

**COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN  
MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF  
INTERPERSONAL MANAGER-STAFF  
COMMUNICATION AT A SOUTH AFRICAN  
UNIVERSITY**

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**MEGAN GEORGINA BALARIN**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Communication is a central feature of human life. The ability to talk is the very feature that distinguishes us from our primate ancestors. Knowing how to use language effectively gives the bearers of this knowledge power over their environment and an upper hand in their dealings with others. Thus, understanding the importance of communication in management is an essential tool for managers who wish to build and develop their organisations and their staff within these organisations.

This thesis takes a case study view of manager-staff communication at a South African university. In this study managers and staff members contribute their feelings on current communication practices at this organisation through an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews. In an interpretive paradigm this thesis answers three central questions: 1) what role do managers and staff think communication plays in their working relationships, 2) what do they perceive to be effective and ineffective communication strategies and 3) What strategies can they suggest to enhance effective communication?

Through in-depth qualitative research and numerical data analysis this thesis discovers central themes that pertain to the effective flow of communication in this organisation. These themes include: motivation and praise, the role of listening, building relationships, respect, acknowledging others' languages and cultures, building teams, communicating frequently and using email and technology effectively, as well as keeping notes of meetings and discussions. Challenges to effective communication include not having enough time, suffering from stress, and the challenges of physical space and distance.

By paying attention to basic human principles, such as the fact that acknowledging people for a job well done encourages them to perform well in future, this thesis relates the general concepts of communication and management theory to the specific realities and individual, personal experiences of manager-staff communication. In this

way it sheds a beam of light on management communication practices and points the way towards an ideal where managers and staff members use communication as a tool of empowerment and understanding.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 The human communicator

Perhaps no endeavour has received more attention, effort, and creativity than has the communication of humans with each other. From drawing on cave walls to burying time capsules on the moon, people strive to share their thoughts, their fears, their history with others (Campbell, Corbally and Nystrand, 1983:146).

Communication is a word with a rich history. It comes from the Latin *communicare*, meaning to impart, share, or make common (Peters, 1999:7). We understand our world, make sense of it, analyse it and grapple with it by using words. Whether they are words in our own heads or whether we do it by talking it out with others, the fact remains that human beings are natural meaning-makers. As we have evolved, communication has come to play an ever more central role in our lives and functioning. As Peters (1999:1) reminds us, “Humans were anciently dubbed the ‘speaking animal’ by Aristotle”. It is our ability to make words, to use words, and to grapple with words that grants us a privileged place in history and on this planet.

## 1.2 A personal communication history

It is this ability to communicate that has occupied a central role in my life and the reason that I turned to communication as a way of understanding management and difficulties I observed and perceived with management communication in an academic organisation.

I come from a line of communicators. My paternal grandparents escaped from Germany just before World War II and, as German-English bilinguals managed to survive and prosper in South Africa, an emigrant haven in those days, and a cultural melting-pot in these. My mother’s mother brought a love of language with her through her profession as an English teacher. A phrase I remember most from childhood visits to my grandmother was “You *can*, but the question is *may* you?” when asking for a sweet or other such childish pleasure. The granting of said pleasure

was only accomplished when I produced the correct grammatical structure. As I was growing up I was constantly referred to the dictionary which occupied the place of pride on the lounge coffee table. The dictionary was the central text around which our lives were based, not the bible, as in many other white middle-class Judeo-Christian homes. Studying communication came naturally to me.

What did not come naturally, or rather, what became an interest that required somewhat more work, was management. As a newly graduated student confident in my ability to be able to manage people, but denied the opportunity, I fell into an organisation, the *Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute*, where management and leadership, as one might predict from the name, occupied a central role. Glancing over the “readings” given to students of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Media Management course, I realised that management was not the simple task I had imagined, nor was it a task with which even current managers could cope with a great degree of ease. While both managers and management literature abounded, there appeared to be a great demand for courses and workshops to link theory and action.

However, it was in my own working life that the most profound impact of management was felt. Although my first “full-time” job came with managers whom I could respect and even admire it also came with an awareness of managers (not necessarily my own) who, quite frankly, did not seem to know what they were doing. Moreover, the organisation under question, from my humble viewpoint, often did not seem to care much about how their staff felt or what their dilemmas or difficulties were.

As part of my job I was fortunate enough to be able to walk around the university a fair amount and to interact with several departments and divisions (the distinction between departments and division being their academic or non-academic focus, respectively). It was in the finance division that I first observed a spirit of discord that I believed more effective management could remedy. Dozens of over-worked, under-paid, dissatisfied, frustrated workers decorated the basement offices and corridors. Yes, there was humour and humanity in the dingy corridors, but it was not easy to find. Indeed, sometimes it seemed as if my bouncy, bubbly “Good morning, Anne, how are you this morning?” had a surprisingly large impact on one amazingly

efficient, dauntingly rule-bound finance worker with whom I had almost daily contact. I would also notice when I called people on the phone and identified myself that their vocal response would change from the often surly, or simply over-worked, response that would generally indicate to the listener that they were busy, important people not to be disturbed, to a more kindly and welcoming attitude. In fact, it was the odd occasion when I would identify myself on the telephone to someone I knew and liked that I was surprised at their response indicating displeasure. Occasionally it was because they were clearly too busy to be disturbed, or more frequently they had simply mis-heard my identification or not recognised my voice. This made me even more certain that there was some kind of link, however tenuous, between effective communication, management and happiness at work.

“Why is it”, I asked myself, “that these hard-working people, clearly hell-bent on making sure things run smoothly and sustaining the financial life of the organisation they support are so desperately unhappy?” My mind wandered around ways of improving their situations and came up with things like painting their grim dirty-white walls in brighter, more cheerful hues to offset the diffused light that found its way into their basement windows through grimy curtains and, indeed, replacing the grimy curtains themselves. A simple coat of paint, I later discovered at a subsequent job, did make an enormous difference. I found it much more pleasant to work in an Arts Education office with bright yellow walls covered with rainbow-hued posters. Even the finance division painted their walls cream, eventually. It looked stunning, and I dare say they felt more valued and cheerful in their jobs. But my suggestions to improve the lot of the workers in the dingy basement corridors fell on deaf ears. It seemed as if there was simply no way to feed suggestions up the chain. Those at the bottom recommended I approach their immediate managers, who recommended I approach their managers in turn, and so-on and so-forth until I felt it was not really my place to take up an issue with the executives themselves when I really had no involvement other than a passing (albeit passionate) interest.

And so it was out of the grim corridors that literally screamed “old administration” to me, the reluctance of junior managers to take up issues with their “superiors”, and my own personally rich background in communication that my interest emerged. I wanted to know what role communication played in management. Did managers at this

organisation give enough time and attention to the role of communication in their daily tasks? Should managers have paid more attention to communication? And what if they did? Would the situations of my embattled colleagues improve?

Luckily I was fortunate enough to be employed by people-centred managers who allowed me to take up a higher degree while being employed full-time. It is in large part thanks to them, their permissiveness and, if not encouragement, at least faith in my ability to handle my job and to study further while doing so, that allowed me to attempt to come to a greater understanding of the unhappiness I perceived at other departments “out there” in the university.

### **1.3 Research topic, question and goals**

So the title of my thesis was born:

**Communication strategies in management: a case study of interpersonal manager-staff communication at a South African university.**

Whether in a retail store, school, bank, transportation system, or manufacturing plant, effective communication is essential. Communication is to an organization as the bloodstream is to a person. Just as a person can develop hardening of the arteries, which impairs physical efficiency, an organization can develop blockages of communication channels, which impair its effectiveness. Just as heart bypass surgery may be necessary to save a person’s life, an organization may have to revamp its communication system to survive (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2001:309).

Lunenberg and Ornstein (1991:185) agree that “communication is the lifeblood of every school organization”. So the questions that are asked here are: how is the lifeblood pumping through this South African university? Are there any places where the arteries are clogged? And in these places, what role do managers have to play and what tools do they have to act as linguistic pacemakers?

My deeply personal interest is in the humans involved in communication at the university under study. So, in answering the questions above and in looking for successful linguistic blood-pressure medication this study looks at as many university employees’ perceptions of communication as possible in order to establish both

managers' and staff members' perceptions of current communication practices in the organisation and to engage them in suggesting possible ways of enhancing communication practices between managers and staff.

The research questions guiding this research are:

1. What role do managers and staff think communication plays in their work relationships and how do they use communication in their daily working lives?
2. What do managers and staff perceive to be effective and ineffective communication strategies?
3. What strategies can they suggest that might be used to promote or enhance effective communication?

#### **1.4 Research approach and tools**

In answering these questions I use a methodology that interacts in a personal way with the individuals under study. In the interpretive paradigm researchers are interested in “the *meaning* that people make of phenomena” (Janse van Rensburg, 2001:16) and so I use questionnaires and interviews to gain perspectives from those who manage or are managed in a university context.

Greenfield, Weber and Goffman (in Hodgkinson in Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993: xiii-xiv) use interpretation “to communicate meaning from one life-space and language game to another.” They triangulate the understanding of many individuals' perspectives about an event to gain a bigger picture of it and argue that

In this way we may come, not to a manipulative technology of power but to a *Verstehen*, a comprehension of the value-dynamic complex of a real situation that is always time-bound, and culture specific (Hodgkinson in Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993: xiii-xiv).

I seek to do the same, to comprehend the time-bound, specific situation of communication between individuals in an academic organisation. I choose to study both the organisation and its individuals as part of a case study. This is

a type of qualitative research in which data are gathered directly from individuals (individual cases) or social or community groups in their natural environment for the purpose of studying interactions,

attitudes, or characteristics of individuals or groups (Leedy, 1997:111).

According to Leedy (1997:157) “A case study is conducted to shed light on a phenomenon, be it a process, even, person, or object of interest to the researcher”. This case study aims to shed light on the process of communication between managers and their subordinates in order to find hints and clues that can guide one towards a more humanistic and strategically effective process of management-communication. As Gummesson (2003:488) states:

The purpose of case study research is usually systemic and holistic, to give a full and rich account of a network of relationships between a host of events and factors.

This is certainly true in this case, where the intention is not to prescribe a way of managing, or a way of communicating, but to see what works and what doesn't, from the perspectives of those involved in these actions on a daily basis, and to present these findings so that managers in educational institutions, and perhaps further afield, can look at them and ask “What am I doing compared with the people in this study and what could I be doing better?”

The techniques that are used in this research to answer the research questions listed above are both qualitative and quantitative. They involve, firstly, an online questionnaire and, secondly, in-depth, open-ended interviews. Online questionnaires are used to gather a wide range of perspectives on a somewhat more superficial level, asking respondents to choose answers from a selection of questions, as well as offering them a chance to add their own perspectives where they feel the need to do so. Interviews are conducted with individuals who responded to the questionnaire and indicated their willingness to participate further with the research. Although the first is primarily a quantitative data collection technique, while the second is qualitative, as Gummesson argues, “Whether research is labelled qualitative or quantitative is immaterial. There is no genuine conflict; we should use whatever tools are best suited to assist us” (2003:487). Through using both qualitative and quantitative tools I am able to triangulate the findings of general research (questionnaires) with specific, in-depth questions and answers (interviews) in a way that brings a depth of understanding to issues raised a) by the researcher b) in questionnaire responses and c) during the interviews themselves.

The interpretive research methodology, case-study approach and qualitative and quantitative techniques are further elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

## **1.5 Thesis structure and chapter contents**

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

In **Chapter 2** I review selected literature surrounding the central themes of this thesis, namely, communication and management. This chapter defines and describes both terms, explains the need for communication as a management tool, gives a brief overview of the history of communication in management theory, describes the interpersonal communication process and discusses Rasberry and Lemoine's (1986) useful model for managerial communication.

The chapter also touches briefly on social theory, theories of motivation, the distinction between management and leadership and selected leadership theories, while contextualising communication within the organisation and the study. The subtle relationship between management, power and communication and misunderstandings is also considered and current organisational communication studies are mentioned.

**Chapter 3** discusses the research methodology and techniques. Also discussed are the interpretive orientation, ethical issues surrounding the research, potential limitations to the research, issues of generalisability, validity, and reliability, the research technique and method (case-study) as well as the case itself. It then goes on to describe the data-collection methods (pilot group, questionnaire and interviews) as well as explaining how the research sample was chosen and the data-analysis (thematic grouping) technique.

**Chapters 4, 5 and 6** discuss the data and findings evolving from the data, dealing separately with questionnaire and interview responses.

**Chapter 7** consolidates the earlier chapters. It discusses how well management in the organisation under study is coping with the current communication situation and how management can make more effective use of communication situations, techniques and time, amongst other issues, to get both organisational and personal messages across. It discusses the data collected and refers back to the literature to make sense of the findings within theoretical frameworks. In addition, while summarising the research findings, it makes recommendations in principles and techniques to enhance management communication in organisations of a similar nature. Lastly, it also discusses the potential value of this research, suggesting recommendations for further study and acknowledging the study's limitations.

I conclude with a review of the literature and a hope for the future of management communication. This hope is that all managers will want to pay attention to how they communicate with their staff and that this study will go some way towards building communication bridges across organisations.

## **Chapter 2: Literature review**

### **2.1 Communication and management**

“Perhaps no other aspect of human behaviour has been so closely linked to the supposed ‘special’ status of human beings” than language (Lieberman, 1975:vi). As humans, the ability to speak sets us apart from animals and other life. As we speak we try to make sense of our world. However, Lieberman (1975:1) says that

Human language is not a phenomenon that can be completely divorced from other aspects of human behaviour and human life. Language affects and indeed structures virtually all aspects of human behaviour including the way we structure our world and manage it.

Communication and management are two concepts that have existed since humans began to organise their world more efficiently. Although they have not often been studied side-by-side or as two different aspects of the same process they are nevertheless inextricably intertwined because man’s struggle to organise his world has occurred, undeniably, through the medium of language. According to Neal (1960:11)

Communication has made possible our great industries; our commerce with other nations; our improved transportation, modern methods of agriculture, education, science; our entertainment and recreation. It is the real basis for our standards of living.

In this literature review the researcher focuses on both interpersonal communication and management and attempts to find a unifying connection between the two fundamental human tasks. However, since “Communication is a good deal more talked about than understood” (Thayer in Rogers and Agarwala-Rogers, 1976:1) and “Men, though managers, did not write about or recognize management as such until fairly recent times” (George, 1972:xv) this task is not an easy one.

In attempting to understand and synthesise these two central themes this literature review will cover literature relating to communication, management and management/organisational communication. The chapter begins by defining communication and describing the need to study it as an important part of management and as a way of enhancing management skills. It goes on to describe a working management-communication model that will be used to examine

communication in the university context under study and continues to establish the role of communication in management. I then attempt a general overview of literature relating to an evolution of management theory in order to show the role that communication has come to play in management over a period of time as well as to contextualise current management practices. I then discuss social theory and organisations as well as communication in the context of this study. Later, I draw a brief distinction between management and leadership and examine a few theories of leadership in order to establish a superficial basis of similarity and difference between the two. This is also to anticipate what managers think of as management and leadership and help explain how they might use the terms interchangeably. I then look at motivation as a part of management, particularly within current management styles, and outline some theories of motivation after which I touch on management miscommunication. Lastly, I offer a brief review of current research into management communication in order to contextualise this study and compare research trends with my own research.

## **2.2 Defining communication**

Before trying to understand the role communication plays in organisations it is useful to define what this study intends by the use of the word “communication”. The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines communication as “the imparting, conveying, or exchange of ideas, knowledge, information etc. (whether by speech, writing or signs)...” But the use of the term “communication” seems to have proliferated in the information age where communication is immediate and instantaneous. Currently a communications expert can be anything from a linguist, a public relations officer or a researcher in any kind of language-related field to an information technologist, a computer scientist or a website designer, and many other things in between. Communicating can be imparting knowledge, receiving it, undertaking communion; whole books have been written on the ‘idea of communication’<sup>1</sup> as a notion in itself. Coming to terms with what communication really is is not an easy task since communication is often defined not so much as a single entity but as an idea, a process, and a product of processes.

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<sup>1</sup>See “[Speaking into the Air](#)” *A history of the idea of communication*. John Durham Peters. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. 1999.

In management books communication is usually defined as imparting information with a specific plan or result in mind, as in Rogers and Agarwala-Rogers (1976:9) where they claim to define communication as “the process by which an idea is transferred from a source to a receiver with the intention of changing his or her behaviour”.

In this research, the term communication is used to describe the process of the sending and receiving of messages between two individuals. Communication here includes the features that one cannot see or touch during meaning-exchange such as affective features and cultural variables. Communication here is a one-on-one process and does not include messages sent from one-to-many or any kind of mass communication. I do not use the term to include references to multi-media or computers. In addition the focus of communication in this research is on *how* the messages are sent and received and what other factors play a role in the effective sending and receipt of those messages.

More specifically, communication is the “sorting, selecting, forming and transmitting of symbols to create meaning in another person’s mind” (Rasberry and Lemoine, 1986:31). Symbols here are used to explain the bigger “concepts” that are formed when people hear and try to understand words or groups of words. A symbol can be as simple as a single word or as complex as a whole idea or theory. Rasberry & Lemoine’s model can be simply explained through their summary, as follows (1986:31 – see Appendix I):

The source, or sender, is stimulated by some need, motive or drive to send a message to a receiver. The source must encode the message by sorting and selecting symbols through a channel. The receiver decodes the meaning of the symbols used by the sender and interprets the message. Knowledge, attitudes, experience and socio-cultural background act as a filter in giving meaning to the message. Finally the receiver responds to the message and thereby provides feedback to the sender.

In their model communication is dynamic (speaking is an activity that involves ongoing behavioural changes), irreversible, proactive (it involves the total person) and interactive (it involves two or more parties) (Rasberry and Lemoine, 1986:25). In addition, they acknowledge that several factors affect how people exchange messages. Rasberry and Lemoine’s model (1986:31) indicates that people’s motives, thoughts,

decisions, skills, knowledge, attitudes and socio-culture all have the potential to affect the way a message is encoded or decoded. These intangible variables can differ greatly between individuals who draw on their unique background knowledge to interpret messages, making communication “a risky adventure without guarantees” (Peters, 1999:267).

It is vitally important to acknowledge that individuals bring many factors to a communicative exchange. While Rasberry and Lemoine touch on some of these aspects, such as gender, culture and power differences, to merely acknowledge that these differences exist is not enough to come to terms with the large impact they may have on communication. In a much larger thesis it would be nice to be able to discuss in greater detail issues such as intercultural differences, for example, but in this thesis it must suffice to acknowledge the differences and attempt to give a broad overview of cultural theory if such points arise for discussion as a result of responses by questionnaire respondents or interviewees.

### **2.3 Why study communication in management?**

Numerous management texts demonstrate the importance of communication as part of daily human life and its useful role in managing both people and tasks. This section serves to demonstrate that the role that communication has to play in organisations has often been ignored in the past. Since communication is often dismissed as being as natural a human function as breathing, it is easy to understand how this perception has been perpetuated. But communication is such an important part of managing people and organisations while enhancing productivity and keeping workers happy that it is worth devoting a section of this literature review to it, simply to acknowledge its vital role.

Communication is only one of man's multifarious daily activities but it is without doubt the one he indulges in most, the one he cannot exist without, the one that ensures his personal and collective progress. In short, communication is man's most important activity (Fourie, 1977:introduction).

As Fourie points out, communication is central to human life. But has man's most important activity been given the acknowledgement that it deserves in management,

another role central to human life and functioning? As far back as 1938 Chester Barnard recognised the importance of communication in management, saying,

In an exhaustive theory of organization, communication would occupy a central place, because the structure, extensiveness, and scope of the organization are almost entirely determined by communication techniques (Barnard, 1938:226).

Even though Barnard acknowledged the essential role of communication nearly seven decades ago the consequences of this acknowledgement had not been fully explored until fairly recently. As the decades unrolled management as an exercise started to focus more on achieving success through the effectiveness of its human employees and less purely on the bottom line. That is not to say that this was an entirely altruistic development. It was more that management was beginning to realise that happy employees could positively influence the bottom line. As Semler (2003:113) says, “At a company, profit, growth and quality will happen only once employees feel it’s worthwhile to get up for work”. Effective communication is an important part of developing the relationships that make staff members want to get up and come to work day after day and management theory is evolving to recognise this fact as time goes by. Thirty years ago Porter and Roberts (1977:9) argued that

If one raises the question ‘how important is it to have good communication in organizations?’ nearly everyone will give lip-service to the answer that it is critical to the welfare both of organizations and employees. [But] when it comes to the question of what can or should be done to improve communication in organizations, or even to the question of what we know about the subject, there appears to be relatively little agreement (Porter and Roberts, 1977:9).

Thus, while managers started to realise that communicating with one’s staff was important they did not really know how to go about doing it effectively. Since the 1970’s the interest in communication in management has grown exponentially. As interest in the subject has grown, so has knowledge of what makes it a success. Now, in a new century and a new age, “the information age”, human knowledge of communication has reached a point where, Haslam argues, “The plain fact is... communication has never been more important than it is now. It is at the crux of global development, business, politics and commerce” (2002:20). Finally “the value of quality internal communication and its relationship to organisational efficiency and effectiveness has been widely recognised” (Quinn and Hargie, 2004:146) and

communication is coming to be seen as one of the essential components of the managerial process, as Hellriegel *et al.* (2001:16) explain:

Of the six managerial competencies that we have identified, communication is perhaps the most fundamental. Unless you can express yourself and understand others in written, oral and non-verbal... communication, you cannot use the other competencies effectively to accomplish tasks through other people nor can you effectively manage the vast network of relationships that link you to other people inside and outside your organisation.

A veritable catalogue of researchers acknowledge the role of communication at work. Rasberry and Lemoine (1986: viii), van Staden *et al.* (2002:12) and Quible *et al.* (1996:1), agree that the importance of communication in a business environment cannot be ignored. In fact Rasberry and Lemoine (1986), van Staden *et al.* (2002), Quible *et al.* (1996), Reuss and Silvis (1981), Tourish and Hargie (1998) and Hoy and Miskel (1996) agree that communication is an *essential* component of the managerial process. Indeed, Reuss and Silvis (1981:5) maintain that “organizational communication is *the* vital link in the chain of events comprising the process of managing a business” (their emphasis).

So why should we, as ordinary people, pay attention to communication as a significant part of our every-day existence? It certainly might help managers motivate their staff in order to achieve a bigger yield and higher profits at the end of the day, but what does this mean for me? The simple answer is that communication is not only an important part of business; it also permeates every aspect of our daily lives. We have evolved from the stone age to the information age, with advances in speech and technology that seem to go hand-in-hand. Being able to communicate with others has always been a human challenge. More often than not, humans who can communicate better than others and as a result can persuade their fellows on a course of action (be it to take over the most sheltered cave to live more comfortably, or the weakest company to grow a larger profit margin) often find themselves in leadership roles. Now being able to send, receive and understand communication in all its forms is not just a luxury but a necessity for survival, more than ever before. In order for the fittest managers to survive they need to hone their communication skills to perfection. As well as training for an hour at the gym each morning and eating a healthy, low-fat diet, the “modern” manager must constantly exercise his/her staff relationships.

Possessing persuasive and motivational skills that will encourage one's staff to improve their performance, efficiency, and development requires managers who are willing to get to know the tools of effective management communication so that they can compete on an international level.

Fifty years ago Redfield (1958:x) discussed rapid change as a feature of the increasing need for "information handling", as he calls effective communication.

There is no doubt that the continuing growth of giant organisations is still a major factor behind the interest in administrative communication. But size alone does not explain the ever widening interest. The increasing complexity of modern civilization – technologically, geographically, financially – is a highly important factor. Closely related to complexity is the factor of rapid change, which is a signal characteristic of the present time and of the foreseeable future. Rapidly changing conditions require ever new decisions, with new implementing policies and procedures. Making decisions, and implementing them, depends very heavily on an optimum system of information-handling throughout the organization (Redfield, 1998:x)

Even five decades ago rapid change was a feature of daily life and being able to process large amounts of information gave an efficient manager the edge. Now we live in an age where information is our currency. Even financial currency has become "virtual", with real bank notes becoming less and less frequently exchanged and bank accounts simply a collection of ethereal numbers. Information is, more than ever, an interchangeable resource. It has always been true that knowledge is power, but being able to understand and contextualise the world with ease and efficiency separates the knowledgeable from the ignorant, both financially and in hierarchy, even more in our current age. Being able to communicate well, process information easily, and share information in a way that makes it accessible gives today's manager a physical and emotional advantage. It is time for managers to start building up their "talking-biceps". Why? Because,

As a basic, dynamic process, communication underlies virtually all interpersonal, organization, and administrative variables, including formal structure, informal organization and culture, motivation, leadership and decision making. Communication skills, therefore, are essential tools for an effective administrator (Hoy and Miskel, 1996:341).

An effective administrator needs to be able to understand and use communication for a thousand different reasons. Unfortunately, the desire for knowledge often exceeds the knowledge available, as Berry demonstrates in this quote: “While the need for good communication has been identified, the lack of research or establishment of communication strategies... has also been highlighted (Berry in Quinn and Hargie, 2004:147).

It is within this framework that the “communication audit”, a term which emerged in the 1950’s (Tourish and Hargie, 1996:39) has gained popularity. The communication audit is designed to assess the “philosophy, concepts, structure, flow and practice” of communication in an organisation (Emmanuel in Tourish and Hargie, 1998: 177). This can be a remarkably useful tool to accurately gauge the communicative practices of an organisation. Unfortunately, though, it is not able to delve beneath the surface of communicative events to discover the motivations behind communicative practices or how employees feel about communicative activities which occur in their business environments, which is the real aim of this interpretive study.

This study seeks to look below the surface of managerial communicative practices in an organisation and to relate the awareness of these practices with their efficacy by using questionnaires to gain a bigger picture of the organisational management communication practices and interviews to gain a more detailed perspective of real, on-the-ground practices on an individual scale.

## **2.4 Communication in management theory**

Since history repeats itself, it is useful to touch on where communication in management has come from, in order to understand more about management communication today. Communication as a concept has evolved over centuries, since humans learned to talk. To try and describe the evolution of language and finally to narrow it down to interpersonal communication would take an entire thesis of its own. Suffice to say that *how* people talk has evolved as a site of study of its own fairly recently. Although this section simply speculates on the origins of interpersonal communication this personal conjecture may provide some hints towards understanding the drive to improve one’s own communication as an individual.

The evolution of self-help books may have come at a time when personal improvement and the constant drive to make oneself a “better” person were emerging as areas of public interest. Dale Carnegie’s landmark work *How to Win Friends and Influence People* was first published in 1937, just after the American great depression. It came at a time when people desperately needed to believe in themselves and, I would argue, had a significant influence on generations of entrepreneurs. This book does indeed contain a whole section on leadership and chapters on management and communication. It includes useful management advice like the fact that managers must realise that “resentment caused by a brash order may last a long time” (Carnegie, 2001:213) and “It is always easier to listen to unpleasant things after we have heard some praise of our good points” (Carnegie, 2001:199) as well as “Make the other person happy about doing the thing you suggest” (Carnegie, 2001:235). These are all basic management principles laid down in popular literature 70 years ago and yet this book is still popular to this day, as attested to by the recently published 2001 edition. The book is still on sale after all these years.

Many of the principles discussed in *How to Win Friends and Influence People* involve both management (of oneself and of other people) and communication, because the easiest and most lasting way of winning people over is by showing an interest in them and talking nicely to them. These are principles that both managers and staff identify in this study. It is interesting to note that while they appear new and exciting to the workers at this university they were identified decades ago in popular literature, and centuries ago in classical discussions of the nature of man. Even Plato in *The Republic* discusses both management (of the ideal society which he proposes) and communication. He is aware of the double-edged sword that is communication and warns that story-tellers should be censored so as not to tell lies (Denning, 2006), just as managers should be in this day and age.

From looking at texts from both decades and centuries ago it would appear that humans have always been interested in more efficient ways of managing their world as well as using communication. But focusing on Carnegie’s more recent text it would appear that a definite link between talking and motivating had already made a huge hit a few decades ago. This was also a time when managers (of our modern, western

society) started to become aware that good management and leadership practices were accomplished by individuals within companies, not companies themselves, and that improving one's personal skills could improve one's management skills simultaneously. At the same time as pop literature started to focus on individual discursive power, management theory began evolving towards a more democratic approach to dealing with people. This may be simply a hopeful coincidence, but it seems that since its beginning in scientific, task-oriented management (early 1900s) where communication was seen as a means to an end, if it was considered at all, management theory has evolved to include individuals and their needs as part of the business structure, and communication is an important aspect of this evolution.

The trend towards recognising the importance of communication seems to have arisen with a new awareness of the significance of keeping staff and investors happy (Tourish and Hargie, 1998; Haslam, 2002; Hoogervorst, 2004; and Barrett, 2002). Democratic management, in which communication plays a central role, is a more recent management trend following on the heels of centuries worth of management theory beginning as far back as the Egyptians but making its mark more traceably in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Charles Babbage and the scientific approach (George, 1972:vii-x).

But, just as “management theory cannot be portrayed as an orderly succession of ideas or a unified body of knowledge in which each improvement builds on and advances the one before it” (Pindur *et al.* 1995: 75) so can communication theory within management not be isolated into specific groups or trends. However much we attempt to make these patterns conform to fixed periods of time or certain theorists' perspectives they will always overflow into different eras and themes of management.

It is nevertheless useful to begin by looking at an era which did not seem to focus much on communication and the first modern traceable management theory. The idea of individuals as more engine than human comes from scientific management, based on the idea attributed to Taylor that individuals could be programmed to be efficient machines (Hoy and Miskel, 1996:9). Classical or traditional organisational thought, into which scientific management falls, generally ignored psychological and sociological variables (Hoy and Miskel, 1996:10), and communication along with it.

Although Taylor's intentions are often misconstrued in literature the scientific school, into which his management theories are believed to fall,

inclines toward the quantitative in methodology and the realistic in epistemology. It tends to eschew the qualitative, the imponderable, the intractable, and to avow the early Wittgenstein's 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent'" (Hodgkinson in Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993:xi).

Administrative management, followed after the scientific management trend. Administrative management "examines organizations as total entities and focuses on ways to make them more effective and efficient" (Pindur *et al.*, 1995:60). This management theory may have looked at communication as a factor, but again from an organisational perspective rather than an individual one.

Interest in communication as part of management seems to have stirred during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Redfield (1958) argues convincingly that the origins of interest date to about the late 1920's, or perhaps later.

One of the remarkable developments of recent years in the business world has been the growing concern of business managers with the problems of communication. This is a relatively new interest. While no-one can pinpoint a date and say with assurance that businessmen then began to recognize the problems of communication, my own observation is that, in general, concern with communication goes back not more than twenty-five years and perhaps less. (Redfield, 1958:v).

It is interesting to note that the observations made by Redfield half a century ago with regards to problems of communication in organisations still echo across the decades to today. The awareness in management of a new tool to deal with workers who were becoming steadily dissatisfied with management's attempts to pacify them with increased (to a point) incomes and who were looking for more meaning in life and work, is reflected in Redfield's following words. Business was slowly starting to realise that in a democratic culture communication played an important role.

Executives discovered that silence was not golden; that misunderstandings flourished in an atmosphere of secrecy; that business, like other institutions in a democracy, could progress only as far and as rapidly as it could carry with it the consent of the people, whether those people were acting in their capacities as voters, as employees, as share-owners, as suppliers, or as neighbours.

So management people in their turn began to try to communicate. They improved their systems of order-giving. They institute employee newspapers or magazines. They conducted meetings or made speeches. They wrote letters, published pamphlets, produce slide films and motion pictures (Redfield, 1953:vi).

Five years down the line, as Redfield commented in the 1958 preface to the first edition of his book, communication had been taken up in full force by universities, businesses and the general ruling public. And his book, reflective of the management thinking of his time, looks at communication as a one-to-many, non-reciprocal, dictatorial tool to be used by those in power to give information to their staff. In accordance with communication models of the time communication in management was seen as a unidirectional process where a sender sends a message to a receiver, without any way of the receiver reciprocating such communication, as in the Shannon and Weaver model of communication (Borman, 1989:31). This model, which falls under the mathematical theory of communication, or information theory, represents the idea that communication can be given in packages, i.e. that the exact message sent, minus a little bit of noise, is received in the same package by the receiver as it was originally intended by the sender. Borman's information theory talks of transmitting information, a one-way process. He says

Communications engineers working on technical problems involved in designing efficient sending-and-receiving equipment and transmission lines developed the mathematical theory of communication as an explanation of information and its transmission (Borman, 1989:37).

In much the same way, managers used “communication” with their staff to describe and explain orders to their subordinates, without any room for feedback.

As communication models were evolving, so was management theory. It was during this era that business began to be less of a private affair, the concern of single or isolated groups of businessmen who would “no more readily discuss his business affairs than his family affairs in private”, and more of a public concern (Redfield, 1958:vi). Redfield (1958:vi) says,

The depression of the early 1930's; the gigantic growth of government and of regulatory official bodies; the rise of the mass labor unions, active, vocal, and frequently hostile – these and

other developments shattered forever the calm private world in which the earlier businessmen had functioned.

Businessmen could no longer treat their business as a “calm, private world” and make decisions in private. Democracy was rearing its head and ordinary people, realising the role they could play in a democracy, were demanding to have their say in the way their government and to a certain extent the way business was being run.

The work of Mary Parker Follett, the findings of the Hawthorne studies, and Lewin’s work are examples of theoretical developments highlighting the importance of the human element in management, in terms of which communication was seen to be significant. In reaction to classical theory, the human relations approach (1920-1940), under the behavioural school, and particularly Mary Parker Follett within this school, shifted the emphasis in management to increased involvement of all members of organisations in decision-making and problem-solving (Hellriegel *et al.* 2001:59). Communication between managers and employees was starting to be given particular prominence, as in the work of Chester Barnard (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2001:60), who believed that “people should continually communicate with one another” and that managers’ main roles are “to communicate with employees and motivate them to work hard to help achieve the organization’s goals” (Hellriegel *et al.*, 2001:60). This focus on people brought along with it an increased focus on communication which continues to this day. Modern approaches such as Peters and Waterman’s excellence approach, which insists that “effective organizations continue to strive for improvement” (Pindur *et al.*, 1995:74) will undoubtedly consider communication a factor in improving organisations, since excellence in business cannot come about without excellent communication. Total Quality Management (TQM) also includes communication as a feature of their management techniques (Hellriegel *et. al.*, 2001:68), since no organisation can produce top quality goods and services without top-quality organisational communication. Similarly, non-traditional management theories, such as critical theory, post-modernism and post-structural approaches acknowledge the importance of communication since these approaches use language, not just for communicative purposes, but as an essential tool of their trade.

It is difficult to place the role of communication in specific management theories, although management theorists try to place management styles in little boxes, and it

would seem to be appropriate to try and place the role of communication in the boxes along with the theories, however inappropriate this might be. Unfortunately, as dos Santos, Powell and Sarshar (2002:795) lament,

The constant and unstructured generation of new terms and “new theories” witnessed nowadays does not help either industry or academia to consolidate existing ideas or developing truly new ideas. In general, newer production theories do borrow concepts and principles already developed from previous words and, therefore, usually generate only a fraction of truly new knowledge. Often the main body of these “new” theories is only a re-interpretation and re-configuration of previous theories in order to allow the application of them in a particular context and for a particular problem.

All in all, management theory has evolved in a seemingly parallel way to general cultural trends. It is interesting to note that more women are becoming involved in the management of companies. One wonders how management style will evolve in the future. Will more feminine qualities find their way into management trends? Can management become more participative and egalitarian? Or is there a break-even point beyond which managers cease to manage and start to play a different role entirely, such as a mentor, or, indeed, a leader? The answers to these questions are not yet forthcoming, but it is curious to speculate on whether management trends follow social trends or emerge simultaneously. If this is the case, democratic management in South Africa should certainly have had at least ten years of evolution. As always, the question should be “what next”? A forward-looking manager should be constantly re-evaluating his/her practices and re-aligning them with social and environmental changes.

## **2.5 Social theory: language, society, organisations and individuals**

Porter and Roberts (1977:10) believe that

A basic unavoidable feature of complex organisations is that the people in them do not work in isolation. Thus, group identification and role relationships, information transmission, and the process by which information acquires meaning must be better understood.

As seen from this quote, understanding an organisation and its behaviour can not only be done by imagining a certain behaviour that describes the organisation in its

entirety.<sup>2</sup> An organisation is composed of individuals who give meaning to their lives and work through interactions with other individuals. “For Weber”, says Greenfield (1986:80) “the necessary unit for analyzing self and society is the individual human being”. Therefore the only way to truly understand a phenomenon, such as the organisation and individual behaviour within that organisation, is by consulting those involved. “It is the individual that lives and acts, not the organization. It is therefore the experience of individuals that we must seek to understand” (Greenfield, 1986:152).

Organisations and the individuals who work within them interact in complex and intertwined ways. The organisation imposes rules and order on those employed within it, but simultaneously those who are employed within it constitute the organisation. It comes down to the essence of what an institution really is.

The common view in organisation studies holds that people occupy organisations in somewhat the same way as they inhabit houses. The tenants may change but, apart from wear and tear, the basic structure remains and in some way shapes the behaviour of people within. (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993: 2).

I disagree, believing that the structure of the organisation can also change and reinvent itself, while retaining the same name. This occurred at Semco, a unique company in Brazil that boasts record profits in all of its endeavours. When Ricardo Semler took over the organisation the first thing he did was fire two-thirds of his father’s most senior managers. “I then spent the next two decades questioning, challenging and dismantling the traditional business practices at Semco” (Semler, 2003:9). And yet Semco, the organisation, still retained its name, despite its radically altered structure and functioning. This is, however, a unique example, and not often repeated. Which returns us to the question of what an organisation is, if both the tenants and the building can change.

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted here that I do not take the phenomenological perspective of an organisation that it is simply a construct of human and social interactions (as described by Burrell and Morgan, 1979:273). I acknowledge the physical existence of an organisation, but argue that it can only be understood through the perspectives of those it employs.

In the past the organisation has been defined as both an organism, with complex needs and drives, and the most mechanical of forces, a clock or a piece of machinery. Greenfield & Ribbins (1993:6) summarise this perspective beautifully, saying,

In the one perspective, organisations are natural objects – systems of being which man discovers; in the other, organizations are cultural artefacts which man shapes within limits given only by his perception and boundaries of his life as a human animal.

To me, it seems outdated to think of an organisation as a product and producer of mechanical, predictable sets of instructions that its human employees must simply follow diligently, without any room to make changes or complaints, since “organizations are, in Pondy’s (1978) term, ‘multicephalous’, i.e. they have many brains that sustain mind, meaning, values, and culture (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993:76). However, I believe it is also taking it one step too far to believe that an “organisation”, a solid, constructed building with rules, goals, and set fixed outcomes or products, is *only* a product of the ideologies, behaviours and idiosyncrasies of the people it employs.

In today’s organisation, a subtle interlinked network of human intention and socially-organised convention, managers or administrators need to involve the humans they employ. This drive towards participative management is a trend that should bridge the divide between the organisation as a solid, tangible structure and a product of individual will. It should further encourage administrators to realise the human intentions of its staff, indeed, of the organisation in its entirety, since, as Greenfield (1986:152) puts it,

Organizations are the façade that covers individual intention and will; they are the marionette show that dazzles and deceives an audience – an audience of people who will themselves to believe the performance.

Organisations are therefore about the people who work in them, constitute them, and enact the acceptable behaviour practices of the organisation *at that point in time*. “So an organization is a set of meanings that people act out, talk out, and buck up with their own armamentarium of forces – psychological, moral and physical” (Greenfield, 1986:154).

To look at communication in organisations is therefore to study something both intangibly accessible and indelibly embodied in the fibre of the organisation, which makes even a simple study of looking at various individuals' perspectives of current management-staff communicative practices a daunting task indeed. Yet, in order to truly reflect on their own practices people need to think about them, contextualise them, and explain their behaviour to themselves. Greenfield (1986:154) asserts that "Organisations are sets of categories arrayed for the linguistic and other wars that people wage among themselves". So while management and staff sit on opposite sides of the fence, as in a bureaucracy, the power differences between them will confuse and confound any attempts they may make at communication. They will be fighting a war among themselves where they are constantly employing their verbal soldiers in tactical battles, linguistically attacking each other, while seldom understanding that they are, in fact, at war. Rabinow and Sullivan (1979:6) believe that

Our capacity to understand is rooted in own self-definitions hence in what we are. What we are is a self-interpreting and self-defining animal. We are always in a cultural world, amidst a 'web of signification we ourselves have spun'... When we try to understand the cultural world, we are dealing with interpretations and interpretations of interpretations.

To understand the meanings we make of communications with one another we need to understand how we define ourselves and our intentions. Hence, reflecting on our language practices becomes a meta-textual necessity. Since humans are uniquely defined by their ability to talk, the only way we can really come to terms with our originality and make sense of our world is through language.

## **2.6 Communication in the context under study**

Bearing this in mind, the need for communications research is greater than ever before. Not only do we need to reflect on communication in order to understand ourselves better, educators have a responsibility to understand their practices better. In academic institutions communication is essentially the core business, since education takes place by transmitting knowledge through language. Educational institutions, above all institutions, need to reflect on their language practices as part of what they do. To teach without knowing what you teach is both ignorant and irresponsible.

Educational institutions are going through a phase of extreme turmoil in South Africa at present. While they seem to have survived the government's merging of tertiary academic training institutions (universities and technical colleges) into fewer, larger, more multi-disciplinary bodies of education they now need to weather the storm of academic audits. While this would appear to be a forward-thinking step, designed in theory to ensure the provision of high-quality education at all institutions, in practice it is more of a paper-pushing exercise that frustrates academics who really want to teach but are unable to provide real quality teaching due to increased pressure on their already strained schedules.

In the organisation under study communication does not yet seem to have registered as an important part of formal management. When this research began, no formal policies, documentation or committees on communication existed at the university under study, suggesting the need for a greater focus on organisational communication. Despite the fact that this organisation has made no explicit steps towards embracing communication as part of management, recent changes to the structure of higher education institutions in South Africa, the associated emphasis on the need for accountability in universities and the subsequent focus on quality assurance suggest that *South African universities must re-evaluate their practices, including their communicative practices*. The need for greater quality and consistency should encourage academic institutions to try and increase effective communication in their policies, procedures and management of staff, as well as encouraging managers and staff members to better understand their own communicative practices.

## **2.7 Management or leadership?**

Where does management end and leadership begin? Hoogervorst (2004:300) quotes Bennis (1989) as saying that organizations are often "over-managed but under-led", meaning that organisations tend to focus on management as 'getting the job done' as opposed to 'getting the job done better'. Getting the job done better would involve managing people and their work environment to keep employees motivated and enthusiastic.

The management versus leadership debate is perhaps beyond the scope of this research, but the issue of an excess of management and lack of leadership has arisen nonetheless. It is thus important to touch on the difference between the two.

Most management texts will use the terms “leadership” and “management” almost interchangeably. For example, Hellriegel and Slocum (1996:5) define a manager as “a person who allocates human and material resources and directs the operations of a department or an entire organisation”. Hellriegel and Slocum go on (1996:8-10) to include planning, organizing, leading and controlling under general managerial functions and roles. Leadership, however, “involves influencing others to act toward the attainment of a goal” (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1996:445). Gibson and Hodgetts (1986:170), amongst others, define leadership almost identically to Hellriegel and Slocum. But more often than not the terms are not defined separately at all. The distinction, if it is acknowledged, is very subtle and seems to focus on the difference between a manager and a leader because of his/her role as a controller (manager) versus an influencer (leader). Or, as Bennis in Rasberry and Lemoine (1986:324) puts it, “The difference may be summarized as activities of vision and judgement versus activities of efficiency”. Communication plays an important role in both vision and judgement and efficiency although its function differs subtly between the two.

In the minds of managers and their staff the concepts of management and leadership may also be muddled. While the study aims to look at management practices and not at issues of leadership it is very possible that managers themselves may feel the need to distinguish between the terms in order to elaborate on how they or their colleagues manage their work environments. By the same token, it is possible that managers may not believe that their roles involve leadership at all. The distinction is a fine one since the terms are often not clearly distinguished and may very well not be distinct in the minds of the participants. It is, nevertheless, useful to briefly touch on leadership theories in order to elucidate how the literature views management and leadership as separate entities even if the terms themselves are hard to distinguish.

## 2.8 Leadership Theories

Despite the general lack of distinction between the words, “management” and “leadership”, theories relating to the two terms are clearly differentiated. Leadership theories have followed a route from leadership as an in-built characteristic to a set of behaviours that can be learned. Trait theory, emerging during the 1920’s prefers to view leaders as possessing “leadership”, a trait with which one is born (Bernard (1926) in Horner 1997). Behavioural theory tries to identify leadership styles, rather than innate characteristics (Horner 1997:270). Blake and Mouton (1964), for example, use a managerial grid to qualify leadership styles (Armandi *et al.* 2003:1077). Contingency theories such as Fiedler’s (1967) situational model, House and Mitchell’s (1974) path-goal theory and Hersey and Blanchard’s (1970) situational-leadership theory try to match leaders’ styles and situations (Giles 1991:188-197). Modern leadership thinking, however, has moved from trying to find *one* best way of managing a group of people, to the best way of a *group of people managing themselves*, as embodied in Manz and Sims (1989) SuperLeadership where, as Horner (1997:283) describes it,

Instead of one formal leader holding the power, this theory suggests that the locus of control is shifted over time from the leader to the team. Taking this idea a step further, they believe that employee self-leadership is a critical aspect of successful teams.

As Fletcher (1999: 155) states, “Effective internal communication, leadership and employee issues seem to be three generic aspects of critical importance in the potential success of any organisation”. As such it is important to pay attention to the role of leadership in an organisation when focusing on communication and relationships between managers and staff.

Understanding leadership theories helps to place management theories and trends in perspective since the two terms have often been used interchangeably. The overlapping nature of these terms will be tested by those in the study themselves who are in no way encouraged to use the term “leadership. As such, “leadership” is a term that can safely be ignored, until a manager him/herself brings it up. From pilot studies it has been observed that certain managers tend to use “leadership” as part of their daily discourse, which would indicate a higher awareness of what is involved in being a leader. It is possible that good managers may exhibit leadership abilities and

tendencies as well as good organisational skills. It remains to be seen whether using communication effectively may separate managers who have vision and judgement from managers who are solely focussed on efficiency. And unfortunately this may still not be possible to establish accurately given the nature of this research, its limited focus and scope, and its focus on communication rather than management or management styles.

Yet leaders are an integral part of the organisation, simultaneously justifying the behaviours embodied in the organisation and encouraging people to follow them in these behaviours. As Greenfield comments “The task of leaders is to create the moral order that binds them and the people around them. They weave the social fabric that allows us to be, to exist” (1986:159). Greenfield talks of a teacher who sees the work of a leader, himself, “as a performance given by a skilful actor before an audience that dares not disbelieve, or chooses not to disbelieve what it sees” (1986:159). So leaders need to direct the performances of those employed below them, while at the same time maintaining the belief by the audience (their staff) that this play is worth watching.

It is, in this day and age, nevertheless somewhat artificial to distinguish between managers and leaders since:

Practitioners can no longer be considered as managers, factotums, or functionaries dedicated to some gospel of efficiency and effectiveness in the tradition of Herbert A. Simon, his heirs and successors. On the contrary they must become, in addition to all that, active philosophers, reflexive about practice and reflective about praxis (Hodgkinson in Greenfield 1986:xv).

## **2.9 Motivation**

Whether the “manager” in an organisation is seen as possessing management or leadership abilities he/she nonetheless needs to help staff achieve consistently productive and efficient behaviour. Rasberry and Lemoine (1986:335) believe that “The manager’s role is to determine what motivates and what ‘turns off’ each employee”. Research suggests that good quality internal staff communication helps create a happier and more motivated staff and affects such job performance factors as “greater commitment, higher levels of innovation, reduced absenteeism, greater

productivity and higher profitability” (Clampitt and Downs, 1993, in Tourish and Hargie, 1998:176). In addition “losing good employees is costly. It is good business to maintain a motivated work force” (Rasberry and Lemoine, 1986:335).

A motivated staff is more likely to achieve consistently high results.

*Motivation* – a word that derives from the Latin *movere*, which means to move – deals with an individual’s needs, with personal differences, and with the ways in which workers respond to different rewards (Giles 1991:41).

Various theories have tried to establish more about how motivation works. These theories largely derive from and expand upon the work of Abraham Maslow (1954) who designed a five-tier “hierarchy of needs” based on the idea that basic physical and safety needs must first be met before individuals can go on to fulfil social needs, needs for esteem and needs for self-actualization (Giles 1991:49). McGregor’s (1960) Theory X and Theory Y is a more business-focused motivation theory. It proposes that workers have one of two basic natures: X workers are lazy and irresponsible and Y workers “like work... are able to direct their own efforts, and... can be creative at work if properly motivated” (Giles 1991:50). Managers therefore need to establish whether their staff are X or Y workers and motivate them accordingly, by giving them encouragement (Y) or threatening them with repercussions (X) or a combination of both. Herzberg *et al.* (1959) note that employees can be motivated or de-motivated at work. These “motivators” and “hygiene factors” are responsible for workers day-to-day job-satisfaction (Tietjen and Myers 1998:226). Hygiene factors are necessary to minimise job dissatisfaction (salaries, job security etc.) but motivators are what inspire workers (recognition, achievement, advancement, responsibility etc.) (Herzberg 1959 in Tietjen and Myers 1998:226). Horner (1997:23) mentions other important motivational theories such as those of Alferder (1969) who built on Maslow’s theory and simplified it to only three basic needs; Murray (1938) who “suggests that people experience a wide variety of needs... and everyone may not experience the same needs” (Horner 1997:273); Locke (1968) who proposes that people need to set goals and use them to drive their behaviour; and Skinner (1959), the behaviourist who based his theory of motivation on stimulus-response techniques used in animal behaviour research, which reward and punish appropriate and inappropriate behaviour respectively (Horner 1997:274).

These days employers seem to be considering employees' needs from employees' perspectives more and more often. Arnott (1987 in Tourish and Hargie, 1998:176) found that "staff working within an open and communicative management structure were three to four times more likely to express satisfaction with their position and twice as likely to be committed to that organization". Ricardo Semler, author of *The Seven-Day Weekend* has found one way to get employees truly involved: what he calls a "democratic company". They embrace open communication as part of this democracy (Semler, 2003:5) and seem to produce a largely happy, motivated staff.

Understanding the subtle role that motivation and praise have to play in the management-subordinate relationship can give enormous power to the manager open to this tool. As the research findings will go on to demonstrate, showing an interest in one's employees and making them want to do what they have been asked to do is vital in building a happy and successful working relationship and, ultimately, a more productive work environment.

## **2.10 Language, power and misunderstandings**

Jackson (1959:158) tells us that

Business executives... have communication problems, too. They are concerned, of course, about better understanding among all persons. They are interested in overcoming barriers to communication between members of the public and their own particular industry. They are especially concerned, or should be, about problems of communication within an organization, since business administration by its very nature is a collective enterprise, and people in this profession must spend their days in organized groups, or organizations.

In an average day each human will spend many hours interacting with fellow human-beings; in the office, at home, on public transport and in every other context imaginable. "Using language is one of the commonest forms of social behaviour..." (Fairclough, 1989:2). We use language in every single aspect of our lives, including in our thoughts and dreams. But no language can ever be neutral, because the language spoken is inextricably bound with the history and culture of those who speak it. Misunderstandings can often occur, particularly between those of unequal power

(Elgin, 2000:9) such as managers and their staff. In using language to communicate instructions, managers pass on the common-sense ideologies of their organisations. Fairclough (1989, chapter 1) claims that language is a contested domain of power where those who have the power use language to legitimise the dominant ideologies of the time (whether knowingly or unknowingly) and managers do precisely this. They need to reinforce the dominant ideologies of their employers. Their jobs depend upon convincing their employees that the organisation's aims are worth obtaining.

The difference in status between those higher and lower in a vertically managed organisation such as a bureaucracy often affects the nature of their communication and this status difference "inhibits the free flow of information vertically (upward and downward)" (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 1991:205). Managers who, in their opinion, are simply "doing their job" will often promote the status quo, whether they are aware of doing so or not. And they may at times be misunderstood by their subordinates who perceive implications in their speech that may not necessarily have been intended by the managers themselves. Greenfield (1986:154) reiterates that "language is power. It literally makes reality appear and disappear. Those who control language control thought, and thereby themselves and others".

Apart from status differences, other factors affect the human ability to understand a message exactly as it was intended, or sent. Stanton (1982(1):13) believes that

Human communication is fraught with problems and difficulties. How often do we say or hear statements like 'I didn't really mean that' or 'You still don't see what I mean', or 'You don't seem to have grasped that point'? Whatever we try to communicate, something often seems to get in the way and we are not understood in the way we intended. But even when we are understood we often fail to get people to think or behave in the way we would wish.

As Peters (1999:2) states,

The difficulty of communication across various social boundaries – gender, class, race, age, religion, region, nation, and language – confronts us daily. Strother Martin's line from the 1967 film *Cool Hand Luke*, starring Paul Newman, has assumed an epochal significance: 'What we have here is a failure to communicate'".

The problem is essentially a human one, one where we cannot understand each other because we cannot look inside one another's heads, to the factors and experiences that

affect how ‘what we hear’ becomes ‘what we interpret as what we heard’. Pirandello (in Greenfield, 1986:76) puts it beautifully, saying:

Each of us has a whole world of things inside him... And each of us has his own particular world. How can we understand each other if into the words which I speak I put the sense and the value of things as I understand them myself... While at the same time whoever is listening to them inevitably assumes them to have the sense and value that they have for him... The sense and value that they have in the world that he has within him? We think we understand one another... But we never really do understand!

Misunderstandings mostly occur due to “noise” (refer back to Rasberry and Lemoine’s (1986:27) model – Appendix I). This noise can be external, for example, every day background office noise, internal (within one’s own head) or interpersonal (between people). Noise is one communication barrier mentioned by Adey and Andrew (1990:26-32) who also include differing perceptions, language problems, inconsistencies in communication, differences in status, distrust, emotional communication, apathy and resistance to change as barriers.

Interpersonal exchanges carry a great risk of potential misunderstanding because the psychological features that any human carries to a meaning exchange, i.e. “motives, thoughts, decisions, skills, knowledge, attitudes and socio-culture” differ widely between conversationalists (Rasberry and Lemoine, 1986:27). Power differences add further complications and together with other types of noise they can cause *reality gaps* - “radical differences in the way people perceive situations” (Elgin, 2000:9).

When a message is sent (or encoded) noise may creep in between the ideal meaning of the message in the sender’s head and the words they utter. When the receiver tries to decode (interpret) the message noise may again intersperse itself between the sender’s intended meaning and the receiver’s own perception of the words. Hence the two speakers’ different perceptions of reality and other noisy influences can cause the message to become distorted, affect their understanding of the message and cause them to react in different and unpredictable ways.

## 2.11 Organisational communication

Jackson (1959:159) asserts that communication within organisations is particularly difficult and explains this assertion as follows:

An organization may be considered a system of overlapping and interdependent groups... Each one of the subgroups within an organization demands allegiance from its members... The groups in an organization often represent different subcultures... each (subculture) develops along with its peculiar value system a somewhat specialized system of meanings. What is required to communicate effectively to members of different groups is a system of simultaneous translation like that employed by the United Nations.

Communication within an organisation is complex, of that there is no doubt. Apart from the difficulties individuals may have in understanding one another, yet another possible reason may be the numerous directions in which communication must travel. Rasberry and Lemoine (1986:89-97) distinguish between three types of organisational communication: downward, upward and horizontal communication. In organisational settings communication occurs not just between individuals (upwards, downwards and horizontally) but also between different groups and between the explicit goals and implicit communication of the 'real' goals within an organization. In this case the concept of "noise" takes on a more complex meaning since it refers to the potential for miscommunication between individual members, different groups, and between the organisational goals and perceived goals. Hoogervorst *et al.* (2004:288) stress the need for consistency between what an organisation claims to want from its employees and what impressions executives give of what they want from employees. If organisations can minimise the possibilities of internal miscommunication then more effective staff relations and more productive work environments are likely to result.

Nevertheless, recognising that many factors such as inconsistency, power differences, and individual affective features can inhibit free conversation is not enough to prevent organisational misunderstandings. A permissive communication culture is necessary to help promote upward communication (van Staden *et al.*, 2002). Van Staden *et al.* (2002:23) suggest several hints for more effective communication across levels in organisations. Among them are: constantly keeping communication routes open; encouraging and enabling lower-level staff to gain access to their superiors; and a

shorter communication chain that avoids the broken-telephone effect and flattens the communication hierarchy pyramid. Communication strategies such as these are elaborated on in Chapter 7 of this research.

Whatever the ultimate cause for the communicative misunderstandings there is a need to understand more about how communication happens in order to prevent misunderstandings in future. Stanton (1982(2):17) points out the importance of overcoming misunderstandings and learning from them:

Well it was just a breakdown in communication. Over and over again we hear this comment as an explanation for things that go wrong both at home and at work – rows, bad feelings, inefficiency, poor service to customers, labour disputes, mistakes which take their toll in extra work, frustration, lost tempers and strained relationships. Communication is always blamed – perhaps because it is the easy way out. But are we justified in leaving it there? Simply blaming the process of communication as if there was nothing further we could do? Could we learn from the mistakes of the past and used that knowledge to avoid committing the same mistakes again?

## **2.12 Current research into organisational communication**

It would appear that organisations are intent on learning more about communication. While this is still a new field it is growing steadily and constantly. One type of popular communication research at the moment is the communication audit, “a complete analysis of an organization’s internal and external communications systems” (Gibson and Hodgetts, 1986:382). This is a popular tool currently being used to help managers gain an accurate picture of the communicative situation within their organisation. It can tell organisations with whom, how, and what they should be communicating versus with whom how and what they actually do communicate (Hargie and Tourish, 1993, in Quinn and Hargie, 2004: 148). Tourish and Hargie use the communication audit in schools to highlight the importance of the staff’s need for information and upward communication, the importance of visibility of senior managers, the need for proper communication channels and the power of the grapevine (1998:179-180). Quinn and Hargie use a communication audit for the Police Service for Northern Ireland (Quinn and Hargie, 2004:146-158) which shows staff

indicating a clear need for more information, openness, directness and contact with the organisation, particularly with senior management.

Other methods used to analyse management-communication draw similar conclusions. A study (Lotter, Ripley and Reynolds, 2004:10) conducted at the university under study in this masters research indicated remarkably similar findings; a need for closer contact with senior management, insufficient communication throughout the ranks and a general need to be included in decision-making processes. Tourish and Hargie investigate the NHS, a very different business but again find similar results; insufficient communication and contact with managers and a feeling of exclusion from decision-making processes concerning their work (1996:46). Also in the Health Service, Irving and Tourish recommend that comprehensive communication programmes be undertaken to take communication more seriously since “communication is neither peripheral to the management function nor an optional extra” (1994:57). Returning to a university context Thornhill *et al.* observe “significant relationship between employee’s perceptions about communication and their attitudes towards the institution” (1994:19). They recommend that consistent, credible and employee-focused communication be practiced in order to obtain a commitment to quality in the organisation. Hoogervorst. uses a questionnaire to discover the link between implicit and explicit management communication (i.e. what managers are telling staff about their organisation versus what staff think is really happening) and confirm the importance of consistency between explicit and implicit communication (2004:307). Hunt, Tourish and Hargie collect critical incidents experienced by participants to study strengths and weaknesses of communicative practices in educational settings (2000, 120-129). They conclude that those involved in the study have critically reflected on their own practices and can use this understanding to minimise communication failures in future while Barrett uses a “Strategic Employee Communication Model” to help managers focus on communication and use it to assist the process of organisational change and even “establish the foundation to make change happen” (2002:228).

Examining various theories and perspectives on management, communication, motivation, language and power and organisations has placed this research on a solid theoretical base. It would appear from the availability of recent research that

communication is coming to be recognised as an important factor in successful management. Hence, ultimately, increasing both managers' and staff' awareness of how language can aid or hinder them will go a long way towards creating an open communication culture. It is hoped that this study will serve a similar aim in its university context, informing both groups that using the right kind of language (i.e. the kind of language that best serves the purpose of the sender) is a form of power all of its own.

As Peters comments, “there are no sure signs in communication, only hints and guesses. Our interaction will never be a meeting of *cogitos* but at its best may be a dance in which we sometimes touch” (1999: 268). Effective managers can learn to harness the power of effective communication to make a difficult meeting of words, worlds and cultures into a symphony of shared meanings.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 A refresher: this study's research question and goals**

To remind the reader let me reiterate the study's research question and goals. This thesis seeks to examine the perspectives of both staff and managers at the tertiary educational institution under study on their interpersonal communication with one another. It does so by asking both parties what their perspectives are and seeking their opinions on what is working well, what is not working so well, and if they have any suggestions for improvement.

### **3.2 Methodology introduction**

As Hodgkinson (in Greenfield, 1986:xi) eloquently put it,

We are now living in the period of the Epilogue or Afterword. That is, ever since the death of God announced by Nietzsche and confirmed by Freud... it no longer makes 'sense' to claim that 'in the beginning was the word (logos), and the word was with God, and the word was God'. Rather we live now in the epilogue, the afterword, for what science has done for the natural world deconstructionism in literature and the arts, behaviourism in psychology, and pragmatic positivism has done for cultural interactions, administration, and the affairs of men.

We live in a new era that comes after the era of the de-contextualised word. When computers first began to simplify (and complicate) the world by reducing text to a combination of ones and zeros, the focus of the world turned to information as a way of making meaning of human life. How much information to get, how to get it as fast as possible, and how to pass it on, these were the issues that categorised the information age. Since then computers have become commonplace and almost every modern device from the cellular telephone to the digital washing machine comes with a built in processor. It is now time to move on from looking at the world as a collection of bits of information and to try to make sense of it all together. Since one of the main areas in which humans excel and computers struggle is contextualising information, the challenge now is to look at meaningful information in context. The question remaining is what our new age will be called.

In an era of post-modern man, where art and popular culture create humour and intelligence and gain popularity through their self- or textual-referential nature, possessing the knowledge and power of what to do with words in context is our only hope in making sense of our new “after-world”. Our post-modern era is fraught with misunderstandings. Man is a meaning-making individual whose life can be understood as a text and through texts and textual constructions. By looking at communication through verbal reflections of communication practices, and by writing up these perceptions, this thesis becomes a post-modern study. But its strength lies not simply in referring back to communication practices, or acknowledging the self-referential nature of these reflections. This study’s strength lies in making sense of them in context, a manager-staff communication context.

Since this is a reflective study and its strength lies with the reflections of participants on themselves and their own behaviour it is appropriate to place it in an interpretive paradigm. But, as Gummesson (2003: 482) argues,

Let’s stop fooling ourselves. All research is interpretive! No ready-to-consume research results pop out like a soda can from a vending machine once we have inserted sufficient money and pushed the right button. There is interpretation all along, from the very start of a research project until the very end.

So, bearing this in mind, what does it mean to do a self-proclaimed “interpretive” study? Although Gummesson has a valid point, that all research involves interpretation, from the beginning to the end, the point of calling research “interpretive” is that it specifically acknowledges, and bases its strength on *trying* to make sense of, and interpret, the meanings and intentions of its participants.

Respondents make their own meaning of events, and the researcher interprets the data they generate using questionnaires and interviews as a starting point for interpretation. To speak of respondents as generating data, and hence as “data generation”, rather than “data collection” is an ideological position which implies that participants create data, rather than data simply being something “out there” that can be picked and chosen, as if from a fruit tree heavy with ripe apples. This term comes from Gummesson (2003:486) who explains it as follows:

I prefer the term data generation to data collection, as data in social settings are not objects that are ready for collection. Instead data are

generated, meaning that they are the creation of the researcher in interaction with, for example, a respondent in an interview.

By integrating with the respondents as part of the research, albeit only during interviews, I have played an active role in the data that appears in this research. It is particularly appropriate, I feel, to acknowledge my role in this self-proclaimed interpretive study.

### **3.3 Choosing the interpretive paradigm**

Kuhn (in Greenfield & Ribbins 1993: 11) believes that

Our theories are not just possible explanations of reality; they are sets of instructions for looking at reality. Thus choice among theories and among approaches to theory building involves normative and – especially in the social sciences – moral questions.

I made a moral choice to use the interpretive paradigm and corresponding theories because I chose less to explain the communicative practices of managers and their staff than to *get them to make sense of their behaviour* around this complex practice.

So why choose the interpretive paradigm? I choose it because I believe that the only way to make sense of our world, as human beings, is to interpret it. “For Weber”, says Greenfield (1993:80),

the necessary unit for analyzing self and society is the individual human being. All explanations of social and personal phenomena must rest upon subjective meanings that appear ‘adequate’ to the individual. The task of those who would explain human action and social forms therefore becomes the ‘interpretation’ of human meanings.

In the interpretive study, as Connole (1993:20) puts it,

The task of the researcher becomes that of understanding what is going on, the *definition of the situation*, at least in the first instance. To do this requires not detachment but active involvement in the process of negotiated meaning (their emphasis).

Becoming actively involved with one another during interviews is the first step of this negotiated meaning. Individuals have also negotiated their own meaning by becoming

actively involved with the online questionnaire. Lastly, the researcher has become actively involved in constructing meaning from participants' constructed texts.

Humans are intimately involved in all the steps of this research process including the human interviewer, researcher and research designer, and the human subjects.

The social sciences are strong on allowing people to speak for the events they enact. I believe that it is important not only to speak for these events, but to entice the participants to understand them by stepping outside of them. Discussing their practices and experiences helps them in this understanding because, as Hodgkinson says,

In the end the only way to explicate or critique or probe the meaning of a dramatic work of art is by hermeneutically staging and performing it. By analogy the only way to truly understand a school is by enacting its scripts, participating in its scenarios, yet somehow discriminating always between the actor and the role. (Hodgkinson in Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993:xiii-xiv).

The participants involved in this research re-enacted their management communication scripts, and in the process we could both observe the dramatic playing out of the everyday occurrences and hopefully learn about ourselves and each other.

This study also fits well within an interpretive paradigm because of its focus on language and its use of language to understand behaviour. "From an interpretive perspective", says Conole (1993:19),

Human actions have reasons. Actions are preceded by intentions and may be accompanied by reflection. Actions take place within a structure of social rules within which they have meaning for both actor and observer. Meanings are generated and shared through language and other forms of symbolism and are negotiated.

### **3.4 Method**

In attempting to understand this phenomenon I chose to take a case-study approach to this research. Case studies are a type of qualitative research in which the researcher

explores a single entity or phenomenon ('the case') bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time" (Creswell in Leedy, 1997:157).

I chose the case of manager-staff communication and studied it over a period of several months by collecting information from questionnaires and interviews to ask how things were working and possibly to investigate instances and possible causes for why things worked well or not so well. In this case, as in general case study research, a case is used “to arrive at specific or general conclusions about certain phenomena, recognising the multitude of variables, complex interrelations and ambiguities of business life” (Gummesson, 2003:488).

As Robert Yin (1989 in Baker, 1994:300) proposes, case studies are appropriate when the research question to be addressed asks *how* and/or *why*” and if the aim of the study “is to try to figure out why a certain situation prevails...”. Case studies are used to examine a real-world situation in a real-life context using “whichever research strategies are necessary to address the problem at hand.” (Yin, 1989, in Baker, 1994:300). The strength of a case study is that, in Gummesson’s words:

Case study research provides the reader with an input of real world data from which concepts can be formed and propositions and theory can be tried (2003:488).

In this case the aim is to form a concept of management communication based on real world data and “to give a full and rich account of a network of relationships between a host of events and factors” (Gummesson, 2003:488).

Although two factors, namely management and communication, do not necessarily constitute a “host”, it was possible to draw on other factors such as motivation and leadership, brought up in questionnaires and interviews, in order to develop this account of manager-staff communication at a tertiary education institution more fully. Thus a case-study appeared to be an apt choice of methodology for a study conducted in an interpretive paradigm.

### **3.5 The case**

The case was selected because of an emergent interest in communication from the researcher’s involvement in the organisation as well as because of convenience. It was also selected because of a prior knowledge of the organisation under study. I have

studied and worked at the university in question and gained an insider perspective into both the service provider's (the university) and the customers' (the students) viewpoints. These insights suggested that this organisation was an ideal site in which to study the phenomenon under question. Naturally my 'insider' perspective raises questions of an ethical nature, which I discuss elsewhere in this document (see section 3.9: Ethical issues).

The study uses individuals as a unit of analysis, but uses an organisation as the focus of the case study. In the tradition of social science I seek to understand the world around the participants being studied (managers and their subordinates) by examining it from their viewpoint through interviews and questionnaires. But humans cannot be divorced from the context in which they operate. Indeed, context has a significant impact on the communication strategies they employ, hence, the organisation under question will also be broadly examined in terms of its communicative policies and structures.

But it is not easy to study education or educational administration, including practices and procedures. As Greenfield and Ribbins (1993:x) point out,

Educational administration is neither unitary nor homogeneous nor monolithic. It is fragmented and factional, obscure in its dimensions, vague in its ends, and contentious in its methodologies.

So to try and understand an organisation of such divided aims it is not sufficient to simply gather data and let it speak for itself. What is necessary is to go deeper, to gather data and let people within the organisation speak for the data. This has been done by collecting data from questionnaires and then feeding the issues back to interviewees on which they can further elaborate.

### **3.5.1 Describing the organisation**

In terms of business areas the organisation is extremely large and complex. Although its primary business focus is the provision of education, the fact that there are close to one thousand employees working at the organisation and more than five thousand students means that the business of educating people can only run smoothly if the services that facilitate the provision of education run smoothly. In addition, the fact

that the university is largely residential (a significant proportion of its students are accommodated within the residence system and live, eat and play on campus) means that staff who handle everything from house-keeping to catering are also employed at the university. In addition to the maintenance of the grounds and gardens which requires a large staff, security guards patrol the campus, librarians control data resources and technicians service machines including several hundred computers. There are also administrative staff to deal with registrations, fees, employee payments, in-service courses, payment of service providers, and the administration of many research and other institutions affiliated to the university who are administrated to a greater or lesser extent by university-employed staff. This highlights just a few of the non-academic areas.

So, although contextualising this study within a university would appear to be a simple business on the surface, behind the scenes a study of communication at this organisation is even more complex than the study of any large corporate environment, since few corporates will both accommodate and feed their customers on their business property! In this sense the university is a macrocosm of a real world environment, a “village” of its own, if you will. This in itself has its benefits and its disadvantages. Being a relatively small organisation, within a relatively small town, provides a sense of security, comfort, and stability for those both paying (tuition fees, residence fees, etc.) and on the payroll. But on the other hand, the unique smallness of both the town and the organisation (there are even those who would say that the university is the town, and it’s certainly not too hard to believe during varsity holidays when the town empties itself almost entirely of life) comes with its own unique troubles. “It’s probably the most important institution in (this town – name deleted for confidentiality). Therefore people involved in it do not see it in perspective to reality”, said one interview respondent who lives on campus and has worked for the university for decades.

And I find, as well, with my staff, that some of them are extremely narrow minded because they never go out, they never see that there’s actually a bigger world out there, that things change. I’ve travelled a lot, not necessarily travelled, but visited a lot, around. And I find that things get out of proportion (for people living there).

Because the town's borders are literally only kilometres away there is a danger that mindsets never grow bigger than a few kilometres.

And yet, bearing this in mind, the challenge is not to look at this organisation from too small a mindset. This is precisely both the strength and the weakness of this study. Its strength is that it has consulted a large number of staff members and their managers, from all areas of the university's service provision, but it is also dangerous to assume that just because something may or may not work here, in this small town even though the organisation spans a large number of activities and areas, that it may work the same way for a bigger organisation in a bigger city or a different country.

Again, it is important to remember that this study seeks people's own perspectives and tries to balance them in as fair a way as possible, and by placing it in an interpretive methodology this is one of its central goals. But it is also important to note that there is no perfect solution. As another interviewee commented, "I think also that it doesn't matter whatever system you have, the nature of organisations is such that you will always get some who are dissatisfied, you will always get some who will say they are getting too much and some who are getting too little. So there is no ideal out there that we will finally say we've arrived, everybody's happy. That's never going to happen".

### **3.6 Data Collection**

To find out what managers and staff members are saying at the organisation under study I believe it was important to gain a) a broader picture, or overview of management communication and b) a specific, localised, view of communication practices from individuals involved. So I used both questionnaires – for a general overview – and interviews – for specific, in-depth looks at individual behaviour. In this way these different methods of data capture could work together. As Janse van Rensburg (2001:18) believes:

Interpretivist methodology, with its emphasis on rich contextual detail and close attention to individual life experience and meaning-making is complemented by quantitative data and broad sweeping overviews .

The choice of using both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect or generate data is an unusual one since it is often believed that the data collection methods (interviews and questionnaires) are incongruous and belong to different schools of thought – the natural sciences versus the social sciences (Strelitz, 2005:60). At one extreme, the scientific perspective holds that “observations are viewed as uncontaminated by the scientist’s theoretical or personal predilections” (Bryman in Strelitz, 2005:61) and thus “the positivist approach to social enquiry claims that there is a ‘real’, independent reality that can be apprehended by an objective, detached and value-free inquirer” (ibid.). Looking from the other side, however, the social scientist is required to interact with subjects and create meaning together with others and involve their thoughts, interpretations and biases in the process. Christians and Carey (1989:38) say that

Humans live by interpretations. They do not merely react or respond but rather live by interpreting experience through the agency of culture... It is then, to this attempt at recovering the fact of human agency, the ways persons live by intentions, purposes, and values that qualitative studies are dedicated.

### **3.6.1 Quantitative data collection (questionnaire)**

Bearing in mind the complexity of the organisation, its large areas of service provision and the diversity of its staff it was felt that while interviewing individuals would give a more in-depth feel it was also necessary to consult a larger number of managers and staff members. Through an online questionnaire I attempted, as Rasberry and Lemoine (1986:27 – Appendix I) suggest, to include knowledge of the “organisational environment”.

#### **3.6.1.1 Why a questionnaire?**

A questionnaire was useful for several reasons. Firstly, several questions were designed to gain a larger view of the topic across the organisation by providing participants with simple questions with a choice of options. The results to these questions could be numerically analysed for trends to give a broad basis of data with which transcribed answers to in-depth interviews could be collated. (Refer to Chapter 5 for numerical details). One question was also put in place so that participants who wished to participate further in the study could indicate their willingness after

completing the task. Strelitz (2005, 68) says that “the findings from the qualitative phase act as a source of hunches or hypotheses to be tested during the quantitative phase”. In the case of this research, it happened the other way around. The quantitative phase was useful to act as a source of hunches to be developed in the qualitative phase. This proved to be one of the most important aspects of the questionnaire, helping to elicit potential categories for further discussion and elaboration during the interviews. A fourth and final function of the questionnaire was to act as a test of reliability for the data that was collected in the face-to-face interviews. (See section 3.12. in this chapter for a discussion of reliability and Chapter 6 for a combination of interview and numerical data analysis).

### **3.6.1.2 An online questionnaire**

The questionnaire was designed over several months, with input from both within the university and externally, and from those involved in the arts, the sciences and business. It was one of the researcher’s goals to put together a questionnaire that people could answer easily, quickly, and without leaving their desks. It is incredibly difficult to get a staff member’s perspective on things during interviews only, especially when their managers are sticky about them “leaving their posts”. It was also a concern that people might not fill in paper questionnaires, or that they would get lost or be a waste of a precious natural resource (paper). So it was decided to allow participants to complete the questionnaire online. This also contributed significantly to the ease of data collection. Instead of having to re-type each of the returned questionnaires, this method allowed respondents to type their own input directly into the system, where it was stored and retrieved exactly as they put it in (spelling mistakes and all). This time-saving was of great benefit in allowing the researcher to dramatically increase the number of people who were invited to participate.

### **3.6.1.3 Pilot group**

Before administering the questionnaire to the data group it was tested on a non-representative sample group from within the organisation. This group was selected because the researcher has a close link with the departments tested and she knew she would receive honest and constructive criticism from the test group. This

questionnaire was designed in DreamweaverMX and although associated with a back-end database (excel) it did not allow for much complexity of searching and analysis of results. Comments were then fed back into the questionnaire, providing the first check of validity and the questionnaire was re-designed and hand coded in MySQL server<sup>3</sup>.

#### **3.6.1.4 Selecting potential questionnaire respondents**

The selection process for potential respondents was done through a process of elimination. Firstly, respondents needed to have access to e-mail and have their own e-mail addresses. Secondly, since this is a management communication study respondents were required to either be directly managed by or directly manage people, hence the communicative link between them is more immediate than those involved in distant relationships, and more hierarchical than those who are on similar power levels (such as lecturers and heads of department). A total of 935 staff members at the university had e-mail addresses at the time of this study. From these addresses all academic posts, where the academics are not a head of department, director or perform a management position as designated by their title, were removed. Duplicate addresses were also removed leaving the database at a size of 600 potential respondents. The respondents were non-academic or administrative staff and their managers, who may or may not be academic staff themselves. Approximately one quarter of the respondents fell in management positions.

These potential respondents were then e-mailed, inviting them to take part in an online questionnaire. They were given three weeks to complete the questionnaire and reminded weekly, also by email.

#### **3.6.1.5 Questionnaire delivery mode (online) and structure**

The questionnaire appeared on a website (put together by Mr J. Balarin with a back-end program that collects the data as the form is completed). Respondents were required to follow the link to the website and answered the questions by clicking on a selection of answers or typing in answers, should the questions require it, or should

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<sup>3</sup> The design of this database must be credited to Mr Jody Balarin of the Computer Science Department of the university under study.

they wish to expand upon their answer. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, including an option for other comments and a question specifically requesting respondents to indicate their willingness to participate further in the study with room for them to give their contact details.

Questions followed the form of both close-ended questions also called controlled or fixed response questions (Irwin, 2004:11-18) and open-ended questions which “allow respondents to answer the question in their own words” (Lemon, 1996:133). Many questions used both controlled response questions to ask participants to make a choice between several alternatives and open-ended questions such as “Explain your choice. If you can think of a specific incident that is relevant please use it to elaborate on your explanation” were utilised to extract further information and enrich the data.

More information on the questionnaire follows in Chapter 4 which discusses the data and explains more about the questionnaire’s contents.

### **3.6.2 Qualitative data collection (interviews)**

The qualitative technique (semi-structured interviewing) involved in this research gathered in-depth, detailed information from individuals who could help me understand this phenomenon from their perspectives. Lindloff (1995:245) says that “qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery”. Thus the interviews with participants helped me obtain this knowledge in combination with interviewees to produce knowledge about their communication situations in order to help gain understanding from both of our perspectives.

#### **3.6.2.1 Interviews and sample selection**

The data collected from questionnaires was very useful for providing a structure for interviews as well as *pointing the researcher in the direction of issues that required further discussion or elaboration*. Strelitz (2005:68) points out that qualitative techniques are not uncommonly used to corroborate findings or explore issues in greater depths. This is partly the role of interviews in this study. As such, it was useful to choose interviewees whose responses indicated a willingness to talk, a certain

knowledge of the subject area, and enough insight of their management role to make the discussions interesting. So interviewees were chosen purposively, to a certain extent. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:95) a purposive sample is “a sample that is chosen on the basis of what the researcher thinks to be an average person”. However, the selection of interviewees, although purposive, did involve other selection strategies. Firstly, a question built into the questionnaire asked respondents whether they would be willing to be interviewed further or not. This allowed participants to self-select for interviews, making the process of selecting potential interviewees much simpler. Actually selecting who should be interviewed was still no easy task, however, since at least 33 people indicated their willingness to be interviewed and still others, who for one or another reason did not manage to fill in their details or answer the question, also volunteered to be interviewed. The richness of the potential interviewees’ responses played a large role in whittling them down to a manageable number. In addition, responses were gathered from managers and staff members in departments, divisions and sections all over the university. It was decided that a spread of staff representing as many departments of possible would help gain a broader picture of communication across the university’s service areas. This helped further to whittle down the list of potential interviewees. It was decided to try and find a nice mix of both managers and staff members and male and female participants. Interviewees could not be selected by an equal distribution of racial characteristics since the sample was unrepresentative of the larger population of South Africa and managers within this organisation tend to be largely of European origin. The final list brought a dozen potential delegates to the selection table and the final selection was made randomly, within service areas, so that representatives of all university functions were chosen.

The final six interviewees represented the following areas:

- 1) The Dean of Students Division (involved with service provision (accommodation, food, etc.) for students in the residence system)
- 2) Grounds and Gardens (deal with upkeep of the grounds as well as planting and maintaining the beautiful gardens)
- 3) The Internet Technology (IT) Division (software support, telephony, databases etc.)

- 4) 2 academic departments – (interviewees included both a departmental manager and a dean)
- 5) Academic Planning (policies, procedures, academic quality control etc.)

Interviews were conducted during a two-week period in which all six staff members were interviewed. Once transcribed, their interview transcriptions were fed back to them so that they could make any improvements, clarifications or omissions as they saw fit.

### **3.6.2.2 Interview contents**

Questions for interviews were based loosely around questionnaire questions and responses to the questionnaire. The interviews started by asking each interviewee specific questions designed around issues of interest that were revealed as a result of the questionnaire and then followed the format of a non-scheduled interview in that “those interviewed are free to expand on the topic as they see fit” and the interviewer is also “free to formulate other questions as judged appropriate for the given situation” (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995:107). The interviews tended towards in-depth interviews, described as “a conversation with a purpose” (Pitout, 1995:113), to

provide detailed background about the reasons why participants give specific answers; allow for observations of participants nonverbal behaviour; and [to] provide extensive data concerning participants’ opinions, recollections, values, motivations and feelings (*Ibid*).

More information on the interviews follows in Chapter 4 and the discussion of qualitative interview and questionnaire findings follows in chapter 6.

## **3.7 Data analysis: thematic grouping**

Rich data was collected from both open-ended questions in the questionnaire and from interviews. Once interviews were transcribed and qualitative questionnaire responses were grouped into separate documents for each question the next step in the process was organising the data into categories. According to Wigston (1995:160) “categories are the meaningful groups into which we allocate our units of analysis”.

The researcher found, on the first analysis, a total of 21 different categories including points like stress, praise, honesty, trust, over/under communication, motivation and leadership as well as general communication, respect, the purpose of communication, meetings or frequent contact and speaking another language, as well as several others. The same categories were applied across questionnaire and interview responses and colour-coded, for ease of reference.

Although all of the issues were interesting, relevant, and repeated themselves across interviews and questionnaire responses it was impossible to discuss every topic separately and so, for ease of reading, several of the themes were collapsed into general topics. These categories were merged into more general sections and are discussed in Chapter 6. The discussion is divided into sections. Firstly, a discussion of effective communication includes:

- Motivation and praise
- The role of listening
- Building relationships
- Respect
- Language and culture
- Teamwork
- Communicating often and
- Email, technology and putting it in writing.

And the second section discusses challenges to effective communication including:

- Time
- Stress and
- Space.

### **3. 8 Triangulation**

Strelitz (2005:60) says this of triangulation: “Triangulation in social research can be described as the use of more than one method of investigation and hence more than one type of data”. The unusual combination of interviews and questionnaires in this research allows for the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data. Strelitz (2005:66) adds,

despite the methodological differences between quantitative and qualitative research, fusing the two approaches in a single research design enables one to draw on their respective strengths.

Although not much numerical data was collected this did provide a point from which triangulation could commence. See Chapters 5 and 6 for data discussion involving some triangulation.

### **3.9 Ethical implications**

Several ethical issues must be addressed in such a study. One is that of permission for research. The Vice-Principal of the university under study has given permission for this research to be undertaken, provided the organisation is not mentioned directly. The researcher has strived to provide anonymity throughout the research by using pseudonyms where necessary and removing names and place references where applicable.

Secondly, there is a risk, because of my “inside perspective” that the research might be biased. It is possible that I may have favoured the opinions of certain areas of the university because of my previous exposure to aspects of the university and experience thereof. Although this bias can never be wholly overcome the research has attempted to provide information on both positive and negative aspects of this study and, as such, has actively striven to provide, if not wholly unbiased, at least a multi-faceted approach to the organisation. Consulting multiple sources including hundreds of participants via a questionnaire and using the precise words of interviewees will go some way towards representing the organisation from the perspective of the research subjects, rather than from only the researcher’s perspective.

Researchers in the social sciences observe human subjects, as well as becoming involved in the research process themselves. Since we are human we bring certain conventions, beliefs, and perceptions with us to each encounter with other human beings. The only way we, as researchers, can attempt to overcome our inherently human bias to some small extent is by acknowledging its existence. The rationalist, empiricist, philosophical and methodological framework has tended to dominate the history of research (Janse van Rensburg, 2001:11) and we still subscribe to this view to a certain extent by attempting to “systematically investigate a problem” (Lemon 1995:31). But it has long been acknowledged that the mere choices we make, from the subjects we choose to the methods in which we investigate them, already cause our

research to reflect a certain way of seeing the truth and hence no research can ever be truly objective, as I discussed earlier (see section 3.2. of this chapter). However, being firmly established in the social sciences this study has no need to prove the importance, or the bias, of the human perspective within it. Greenfield (1986:142) says that “We can do nothing to validate our perceptions of reality other than to describe it as we see it and to argue for the truth of our description”. It is in this spirit that I boldly proclaim this study to be a collection of perceptions. The respondents and interviewees in this research describe the world as they see it, and I, as an interpretive researcher, interpret their descriptions within my own way of seeing the world.

As Greenfield & Ribbins (1993:10) put it,

While the cultural scientist may not discover ultimate reality, he can interpret what people see as social reality and, in deed, he must do so according to a consistent, logical, and rigorous methodology. It is such a discipline for interpreting human experience which provides the science in the cultural scientist’s work, not his ability to discover ultimate truths about social structure. Thus the purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man’s definitions of reality and with the rules he devises for coping in it. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around himself.

In trying to explain, clarify and demystify the social forms of management communication I, as a researcher, needed to become involved in my study and with my participants. By placing this study within the interpretive paradigm, it is implied that understanding and defining a situation is part of my research task and “to do this requires not detachment but active involvement in the process of negotiated meaning, using the researcher’s social competencies” (Connole, 1993: 20).

Other ethical challenges include privacy, or voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995:102-3). It is not felt that the issue of voluntary participation was an insurmountable one in this study since those who chose to answer the questionnaire did so on an entirely voluntary basis and interviewees

were selected from only those who indicated their willingness to be interviewed. The points of anonymity and confidentiality were noted and addressed. Questionnaire responses were submitted anonymously. Only those who included their contact details willingly, for potential interviews, could be tracked down. Once the interviewing process began participants could obviously no longer remain anonymous to the interviewer. Nevertheless, their testaments remained confidential through the use of pseudonyms. With regard to the issue of privacy, interviews were conducted in a space suggested by the interviewee in which they would feel both comfortable and secure, and where their privacy would not be disturbed too much. Interviewees also took part at times best suited to themselves, and even re-scheduled interviews when originally scheduled interview times were no longer convenient for them.

### **3.10 Limitations**

The strength of interpretive and case-study research is that they provide real data from a small sample, allowing for in-depth “slice of life” pictures of an occasion. But this approach does have its limitations. Firstly, the strength of the responses depend to a large extent on the ability of the interviewer to build relationships and extract information in a way that is honest and skilful. As Gummesson (2003:485) puts it,

Interpretation requires subjects – researchers – and their ability to continuously fine-tune their skills with each research project. The approach thus is not just tied to an objective or intersubjectively approved procedure, but also rests inside each individual researcher as a professional scholar.

There is also the risk that interpretive studies rely entirely on qualitative data, which, while rich and detailed can often not provide a broader picture of the issue under study. I have tried to overcome this disability by also using a quantitative research technique – questionnaires. Firstly, the questionnaire provided several answers which could be analysed numerically to look at similarities and differences in opinion between managers and staff members. An example would be question 1 of the research, “What, in your opinion, is the primary role of communication in organisations?” The analysis of results could provide a numerical comparison between the most popular choice of managers, staff members and the group who fell into both roles and answered as such.

The questionnaire, while firstly providing numerical data, also allowed for rich qualitative responses from a larger group of people, thus giving quantity to the quality responses. The discussion chapters use responses from both questionnaires and interviews to triangulate responses. In this way the data discussed is both cross-referenced for validity and enriched by detailed responses. In this way it overcomes some of the limitations of either purely qualitative or quantitative research.

Other limitations to this research, apart from ethical implications such as research bias, and the restriction of purely qualitative research, which is not applicable, lie with the participants, the time limit, and mechanical glitches. Although participants were generally enthusiastic, and interviewees were downright encouraging, the issues that they brought up were discussed sensitively. And in places where interviewees mentioned names these were deleted to protect anonymity. Another limitation was the time allocated for research which was, of necessity, limited. While this did not necessarily have a significant impact on this study, per se, it would, obviously, have been a richer and larger study had there been more time available. It would have been a bonus to have more time and space available for a more detailed discussion of all the interesting issues that were raised, rather than simply having to mention them and move on. Any study of communication, an extremely complex phenomenon, can and must only focus on a limited area of research and hence gain only a limited understanding of 'the bigger picture'.

A mechanical glitch occurred with the data collection of the manager answers to question 2. As a result of an error in the back-end data collection mechanism question 2 could not be analysed numerically. Fortunately qualitative responses to this question were not affected and so the consequences of this error were not too dire.

### **3.11 Generalisability**

Strelitz (2005:65) defines generalisability as "how far one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other people, times, or settings than those directly studied". Obviously there are challenges to research that focuses on a specific instance at a specific time and one must be careful not to make wild suppositions

based on a limited scope of a single research project. But there is great value in obtaining a slice of life, in this case a slice of the communication life of managers and staff at this university. Greenfield and Ribbins, (1993:19) say that

What is needed for better research on schools is better images of what schools are and what goes on in them... These images would be sets of 'one-sided viewpoints', as Weber called them, each throwing 'shafts of light' upon social reality in schools." (Greenfield & Ribbins, 1993: 19).

Hence, this study has attempted to throw a shaft of light upon management communication by looking at images of these practices in an organisation with a wide and varied experience of learning, from the perspective of those who facilitate the learning process of others. Throwing a shaft of light of course does not imply complete illumination. There are many areas, even within this topic, that fall in shadow or lie on the edges of the light. These are the areas that require further research. But a case study, such as this, is designed to be an example of a few instances within in a broader area. Baker says that

Effective case studies serve as classic exemplars of how social research can be done. They may reach theoretical conclusions which have widespread and long-range implications, both politically and in terms of theoretical developments in a field. (Baker, 1994:304).

It is hoped that the theoretical conclusions of this research will be applicable to broader situations beyond this institution. Although located firmly in a specific time and place this case study deals with human behaviour and actions. Maxwell (1992:293) argues for the importance of generalising results from a specific instance to other instances and says that qualitative research is useful in developing theories from which generalisations can be made. Strelitz (2005:65) agrees, saying "Qualitative research should be judged by the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions, rather than to populations or universes". There is value in taking central lessons learned from the example of others and extracting them into theories and applying them to one's own life. This is the strength of the case-study approach. Yes, it is localised, yes, it is of necessity limited in its scope, but it is also a powerful tool of observation. Although the practice of management may (and hopefully will) change over time it is likely that there will always be those who have the power and manage others and those who are told what to do. Knowing how to get messages across power differences is an important lesson for both sides.

It is also important to distinguish between internal and external generalisability (Strelitz, 2005:65). While internal generalisability is concerned with applying the same findings to different populations within a group (such as managers within the university), “external generalisability refers to generalising to other communities, groups or institutions” (Strelitz, 2005:65). Through the triangulation of data collection techniques this study possesses a certain degree of internal generalisability, but it is vain to claim it has external generalisability. Indeed, Strelitz (ibid.) asserts, “qualitative research seldom makes claims for external generalisability”.

### **3.12 Validity**

Baker (1994:122) says, “Put most simply, validity addresses the question “Am I measuring what I think I am measuring?” According to Leedy (1997:32) it asks

What does the test measure? Does it, in fact, measure what it is supposed to measure? How well, how comprehensively, how accurately does it measure it?”

In essence, a study is valid if it tests what it says it’s testing. This research’s validity has been tested by the duplication of questions in interviews and questionnaires. It has further been tested by being administered to a control group.

There are many types of validity. I will discuss two specifically, face validity and content validity. Face validity addresses the issue of whether the researcher, upon deep thought and introspection, can honestly say that the research is answering the questions it purports to ask. This research asks the following question in 3 parts: what role do managers and staff members think communication plays in their work environments, what are effective and ineffective communication strategies and what can they both do to make communication more effective? Although it is difficult to reflect on one’s own work and often it is a case of not being able to see the wood for the trees because one is simply too close to the research, it is encouraging to note that the very questions around which this research is based are asked again and again, in questionnaires, in interviews, and in the analysis of the data. By carefully examining the measure of a concept in light of its meaning and asking myself seriously whether the measurement instrument really seems to be measuring the underlying concept (Baker, 1994: 123) I believe that this research does, indeed, have face validity.

But face validity is not enough. Content validity is also important. This “asks whether the empirical indicators (tests, scales, questions, or whatever) fully represent the domain of meaning of the underlying concept being studied” (Bohrnstedt in Baker, 1994:123). It is impossible to entirely represent the domain of meaning in management communication because it is an enormous area and, as such, only a small section of a) management and b) communication can be represented. Baker agrees that “when the concept to be measured is more abstract... it is much more difficult to establish content validity”. Since this study is also, in the first place, exploratory (i.e. it is examining a subject which does not have an already established base of research) it will, by nature of its subject matter, not be able to “fully represent the domain of meaning of the underlying concept being studied” (ibid.).

Baker (1994:301) goes on to indicate that another test of reliability and validity is “if another researcher studied this same case with the same research question, would the results be the same?” “Could another researcher,” Baker continues (ibid.)

read the case study through its various steps, think through the logic of how to link the propositions to the data, repeat the research effort, and reach the same conclusions?

In another institution, it is likely that while the individual responses may differ, the underlying success strategies would be similar. Respect, frequent communication, and the ability to listen, to name just a few of the success factors in manager-staff communication, are issues of central importance when a) getting the message across and b) developing successful business relationships. I believe that the research has asked the right questions and listened to the answers in a way that has reached into the heart of management communication. Only time and similar research studies will tell whether these themes I believe to be of central importance will prove to remain so, but the triangulation of resources from questionnaires and interviews will have helped. As Baker (1994:302) says,

Yin strongly advises that the case study researcher get multiple sources of evidence and/or try to establish a chain of evidence so that one can pick out the steps that lead to a final effect.

I have attempted to point out the direction of this research throughout the process and it is hoped that the final effect will thus be believable and valid.

### 3.13 Reliability

In addition to trying to ensure that this study is valid it is also important to ensure it is reliable. Bless & Higson-Smith (1995:130) say that “reliability is concerned with the *consistency* of measures” (their emphasis). “Put simply, reliability is defined as the degree to which a procedure for measuring produces similar outcomes when it is repeated” Baker (1994:127). In the case of this study, if a test were administered to check the research goals by another method *at the same time* as the study was being undertaken the measurement tools would most likely produce reliable results. However, since the study is cross-sectional, the participants are individuals, and the data-gathering method is primarily through interviews it is a very difficult task to even attempt to reproduce the same study and expect the same specific results. When dealing with individuals, their feelings and emotions, and their perceptions, it is impossible to state that these variables will not change over time. As such the study could never be reliably repeated to produce the same result each time (Babbie, 1995:124). Indeed, it would be hoped that a similar study undertaken on a similar group of people at a similar organisation would yield subtly different results because different results would mean that communication strategies are being employed more effectively in some situations than others. Nevertheless it is likely that the underlying principles that have been established from this research would be comparable. As discussed in section 3.12.above, the principles underlying the success of communication are, it would seem, universal. Across the globe humans are more likely to be able to communicate well if they listen to one another, respect one another and one another’s opinions, and have a personal interest in the people with whom they are conversing. In this respect the study’s findings are reliable, even if subsequent research differs in focus and extent.

The following chapter goes on to discuss the research specifics and lists questionnaire contents, tabulates some of the questionnaire findings, and discusses interviews in more detail.

## **Chapter 4: The Data**

### **4.1 Questionnaire design**

The bulk of this chapter covers the questionnaire. It describes the contents of the questionnaire, points out a few encouraging thoughts on questionnaire respondents' interaction with the questionnaire and then presents a summary of questionnaire responses in a table form. This table is then explained. A discussion of the questionnaire data, including an analysis of the quantitative data follows in chapter 5.

The interviews are briefly touched on in this chapter as well. A more detailed description of interview contents also follows in chapter 6, intermingled with questionnaire responses, since interview questions related directly to findings from the questionnaire and the responses are often linked to common themes.

### **4.2 Questionnaire testing and implementation**

After months of planning and very careful coding a complex in design, yet simple to use questionnaire was put together on MySQL server. Each line of code was individually put together. Each "please do not forget to answer this question" or "please only choose 1 answer to this question" error message was designed to avoid receiving meaningless data.

The result was both encouraging and rewarding. 600 staff members and their managers were originally invited to participate by email. Unfortunately the database from which the email addresses were gathered was not 100% up to date. So, of the initial 600 invitations only approximately 550 went to real addresses. Of the 550 potential participants a total of 194 responses were received. Several of these responses were from individuals who had problems completing the survey and so tried more than once. Taking this into account and discounting duplicates gave a total of 145 people who filled in the questionnaire, from a total of 49 different divisions or departments within the organisation. This kind of response, a 26% response rate, is unusual for a questionnaire of this nature. It is possible, from this response rate, to generalise the findings of the questionnaire. However, this was not the researcher's

intention. Although it formed an important quantitative data collection method and certain counts will be employed to show general trends from within responses, it is not the researcher's intention to generalise these responses to the entire data group.

The questionnaire was a success. This may have been because respondents enjoyed being individually invited (by email) to participate or it may have indicated an interest from members of the university in communication in general, and management communication in particular. Alternatively, it may have been the uniqueness of the nature of the questionnaire (for a lot of people being able to click buttons and fill in questionnaires online is still new and exciting). Indeed, it may even have been because there was a genuine need for respondents to "have their say" (it certainly seemed to fulfil the function of an anonymous diary or psychologist, as the responses from several participants who nearly gave their entire life stories would demonstrate). Whatever the reasons, it allowed a very rich body of data to be collected. In addition, because of the questionnaire design the data collected was not only quantitative. Questions such as "If you feel the role of communication is not adequately covered by the above statements, please indicate below what you think it is" and "please explain your choice", as well as "please elaborate. If you can think of a specific incident that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation" allowed respondents to elaborate, explain and comment should they choose to do so. And they certainly did! Pages and pages of textual data collected from the freeform questionnaire answers contained responses so rich that the researcher considered not even conducting interviews at all.

### **4.3 Questionnaire contents**

As explained earlier, the first step of the research, following the questionnaire design and testing, was to present the questionnaire to a large number of participants who were invited by email to complete it.

Printed copies of the different questionnaires are attached as Appendix II and the online version can be given on request. The website address will not be mentioned here in order to protect the organisation's confidentiality (it is hosted on their webserver)

The questionnaire took its starting point from Tourish and Hargie's (1996:41) proposed open questions in a study assessing the quality of communication between managers and staff in the National Health Services. These questions ask managers and staff to indicate strengths and weakness in the way people communicate with them as well as asking them to describe a typical communication experience in their organisation and thirdly, requesting them to list three ways to improve communication in their organisation.

This study's questionnaire added to those questions and included questions designed to elicit general responses on: the perceived role of communication in organisations; methods of communication (email, telephone, informal meetings, etc.); how much information is felt to be given; how open the lines of communication were; and the types of feedback given and received (congratulations, criticism etc.). It also covered specific topics including: perceived effects of verbal behaviour such as tone of voice; non-verbal behaviour (body language); and the role of communication in motivation. Subsequent questions also asked respondents to classify communication in their work environment as effective or ineffective and to explain their response as well as asking whether this questionnaire had made them think or reflect more on their communication practices at work.

The questionnaire appendix lists 3 questionnaires of 14, 14 and 23 respective questions in total. The two appendices for *only* managers and *only* staff members have several questions in common (questions 1,11,12,13, and 14. Question 14 was used only to elicit interviewees). The appendix answered by those who are *both* managers and staff members has eliminated the duplicated questions and the numbering of this appendix differs from the first two. As such in referring back to the appendices of questions I will refer to the numbering of the individual (managers *only*, or staff members *only*) questionnaires, rather than the combined questionnaire, to avoid confusion. In the following discussion questions are referenced as they appear numerically in the individual questionnaires listed as appendix IIa (managers only) and appendix IIb (staff members only) not appendix IIc which combines both the manager and staff member's perspectives.

#### **4.4 Encouraging thoughts on questionnaire respondents' interaction with the questionnaire**

Before immersing the reader in a specific discussion of responses to the questionnaire let me first discuss a few general findings that emerged from a first reading of the responses.

With 100 responses (out of 550) on the very first day of distribution I was excited and encouraged by the reply. 15 people already indicated their willingness to participate further and a sample of interviewees could already have been chosen from this selection. Further responses trickled in over the weekend. How encouraging it was to know that people actually took time off over a weekend to fill in the questionnaire! It made me think that people really had a need to talk about their experience of communication.

In some cases this became a “rant session” for individuals, as in the following comment: “It is a surprise and coincidence to receive the questionnaire and get given the chance to express my frustrations at a time when I’m largely very frustrated about these issues”. Rather than seeing this in a negative light, however, I saw this as fulfilling a greater role and as serving a large “cathartic” role for participants. One aim of the research was to get participants to understand communication better from their personal perspectives. Even if they have to get angry and make comments that are not largely useful for a constructive solving of problems they are undoubtedly valuable for a) gaining a bigger picture of the communication at the organisation (realising that in places some people are desperately unhappy, and have needed to use this opportunity to vent their frustrations) and b) helping them reflect on communication. Similarly, this has also been an opportunity for people to realise when their boss/subordinate is doing a good job. In this way it reinforces positive feeling and contributes to continuing effective communication. A response to question 12, “Has this questionnaire made you think or reflect more on your communication practices at work” shows this positive reflection. The respondent answered “No not really - it just made me realise that the communication between my manager and myself is good.”

This questionnaire seems to have given people a taste, and a constructive one, of what may have been lacking in their manager-staff communication. Comments such as "Thanks for the opportunity to participate - hope my comments have helped. Can you help me to devise a survey for the campus too?" are really encouraging as are "Thank you for the opportunity on having to reflect!" and

I've been able to clarify some of the weaknesses to myself. I am realising (perhaps for the first time) clearly that we can BE MUCH BETTER AT COMMUNICATION, and the link between communication and good practice is CRUCIAL!" (their emphasis).

The questionnaire seemed to fulfil a constructive role in informing people about aspects of communication they may not previously have thought about, or not given due consideration. Comments such as the following demonstrate this.

I find it amazing how awareness of body language can help communication, but I know that my knowledge is limited and needs further attentive scrutiny to pick up on subtle communication through body language with cultures other than my own.

Similarly, useful feedback from people who communicate effectively indicate how well they know the tool they use every day. A comment here about tone of voice illustrates this point:

I've found the approach to be key in all staff members responses, but in many cases its not only the tone, but the perception of the manager's authority that makes the difference – i.e. if a younger manager uses the exact same tone in approaching colleagues they often get a totally different response to the more experienced manager!"

While the intention of this research is not to "check up" on individual departments or even to pin-point instances where managers and staff are reflecting on each other's personalities, since this research is not about individuals' actions, personalities, or styles, it was interesting to note that occasionally staff from within a department were reflecting on each other's practice. In one case, in a science department, a staff member gave very positive feedback on their manager's behaviour saying

My manager (HoD) gives me enough information to understand what is required from me and what is needed from me to complete the job. There is good communication between us and I always understand what is required and what needs to be done.

Another member of the same department commented

I feel motivated in my job already and my manager does encourage me and congratulates me on a job well done and my manager does encourage me to do courses etc.

The manager simultaneously demonstrated a great awareness of the role and effect of communication, with his/her own comments such as the following:

Everybody loves to be recognised for a job well done and it is wonderful to see happy faces. You can always improve any situation by highlighting the positive and pushing the negative away in order to achieve the same and sometimes even better result.

The same manager also commented that “they know I take their lives and happiness at work seriously”. This demonstrates how in this situation where communication is clearly effective, the manager’s behaviour was both appreciated by his/her staff as well as specifically intended to come across that way. Clearly being aware of communication and using it effectively has been recognised as an effective management tool in this case.

#### 4.5 Tabulated questionnaire results

Here follows a table presenting a summary of the questionnaire’s findings. A copy of the database, listing each response in detail is available on request.

<b>Questionnaire responses summary: managers and staff members</b>			
<b>No</b>	<b>Question topic</b>	<b>Manager response</b>	<b>Staff member response</b>
1	<b>What is the primary role of communication in organisations?</b> (Comments in addition to selected options.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Communication should aim to build a satisfactory working relationship...”</li> <li>• “Maintain a two way channel of dialogue which intrinsically encompasses most of the above, informing, facilitating, giving feedback, sharing, motivating, encouraging, supporting, liaising, initiating, concluding, guiding, deciding, instructing, resolving, proposing, challenging...”</li> <li>• “I believe the primary purpose of communication in any situation is to develop relationships. Without sustainable relationships, which result in trust and respect, any information is useless. If you don’t trust a company then you will not believe their adverts, if you don’t trust or respect your manager then you will not put value to their communications.”</li> <li>• “Without communication, nothing can be done - work-related and in ones personal life.”</li> </ul>	
2	<b>How do they communicate?</b> (Comments in addition to selected)	Face-to-face Open-door policy Over tea Talking as they work Bi-weekly team meetings	Face-to-face, one-on-one (impromptu) At my desk Chance encounters as we rush past each other!

	options.)	Talking and helping each other with daily work.	We have no meetings Internet Messaging (Jabber, ICQ, MSN) Manager pops in every morning Informal verbal updates
3	<b>How much information is passed from manager to staff member?</b> (Explanations on the choice of too much, enough, or too little information.)	<b>Too much:</b> "The more people know and the more included they feel, the better the team will function." <b>Just enough:</b> "I don't have enough time to spend explaining everything in detail." "Enough information is all that is required." <b>Too little:</b> "I should explain more in order for them to grow." "I expect the staff to take initiative also." "Generally overloading people with information is counterproductive to getting the job done."	<b>Too much:</b> "...Sometimes I do get too much info at the time." <b>Just enough:</b> "My manager provides sufficient information but doesn't overload me, which can also be good, because superfluous information is also negative, as it may "cloud" the important stuff." "He often gives me confidential information that makes the bigger picture appear clearer and this motivates me to go further to please and serve." <b>Too little:</b> "Sometimes my manager forgets to tell me information." "He seems to think that keeping us in the dark and not consulting us gives him an edge and keeps us off balance."
4	<b>How open are the lines of interpersonal communication?</b> (Comments in addition to selected options.)	"Your door must be open to your staff all the time, it's the only way to build trust and have effective communication to work as a team." "I work hard on encouraging open communication, but there is definitely a mentality of whinge and whine and unrealistic expectations with some staff. This unfortunately discourages open comms."	"Due to overwork, manager is not necessarily available." "I feel I can speak to my manager about almost anything, work related and personal." "It is difficult at times to approach certain issues and staff due to stress levels." "Urgent issues can be raised at any time. The door is always open. Any issue can be discussed."
5	<b>What sort of feedback?</b> (Comments in addition to selected options)	"Letters of commendation are posted on staff noticeboards, when an event has gone well and all staff have been involved the entire group is called together for commendation. Photographs are sometimes posted on notice boards when appropriate." "Feedback from meetings, e.g. senate, and liaison meetings with legal profession and other Deans." "Disciplinary encounters when required – I try to be constructive if at all possible." "Something more subtle – a kind of constant affirming – showing personal interest in others work is hugely motivating I think – kind of reminds people why it's good to be alive and to	"Complaints that staff are not working but without specifics of who and when." "He shouts a lot and is often rude about colleagues behind their backs." "I get very little feedback unless there is a problem." "I have had one letter of thanks and motivation, which really made an impact. I felt part of the team and felt I was doing a worthwhile job." "Well done or positive feedback is very seldom given. Errors are often highlighted and continually used as a stick."

		work at THIS place.”	“To my knowledge, there are no formal structures in place for evaluation, so unless I directly request those they are also not forthcoming.”
6	<b>Can talking differently affect the person’s response?</b> (Elaborations on their yes or no answer.)	<p>“As the saying goes, it is the tone that makes the music.”</p> <p>“Ask nicely, with a smile, and the job will be well done.”</p> <p>“I have a simple philosophy: treat others as I would like to be treated.”</p> <p>“It is important to be encouraging when work is done well so that the staff member always tries to do his/her best.”</p> <p>“Tone, body language, the WHOLE package sends a message.”</p> <p>“Choice of language is also important especially when dealing with people of other languages. Second language English speakers often respond better if their home language is used to communicate with them – particularly things of importance.”</p> <p>“The atmosphere of the department is largely determined from the top, and the way in which the communication lines are set up, and the TONE in which they are delivered goes a long way to developing a healthy, productive departmental atmosphere.”</p> <p>“Tone is very important. I tend to talk straight and to the point, and I expect professional people to meet deadlines. Some staff react negatively to what I say on occasion when it creates a perception of disapproval and/or intolerance. More diplomatic people might get better reaction from staff, and greater buy-in from them on some issues.”</p>	<p>“If my manager is snappy or in a bad mood, that can affect the way I respond. Conversely, a happy mood can produce a good response from me.”</p> <p>“I think it is important for self respect to be maintained no matter who the person and what their grade is...”</p> <p>“A dialogue is more open, friendly and less personal when it’s done in a friendly manner.”</p> <p>“Of course it does. For instance when initiative is used and the manager is really happy with the way things have been done, it encourages one to always be on top of things. There has been one or two instances where tone or word choice (not necessary, has taken place), one takes it and gets over it and makes sure that this does become necessary again. Managers too have their bad days!”</p> <p>“My manager is polite and down to earth always willing to listen and can answer you properly.”</p> <p>“While encouragement or congratulations might not be said as such, the tone of voice does indicate the person’s feelings, and thus I take strength from that. Similarly, if the individual has a different tone of voice, I am aware, without being told, that I have overstepped a</p>

			mark.”
7	<b>Body language</b> (Elaborations on their yes or no answer.)	<p>“Body language can either encourage or discourage communication. It is very important to watch your body language and the message that it is sending.”</p> <p>“Body language should be in tune with content being communicated.”</p> <p>“I try to maintain eye contact and an open demeanour, and not give the impression that I have already made up my mind.”</p> <p>“When conflict issues are raised and I am the mediator, I tend to fold my arms and sit upright when I need to take control of a situation. Staff react to this and allow me to direct the situation to a more conducive discussion.”</p>	<p>“Body language... normally facial expressions often says more than what is actually being said in words.”</p> <p>“Body language also helps me to understand my boss and what he’s trying to express so I can respond more valuably.”</p> <p>“Eye to eye and a smiling face is conducive to a heart to heart conversation. One tends to be relaxed and more open to questions and answers.”</p> <p>“I’m sensitive to body language and read it very carefully. I’ve learnt that some gestures are just mannerisms which are not necessarily meaningful. But I can also “take a hint” when body language and tone of voice are saying something, and because I’ve worked with this manager for many years now, I can most often tell the difference and work with it. So in other words, body language and tone of voice are part of the overall communication.”</p>
8	<b>Motivation</b>	<p>“Communication is very important in motivation. The manner in which a manager communicates with his staff can affect their performance. Congratulation on a job well done makes staff work better and aim for high standards.”</p> <p>“Everybody loves to be recognised for a job well done and it is wonderful to see happy faces. You can always improve any situation by highlighting the positive and pushing the negative away in order to achieve the same and sometimes even better result.”</p> <p>“I think the staff here are motivated by their own deep needs and</p>	<p>“I think that a manager’s ultimate goal i.e. to build a team relationship with you, supportive and authoritative, which will in turn grow respect for that manager, will encourage and incentivise your performance. Support systems and incentives are far more motivating than speech patterns.”</p> <p>“He needs to listen better, encourage people.”</p> <p>“Often there’s not enough time for encouragement. Pressure is intense and</p>

		ambitions - I can do little more than show an interest and remind them why its important - but even then they will act according to their own drives and desires.”	encouraging seems to take a smaller role.” “In the same way that I see myself as an encourager and motivator of both staff and students in my activities in the dept I would also like to have some positive acknowledgement of some of my efforts in this regard. Everyone needs some form of appraisal from time to time and this is what is not often forthcoming. A pity as the HoD is such a warm-hearted and friendly person. Perhaps he feels I do not need it!”
9.1	<b>List of own strengths</b> (strengths shared by both managers and staff are in bold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Admit mistakes/ accept suggestions (I'm not always right)</b></li> <li>• <b>Be supportive, give praise/encouragement</b></li> <li>• <b>Being available/open/plenty of access</b></li> <li>• Being patient</li> <li>• <b>Communicating often</b></li> <li>• Getting personal (real interest in staff)</li> <li>• Giving clear goals/instructions</li> <li>• <b>Giving feedback</b></li> <li>• Giving them the bigger picture</li> <li>• <b>Honesty/ openness</b></li> <li>• <b>Humour</b></li> <li>• Including people/team-work</li> <li>• <b>Keeping records, using email (putting things in writing)</b></li> <li>• <b>Respect</b></li> <li>• Speaking in a calm way</li> <li>• Treating staff as equals</li> <li>• <b>Trust</b></li> <li>• <b>Willingness to listen</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Admit mistakes</b></li> <li>• Approach directly</li> <li>• Be prepared for meetings</li> <li>• <b>Be supportive, encouraging, complimentary when appropriate</b></li> <li>• <b>Being available, easy access/open-door</b></li> <li>• Being flexible/open/amenable</li> <li>• Communicating in their first language</li> <li>• <b>Communicating often</b></li> <li>• Don't waste time on unimportant issues</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Friendly/pleasant, nice</li> <li>• <b>Giving feedback/keeping informed</b></li> <li>• <b>Honesty / openness</b></li> <li>• <b>Humour</b></li> <li>• Informal</li> <li>• <b>Keeping records, email</b></li> <li>• Loyallness</li> <li>• Not being scared</li> <li>• <b>Respect</b></li> <li>• Talk about problems immediately</li> <li>• <b>Trust</b></li> <li>• <b>Willingness to listen</b></li> </ul>
9.2	<b>List of one-another's strengths</b> (strengths shared by both managers and staff are in bold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask questions</li> <li>• <b>Collaborative/treat as equals</b></li> <li>• Co-operation</li> <li>• Enthusiasm</li> <li>• Forgiveness for mistakes/attitude</li> <li>• <b>Frequent / often communication</b></li> <li>• <b>Friendly</b></li> <li>• <b>Get personal (personal</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Collaborative, team-building, togetherness, willingness to involve them</b></li> <li>• Explains well</li> <li>• Face-to-face communication</li> <li>• Fair</li> <li>• <b>Frequently</b></li> </ul>

		<p>interest/builds relationships)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Honesty, not afraid to speak out</b></li> <li>• <b>Humour</b></li> <li>• <b>Informal</b></li> <li>• <b>Listens</b></li> <li>• <b>Motivation is mutual</b></li> <li>• <b>Open/available</b></li> <li>• Positive attitude</li> <li>• <b>Respect</b></li> <li>• <b>Share information</b></li> <li>• Talk about issues immediately</li> <li>• <b>Trust</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Friendly</b></li> <li>• <b>Get personal (build relationships or take a personal interest)</b></li> <li>• Gives the bigger picture</li> <li>• <b>Honesty /openness</b></li> <li>• <b>Humour</b></li> <li>• <b>Informal/relaxed</b></li> <li>• Keeps to the point</li> <li>• Leads by example</li> <li>• <b>Listens</b></li> <li>• <b>Motivating / gives praise</b></li> <li>• <b>Open/approachable/available</b></li> <li>• Patient</li> <li>• Polite</li> <li>• Puts things in writing, uses email</li> <li>• <b>Respect</b></li> <li>• <b>Share information, willingness to help/work together/explain</b></li> <li>• Supportive, encouraging</li> <li>• <b>Trust</b></li> </ul>
10.1	<p><b>List of own weaknesses</b> (weaknesses shared by both managers and staff are in bold)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>(aggressive/defensive) Aggressive</b></li> <li>• <b>(buy-in) Don't get their buy-in before going ahead with something.</b></li> <li>• <b>(frequency) Don't have as many meetings or as much contact as necessary.</b></li> <li>• (knowing things) Assume they know more than they do.</li> <li>• <b>(listening) Could listen more/better.</b></li> <li>• <b>(minutes) Need for minutes of meetings.</b></li> <li>• <b>(time) Don't have/give enough time.</b></li> <li>• <b>(too informal) door is too open</b></li> <li>• Allowing more dominant team members to dominate others or involve one person only, not the entire team.</li> <li>• Expect staff to be as committed as they are.</li> <li>• <b>Impatient.</b></li> <li>• Language problems.</li> <li>• <b>Not clear in instructions or needs.</b></li> <li>• Not flexible enough</li> <li>• <b>Not forceful enough (confidence).</b></li> <li>• Take the power away because believe they can do the job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>(aggressive/defensive) Defensive</b></li> <li>• <b>(buy-in) Don't persuade the boss enough about their ideas.</b></li> <li>• <b>(frequency) Don't communicate often enough, infrequent meetings</b></li> <li>• <b>(listening) Don't listen.</b></li> <li>• <b>(minutes) Don't write things down or put it in writing.</b></li> <li>• <b>(time) Not enough time, therefore too rushed.</b></li> <li>• Don't deal directly (ask others instead).</li> <li>• Don't discuss problems immediately.</li> <li>• Don't know when to ask questions.</li> <li>• <b>Impatient.</b></li> <li>• <b>Not clear enough</b></li> <li>• <b>Not confident enough (forceful)</b></li> <li>• Not good at dealing with conflict</li> <li>• Not sensitive or too sensitive to time pressures</li> <li>• Should talk face-to-face more often.</li> </ul>

		better.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take on too much (e.g. not tell the boss if they can't cope or are sick).</li> <li>• Too far away (location).</li> <li>• Too honest about shortcomings</li> <li>• <b>Too informal</b></li> </ul>
10.2	<b>List of one-another's weaknesses</b> (weaknesses shared by both managers and staff are in bold)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ( Doesn't talk well or clearly ) <b>Unclear</b></li> <li>• <b>(knowing things) Not enough updates on progress (not reporting back)</b></li> <li>• <b>(lack of honesty) say they understand when they don't</b></li> <li>• Cultural differences (or speak in language which excludes the boss)</li> <li>• Don't ask when have problems</li> <li>• <b>Don't inform enough/full picture</b></li> <li>• Don't pay attention</li> <li>• Don't respect seniority</li> <li>• <b>Email rather than talk face-to-face or not keep written records of meetings</b></li> <li>• <b>Forgetting to tell things (e.g. when they are out of office)</b></li> <li>• <b>Infrequent communication / don't communicate, especially face-to-face</b></li> <li>• Language barrier</li> <li>• <b>Listening (could listen more)</b></li> <li>• <b>Personal issues</b></li> <li>• <b>Too busy</b></li> <li>• Us-them mentality (hide things)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>(knowing things) Assumes they know things that they don't or don't give feedback</b></li> <li>• <b>(lack of honesty) not honest</b></li> <li>• Away a lot</li> <li>• Doesn't give feedback or gives negative feedback</li> <li>• <b>Doesn't inform /not enough info</b></li> <li>• <b>Doesn't talk well or clearly (condescending, too fast, brusque)</b></li> <li>• <b>Don't put things in writing OR overuses email instead of talking personally</b></li> <li>• <b>Forgets</b></li> <li>• Inappropriate humour</li> <li>• <b>Infrequent communication</b></li> <li>• Intimidating</li> <li>• <b>Leaves things until the last minute or not enough warning</b></li> <li>• <b>Listening (doesn't listen enough)</b></li> <li>• Makes them feel bad for mistakes or is sarcastic</li> <li>• Not open to suggestions or criticism</li> <li>• <b>Personal issues or doesn't take the time to build relationships</b></li> <li>• Says one thing and changes mind without informing staff</li> <li>• Should provide more motivation</li> <li>• Shouting at staff</li> <li>• <b>Too busy, not enough time.</b></li> <li>• Treats members of groups unequally</li> </ul>
11	<b>Communication effective or ineffective?</b>	"Our section works as a cohesive, extremely productive unit and I think that this is largely because there are open lines of communication between all staff, not just between staff and manager, and this leads to a mostly comfortable and encouraging work environment."	

		<p>"I think that lack of communication is often expressed in the workplace in bad labour relations, job dissatisfaction, etc. So, it is possible to judge when a lack of communication has arisen, as this is reflected in staffing problems. Generally, a quick and informal meeting between affected parties clears the air. "</p> <p>Issues raised in this question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several people feel frustrated and left out of the picture because information is not passed on (often because people are too busy)</li> <li>• Weekly or fortnightly meetings are very important but there is often not enough time to build relationships.</li> <li>• Email mailing lists help a lot to pass on information</li> <li>• If problems are addressed immediately they tend to be solved more easily.</li> <li>• Communication is often effective within a specific section, but not the whole area or division.</li> <li>• Being open to, taking the time to and building successful relationship helps build a happier, more open working environment.</li> <li>• Openness, trust, frequent communication, working as a team, a smaller group of people working together, the ability to disagree with one another and using the grapevine for positive information all contribute to effective working environments.</li> <li>• There is always room for improvement (even when communication is good) but factors such as managers being away too frequently from the office, staff competing for managers' attention, irregular communication or a lack of information passed on contribute towards ineffective communication.</li> </ul>
12	<b>Has questionnaire made you reflect on communication?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any questionnaire will make one evaluate / any reflection is good</li> <li>• Some learned things from it (to encourage more, to be more available, to improve areas of weakness as identified by themselves, to make time to listen to one another).</li> <li>• Several were made to appreciate the good communication they have at the moment.</li> <li>• Many agreed that it made them aware of their current situations, for good or bad. "Yes. I had to think about communication, something that one takes for granted and does not really spend any time thinking about, but without it everything would fall apart!"</li> </ul>
13	<b>Anything else to add?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "As I said before, without communication, everything would fall apart, not only in the workplace, but in our everyday lives. How would we teach our children right from wrong? How would we say how we feel? or ask for a job to be done? I think communication is one of the most important things in life - it goes hand in hand with understanding. If we don't understand, how to we indicate that without communicating?"</li> <li>• "People must be made aware of how we address and talk to people as being very important. Body language is also important. It would be lovely if we could do away with the word "support staff" and replace with (name replaced for confidentiality) University Staff -- than we are indeed one family !!"</li> <li>• "No communication practice is ever perfect but this kind of investigation should at least highlight problem areas and motivate the responding parties to correct some errors."</li> <li>• "Maybe my manager should hold staff meetings with her staff so that we can communicate with her and she can also get to know us better also become aware of how much we actually do or don't do in our jobs. Meetings would at least open our lines of communication."</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I think my boss is the bees knees. He is honest and forthright and treats me with respect. I have loved working for him, despite regular difference of opinion about how to get things done. He always treats me as an equal and gives me a large degree of autonomy.”</li> </ul>
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## 4.6 Explaining the table

Where columns are merged (as in questions 1, 11, 12 and 13) the answers presented were not unique to either managers or their staff. As such, these questions are discussed in general, without distinction between the two groups. Where columns are separated (as in questions 2-13) these questions were answered by both groups and extracts from both groups’ perspectives are summarised in their respective columns. The managers’ responses are on the left, and the staff members’ responses are on the right, for ease of comparison.

The data table above presents qualitative extracts from questionnaire responses. Several questions, namely questions 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 11 also elicited quantitative (numerical) responses. These results follow in the quantitative discussion chapter (chapter 5).

## 4.7 Interviews

As discussed in previous chapters, interviews were undertaken over a two-week period, following the closing date for submission of questionnaires. It was an extremely difficult process to narrow down those selected for interviews because there were simply so many enthusiastic people who appeared to be interested in these topics and whose input would have been valuable. Unfortunately the scope of this research necessitated limiting the number of interviews undertaken. A final selection of six interviewees was made to encompass a wide range of business areas within the university (refer back to chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of the selection of interview participants). Those interviewed were representatives from academic departments as well as service staff involved in maintaining the grounds and gardens, catering for the live-in students, handling IT and telephony needs; as well as a representative from academic planning, the department responsible for overseeing the content and structure of the university’s various courses.

Interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. Appendix III is the list of questions on which the interviews were loosely based. The first interviews were structured around a simpler version of this list of questions since originally the list only went up to question 7e. However important points of discussion came up during further interviews and as they were raised these issues were added to the list of questions culminating, ultimately, in a total of 7 main questions with 17 sub-questions.

Most of the topics were covered in each interview, but there was no specific agenda, other than ensuring that each area was discussed in some form or another. Interviewees were occasionally asked to elaborate on their points and the researcher sometimes interjected to confirm whether what she heard was, indeed, what the interviewee intended. As a result the interview generally followed the format of a non-scheduled interview in that “those interviewed are free to expand on the topic as they see fit” and the interviewer is also “free to formulate other questions as judged appropriate for the given situation” (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1995:107). The interviews tended towards in-depth interviews, described as “a conversation with a purpose” (Pitout, 1996:113), to

provide detailed background about the reasons why participants give specific answers; allow for observations of participants nonverbal behaviour; and [to] provide extensive data concerning participants’ opinions, recollections, values, motivations and feelings (*Ibid*).

Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour and took place in the office or home of the person being interviewed during non-work times (i.e. over lunch or after hours). It worked out well to have interviews during times when participants were in the office, but not involved with other tasks, as it helped keep them focussed on communication in the environment in which they were discussing it (i.e. at work) as well as allowing them to discuss things openly, while not being disturbed by other interruptions. The fact that they were not in the presence of other people also allowed interviewees to speak more naturally and honestly, without the risk of them being overheard. Indeed, several of those interviewed commented on the openness and ability to share information with the interviewer. As one participant said, “I’ve been fairly open with you. I would guard my comments in a number of environments because I would be cautious as to how those were being taken.” It is a compliment to the intimacy of the

interview process, the confidence with which those interviewed were willing to discuss their situation, and the faith in the confidentiality of the research that interviewees could be honest and open and say things they would not ordinarily say in other contexts. This freedom to express oneself is at the core of the interpretive research paradigm and was not only expressed in interviews, but also in the online questionnaire. One respondent said,

What I have shared here is VERY CONFIDENTIAL and I do not want any of this to be repeated. I have merely tried to answer some of the questions and in doing so have found myself a little carried away!

It is fantastic that he nevertheless had enough faith in the research's confidentiality to still submit his response.

Although it is sad to leave a discussion of the very rich data accumulated in interviews until later, Chapter 5 moves away from collecting textual data to focus on the questionnaire and specifically numerically analysed responses to several questionnaire questions. In this chapter I list the quantitative responses to questions asked during questionnaires which provided numerical results. I explain the numerical analysis procedures that took place in order to obtain meaningful numerical data and then explain questions 1-14 in more detail, with particular reference to numerical data relevant to those questions, where applicable. Chapter 6 then returns to the interviews and links questionnaire and interview data together in a discussion of successful management practices and features.

## **Chapter 5: Quantitative data discussion**

The discussion of data collected in this research is quite in-depth and for ease of reading it has been divided up into two chapters. The first chapter, quantitative data discussion, deals entirely with the numerical findings collected from responses to the questionnaire. This chapter discusses the numerical analysis process, tabulates the numerical question responses, and then explains the results of data contained in questions 1-8 and 11, drawing on selected quotes from questionnaire data to elaborate on numerical findings, where necessary.

### **5.1 Explaining the numerical analysis of question 1**

The numerical discussion of question 1 separates responses from those who answered as managers only, staff members only and both managers and staff members. Results are normalised across the numbers of responses to that question. For example, 14 managers answered question 1, 72 staff members answered the same question and 61 participants who considered themselves both managers and staff members answered the question. Results are expressed as a ratio of answers to one another across the groups.

Let us use managers' responses to question 1, "What, in your opinion, is the primary role of communication in organisations?" to explain the numerical analysis process by which results were normalised, or made comparable. In question 1 managers were asked to rate a selection of 3 of the possible answers from 1 to 3, in order of perceived importance, where 1 was the most important and 3 was the least important. When all these responses were added up this answer gave a numerical result, a total of all the managers' responses.

Unfortunately these psychological associations (first is better, second is less preferable and third is the least preferable of the options) do not work well mathematically. In maths an answer of 3 is a greater value than 2 or 1. In this example a manager who rated "to deliver instructions" as their primary role, assigned that option a value of 1 (being the most important, "number one reason", for them), but mathematically this answer should be given a higher number, i.e. 3. To solve this

problem and to calculate a more accurate mathematical picture, the numbers were assigned a different value. In other words, if an option was rated as a 1 (i.e. managers thought this was most important) it was given a numerical value of 3 (numerically higher), if an option was rated as a 2 (less important) it was given a numerical value of 2 (numerically lower), if an option was rated as a 3 (least important, according to the manager) it was given a numerical value of 1 (the lowest numerical value).

Having resolved the psychological vs. numerical problem the challenge was now to make the numbers mean something. The numbers were now added up, so that the rating for each possible answer was given a total. This means that if the option “to enable dialogue and team-building” received a higher numerical total than the option “to deliver instructions” that this option was rated, overall, as more important, or, that this choice was more popular.

Because the number of responses varied in the three categories, the group totals were not comparable. To reach a simple number that could be compared across the group, the numerical total reached by weighting different responses and adding them together was divided by the number of total responses for that group. For example, 14 managers answered question 1 and the overall rating was the highest for the option “to enable dialogue and team-building”. This most popular choice was given a total numerical weighting of 23. The same answer was given a numerical rating of 62 by 72 staff members. Once the managers’ total of 23 was divided by the number of managers who answered the question (14), and the staff members’ total of 62 was divided by their group total (72) the result gave a number that expressed the answer’s popularity for that group. In other words, the option “to enable dialogue and team-building” was much more popular with managers, whose total weighting gave it a rating of 1.64, than staff members, who rated it as 0.86 (compared to their highest scoring option which received a numerical weighting of 1.47). So managers rated enabling dialogue and team-building as the most important role of communication and staff members rated “giving facts and information needed to do the basic job” as the most important role of communication.

## 5.2 Presenting the numerical analysis

A table of numerical results appears below. A discussion of the numerical analyses of questions 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 11 follow after the table. Additional comments based on qualitative responses to the same questions are included where these answers help explain the quantitative results.

**Table 2: Quantitative data**

<b>Numerical questionnaire responses</b>				
<b>Question Number</b>	<b>Expressed as:</b>	<b>Manager</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Both</b>
<b>Question 1: What, is the primary role of communication in organisations?</b>				
1.1 Deliver instructions	Ratio *	0.07	0.63	0.69
1.2 Give facts and info to do basic job		0.5	1.47	1.61
1.3 Info re: higher purposes		0.71	0.54	0.46
1.4 Motivate staff		1.36	1.19	0.95
1.5 Resolve work-related issues		1.57	1.24	0.93
1.6 Resolve interpersonal issues		0.14	0.07	0.03
1.7 Dialogue and team-building		1.64	0.86	1.23
<b>Question 2: How do you communicate with your manager/staff?</b>				
Data not valid due to database error				
<b>Question 3: In general, how much information do you feel you give/get?</b>				
3.1 Not enough	%	3%	11%	n/a **
3.2 Just enough		24%	50%	
3.3 More info than is required		44%	32%	
No answer		29%	8%	
<b>Question 4: How open are the lines of interpersonal (face-to-face) communication?</b>				
4.1 Door open, any subject discussed	%	48%	49%	n/a **
4.2 Door open, selected subjects discussed		4%	6.5%	
4.3 Appointments for any issues in private meetings		21.5%	19.5%	
4.4 Appointments for selected issues in private meetings		4%	3.5%	
4.5 Any issues for public meetings		17%	11%	
4.6 Selected issues for public meetings		5%	9.5%	
4.7 Open discussion not encouraged		1%	1%	

<b>Question 5: What sort of feedback do you give/get?</b>				
5.1 Congratulations	%	20%	28%	n/a**
5.2 Encouragement		20%	19%	
5.3 Criticism		12.7%	18%	
5.4 Coaching		14%	9%	
5.5 Personal benefit suggestions		16%	14%	
5.6 Personal information about oneself		7%	7%	
5.7 Formal evaluation		9.3%	5%	
<b>Question 6: Can talking affect response?</b>				
6.1 Yes	%	69%	75%	n/a**
6.2 No		3%	12%	
6.3 No answer		21%	13%	
<b>Question 7: Can body language affect response?</b>				
7.1 Yes	%	60%	60%	n/a**
7.2 No		12%	24%	
7.3 No answer		28%	16%	
<b>Question 8: Can one be motivated by talking to or being talked to differently?</b>				
8.1 Yes	%	44% (61%)***	41% (50%)***	n/a**
8.2 No		28% (39%)***	41% (50%)***	
8.3 No answer		28%	18%	
<b>Question 11: Is communication effective or ineffective?</b>				
11.1 Effective	%	54% (74%)***	64% (90%)***	60% (100%)***
11.2 Ineffective		7% (24%)***	7% (10%)***	0%
11.3 No response		29%	29%	40%
<b>Notes:</b>				
*Ratio: here the highest numerical value indicates the most popular choice.				
** When not identified separately the group identifying itself with both the manager and staff member groups had to answer the question separately as a manager, and again as a staff member, hence the common group “both” is not applicable.				
*** Percentages in brackets are an expression of only the responses that were answered relative to one another. In this percentage expression the non-answers are ignored.				

**Question 1**, “What, in your opinion, is the primary role of communication in organisations” received different answers from managers, staff members and both. Managers rated “to enable dialogue and team-building most highly (1.64), while staff members rated “to give facts and information need to be able to do the basic job” (1.47) most highly, as did the combination of managers and staff members called

“both” (1.61). “To assist with helping or resolving work-related issues” was rated second most highly by both managers (1.57) and staff members (1.24), while the combination of both rated “to enable dialogue and team-building” (1.23) more highly here. All three groups rated “to motivate staff to work harder or feel part of the organisation” the third highest (1.36, 1.19 and 0.95, respectively) and there were no significant trends with the other options except to note that “to deliver instructions”, “to assist with helping or resolving interpersonal issues” and “to give information about the higher purposes of the organisation” were rated near the bottom ends of the scale across the groups. It is important to note that this rating scale, while useful to identify certain similarities and differences between managers and their staff (i.e. the basic distinction between work, or people, being the focus depending on your perspective as the one doing the work, or managing the people), cannot paint a sufficiently accurate picture. Several respondents pointed out that they felt all the points were important as part of effective communication, others felt they would have liked to be able to rate more of the options, and still others (who raised this directly with me later in person) commented that the very nature of having to rate these things that are all such an important part of what they do frustrated them into not continuing with the questionnaire. From this one can conclude that manager-staff communication involves all of the factors given as options in this question, as well as many more. As one respondent commented,

Communication involves all of the above, both formally and informally. Further important functions include informal education, modelling of techniques and attitudes, extension of general knowledge about the academic world, and so on..

I would argue that *the mixed responses to this question indicate the difficulty of pinpointing the actual, finite, role communication plays in manager-staff relationships, while simultaneously highlighting its vital importance.*

**Question 2** was designed to find out how managers and their staff are talking to one another. Is the use of email more frequent than personal, face-to-face communication, or are there other ways of talking that the questionnaire design did not cover? Unfortunately data gremlins crept in and made the numerical comparison of the groups impossible, but textual answers (as tabulated in section 4.5 of the previous chapter) as well as answers to other questions in the questionnaire indicate the

importance of face-to-face discussion as well as the vital role that meetings and tea-time play in successful manager-staff communication relationships. Having an open-door policy, having the time and taking the opportunity to discuss personal issues or topics unrelated directly to work (as occurs during group tea-times) as well as being able to discuss things openly and immediately are also success secrets that contribute to effective working relationships. Meeting or discussing things frequently as well as regular interaction, the ability to interact in one-another's space and the use of hi-tech communication facilities (such as email and internet messaging programs like jabber/ICQ/msn messenger) were also pointed out as keys to successful communication.

**Question 3** asked whether the amount of information given and received was just enough, more than required, or not enough. 44% of managers responded that they believed they gave more information than required, while 50% of staff believed they received just enough information. These results were followed by 32% of staff who believed they were given more information than required and 24% of managers who believed they gave just enough information.

*The key issue here was the subtle relationship between giving too much information, contextualising things, and expecting staff or managers to find things out for themselves.* Many managers feel that giving “the bigger picture”, or contextualising their staff members' jobs within the role their section/department/division plays in the organisation helps them do a better job. However, there seems to be a fine line between giving staff enough information to contextualise their role and tasks within a broader picture and a need not to overload people with information. There is an issue of information overload in some departments which may be a feature of task-overload as well, some managers are coping with too many demands and do not have the time available to give a lot of information or spend a lot of time on giving information. There is also an element of managers expecting their staff to find out more if it is required and expecting their staff to be proactive in seeking out information. A last issue is one where managers do not feel that staff can cope with too much information. This may be the case where staff are second-language English speakers or in charge of simple tasks where more advanced instructions may be counter-productive or seen as the manager trying to “tell them how to do their job”. In one

case a respondent emphasised the role of motivation in information-giving as well, saying they see the role of communication to “Give job info, also info about rest of team, rest of Division and University. I see communication as a vital motivation tool - people need to feel involved. The strength of this particular questionnaire, (its open-ended questions) was also observed again here. Although question 3 seemed fairly simple and self-explanatory, the responses to the second part of the question asking respondents to “please explain your choice” elicited numerous topics and issues of interest. In this particular question respondents mentioned some new and some repeated topics which include: their frustration at not having the information they require and, in contrast, their delight with being given information about the bigger picture; the need for frequent contact between managers and their staff members; the impact of personal issues at work and the importance of building relationships between staff; the need to take one’s own initiative in doing tasks; the fact that bosses often forget to pass on important information; the success of team-work, brainstorming, open communication and group discussion; as well as issues with having enough time to communicate, the need for minutes of meetings, the abuse of email communication lists, the importance of asking for help when one is uncertain, the need for policies and procedures on communication at this particular organisation and the different relationship between managers and staff members when staff members have worked at the organisation for many years and don’t actually need any more information on how to do their jobs.

**Question 4** asked “How open are the lines of interpersonal, face-to-face, communication between managers and staff”? 48% of managers chose the option “the door is open and any subject is open to discussion, even if it’s not work-related”, and the percentage of staff members who chose this option was similar (49%). The second highest rated option by managers was “appointments can be made and any issues can be discussed in private meetings (21.5%), which was also the second-highest rated option for staff members, of whom 19.5% chose this option. Rated third highest by both groups was “any issues can be listed on the agenda and discussed in public meetings”. 17% of managers chose this option compared to 11% of staff members. The lowest rated item was “open discussion is not encouraged”. Only 1% of both managers and staff members who filled in this questionnaire believed that open discussion was not encouraged. Again an open-ended question, this one asking “If

these statements are not adequate, please comment below”, raised certain issues on this topic. One respondent mentioned the amount of time available for discussion saying, “Because my boss holds down two jobs there isn’t the time for face-to-face communication”. Other respondents mentioned some examples where things are going well, and why this is the case. One staff member said, “I feel I can speak to my manager about almost anything, work related and personal”, and a manager commented “Your door must be open to your staff all the time. It’s the only way to build trust and have effective communication to work as a team”.

**Question 5** discussed types of feedback given and received. Managers listed “congratulations on a job well done” as the most used type of feedback along with “encouragement to keep going or to do better”. This was followed by “suggestions for personal benefit”, “coaching on the job”, and “criticism”. “Formal evaluation as required” brought up the rear with “personal information about themselves”. Staff members believed that they received “congratulations on a job well done” most frequently from their managers, followed by “encouragement to keep going or to do better”, then “criticism”, which was rated almost equally with the amount of “encouragement” received. “Suggestions for personal benefit” followed “criticism”, with “coaching” following before “personal information” and “formal evaluation”.

Although the results of the two groups are remarkably comparable an interesting difference comes to light when one compares the amount of criticism believed to be given and received. It appears that generally speaking, managers feel they are giving more feedback than staff feel they are getting. The role of praise and encouragement is highlighted once again in the open-ended question asking “If there are any other types of feedback they use, please list them below”, as is the importance of frequent feedback and meetings. It was sad to note the responses from staff members who felt their managers weren’t giving any feedback, saying “Feedback is not regular or structured”, “There is never anything positive relayed”, “Virtually no feedback other than occasional grumbles about time taken which because of overload is beyond my control” and “Well done or positive feedback is very seldom given. Errors are often highlighted and continually used as a stick”. It seems that staff members are more aware of the stick than the carrot when feedback is involved. Managers, on the other hand, believe that they are aware of the importance of feedback. One manager says he gives “something more subtle – a kind of constant affirming – showing personal

interest in others work is hugely motivating I think” while another manager stressed the importance of making sure that feedback given on work done incorrectly is done in as positive way as possible. “Give them upbuilding criticism”, this manager says, “and make sure they understand you are criticising the job and not them as a person!”

**In question 6** managers and staff-members answer whether they think that verbal factors can affect the listener’s response to the message. 75% of staff members believe that speaking differently to them can make them react to the message differently or affect their subsequent behaviour compared to 69% of managers who acknowledged this as a factor. These are both reasonably high numbers since a disappointingly large number of people stopped answering the questionnaire at this point. This meant that only 3% of managers believed that verbal factors did NOT affect their staff’s response and only 16% of staff members were in agreement (21% of managers and 13% of staff members did not respond). Again, the strength of this question lay in the open-ended responses. The question asked respondents to “Please elaborate. If you can think of a specific incident that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation”. While not many incidents were discussed, several themes came up again. These included issues such as the importance of being positive or speaking positively versus speaking negatively or ‘talking down’ to people or in a way that implies managers think they are stupid. Staff members also discussed how being “cut off” while speaking gives a negative impact, the importance of being treated equally, the importance of being given the time to discuss things properly and how they deal with managers when they are too busy, including mentioning how being under pressure can cause people to react badly and create misunderstandings. The importance of positive feedback, the ability to listen, saying thanks and motivating staff, respect, appreciation, the use of email and keeping things in writing, as well as tone of voice, frequency of meetings and an awareness of the fact that managers are human too, rounded off the staff member’s responses to this question.

Managers also brought up issues of trust, respect, praise, the importance of using email appropriately, a need for sensitivity to different cultures, the importance of treating everyone the same, as well as demonstrating an awareness of their own communicative behaviour. The responses to this question generally show a great

awareness of the issue surrounding verbal and non-verbal factors indicating that respondents are giving this question a great deal of thought. Perhaps the question was not well phrased as respondents tended to respond generally to “ways of speaking” i.e. including body-language, and not just verbal factors. It would be interesting to find out if there is a link between managers who are aware that their tones do not always come across as they intend, or that their responses are perceived negatively, and their management styles. Perhaps further research could develop this link.

**Question 7** discusses body language. The question asks, “Do you think that your body language when talking to your staff (e.g. crossed arms, looking at the floor, hands on hips, i.e. non-verbal factors) can or does affect their response?” and for staff members it asks the same of their manager’s body language (i.e. can their manager’s body language affect their response). 60% of both groups (managers and staff members) believed that managers’ body language could affect staff members’ responses. Again, there was a disappointing lack of answers from managers (28% did not answer this question) and an increasingly large number of staff members who also did not answer the question (16%). This result may be as a result of fatigue, a finite resource of time (they may have allocated a certain amount of time to complete the questionnaire and did not see it through to the end) or technical issues (quite a few people indicated they could not complete the questionnaire because, for example, their browser timed-out or they could no longer access the internet for whatever reason). Once again open-ended questions helped make more sense of numerical answers. Managers seemed to be particularly aware of body-language and mentioned factors like sensitivity to other cultures, the role of listening, and the importance of motivation in their textual responses. Staff members, too, discussed the role of listening, the importance of having a relaxed and honest approach to one-another, as well as treating each other equally. They also mentioned that it is good to be sensitive to body-language, but that it is important not to read too much into others’ body language in case that is not actually what is intended by it. One quote sums it up particularly well,

I’m sensitive to body language and read it very carefully. I’ve learnt that some gestures are just mannerisms which are not necessarily meaningful. But I can also “take a hint” when body language and tone of voice are saying something.

They also stressed the importance of “knowing” your manager, being able to read their actions, moods and behaviour patterns and recognising when something is directed towards them personally or when the manager is just in a bad mood.

**Question 8** discusses motivation. It asks whether managers could motivate their staff differently by talking to them in different ways. Of the total questions answered (non-responses are excluded from this count), an equal number of managers said yes, they did believe speaking differently could motivate their staff differently, and no, they did not believe that this played any role. Staff members believed more that language had a role to play. 61% of staff members said yes and only 39% said no. Nonetheless, it would appear that not that many people believe there is a direct link between the way one talks and the results on performance, or at least between different kinds of talking and motivating effects. The open-ended responses gave more clues as to why this might be. While some managers agreed that the role of communication in motivating staff was incredibly important, saying things like

It has been my experience that people will go out of their way for you as long as you ask them in the right way. Acknowledging strengths and encouraging them seems to be the most productive approach

others believed that self-motivation played a much larger role. The following comment shows why this is the case,

I think the staff here are motivated by their own deep needs and ambitions. I can do little more than show an interest and remind them why it’s important, but even then they will act according to their own drives and desires.

The somewhat ambivalent response to this question may be partly as a result of the phrasing of the question itself. The question lists different examples of ways of talking to people (e.g. by shouting, persuading or encouraging). It is possible that by listing “shouting” as an example that those responding may have been confused and answered “no” because they don’t believe that shouting at someone can motivate them (some answers demonstrated this awareness, as in “don’t believe in shouting – rather persuasion through encouragement”) rather than answering the general question. It is unfortunate that the initial or pre-testing process did not pick up this potential confusion. Staff members had a lot more to say about this question, responding again to the open-ended question following the yes/no choice of answer. Staff members spoke a lot about the importance of being self-motivated (“I love my

job, it would not take shouting to make me improve my work” and “My motivation comes from within. I don’t believe that it is really possible to motivate another person to cultivate an acceptable work ethic. This is something that a person either has, or doesn’t have.”). Also mentioned often in this question’s response was the importance of being appreciated by one’s boss, how being given encouragement makes a difference and the need for managers to listen more and share more. Once again the issue of a lack of time and too much pressure, as well as the importance of team-work, treating one another as equals, respect and motivation were also discussed.

Since this is a discussion of the quantitative results to questionnaire questions, **questions 9 and 10** will not be discussed in any more detail here. Refer to Table 1 in Chapter 4 for lists of themes emerging from these questions and to the following chapter for a detailed discussion of the qualitative responses to the issues raised.

**Question 11** asked simply whether managers and staff thought communication in their section or division was effective or ineffective. Unfortunately this question had a particularly low response rate. Reasons for this may be similar to those mentioned under the discussion of question 7. Another potential reason may be distrust in the questionnaire’s confidentiality. Despite being repeatedly assured that their responses would remain anonymous it is possible that those who had negative things to say may not have wanted to take the risk that they might be “found out”. Alternatively, the structure of the question (there was only a simple choice between yes and no, no soft-option such as “maybe” or “not all the time”) may have dissuaded certain people from answering. This forced-option was put in place to avoid fence-sitting. While it certainly did this it may have had unanticipated negative repercussions of non-answering by respondents. Nevertheless, of those who did answer the question, 76% of staff members said communication was effective and 24% described it as ineffective. 90% of managers described it as effective and 10% felt it was not. And the group of both managers and staff members all (100%) described communication as effective. Again, open-ended questions provided more meaning. Having chosen either yes or no, respondents were invited to elaborate on their answer. This was a good opportunity for those who felt communication was successful to appreciate their relationships. Some saw their immediate communication relationships as successful but reflected that communication in different sections with whom they interact

frequently do not have such success. Once again the importance of regular and open meetings was raised, as were the importance of personal relationships. Some believed that communication simply did not happen enough. Others raised the point that communication works better if problems are addressed immediately and it is less effective when information is not passed on, although most were aware that the reason for information not being passed on was often because people were too busy. Some noted that there is always room for improvement. Others raised the issue of email and the usefulness of mailing lists and quick responses to emails, while the double-edged sword of email was raised yet again, as in this quote “Often memos, emails and personal conversations are poorly phrased and as a result are perceived badly and people get very upset”. Another interesting issue was that some people within a division appear to be competing to get the manager’s attention. Others felt that discussing issues, communicating openly and frequently, working as a team, not being scared to disagree with one another and using the grapevine effectively contributed towards a successful communication environment. Yet another issue that was raised was the difficulties in communication when managers were frequently away from the office. A quotation from one manager showed how effective communication can (and does) take place, and what the reasons are that they see for this success: “The work gets done, generally without complaint and errors are at a minimum. This can only come about if it is done as a team, and the team is only as good as its ability to communicate properly”.

**Questions 12 and 13** are adequately summarised in the Table 1 in Chapter 4, but to re-cap quickly, the questionnaire did seem to help managers and staff members reflect on their communication practices at work in a few ways. Firstly, when communication was good it made them realise this and appreciate it, secondly, it helped them to become aware of issues that needed fixing and learn things about themselves and their communication relationships. Some agreed that there was room for improvement, others were made more aware of the way things could be improved. However, there is never consensus. As one respondent put it,

Communication is always a sticky point. You may think email is a good way to communication but another person will prefer face-to-face communication. As long as there is a diverse group of people involved you will never get consensus.

In precisely this vein, there were also those that felt they did not think or reflect more on communication as a result of this questionnaire. But by the same token, others commented that any questionnaire would cause such reflection, so those who said “no” either had thought about these issues a lot (some mentioned that this was, indeed, the case), hence the fact that this particular questionnaire made no difference to them, or they simply did not feel any immediate benefits. Lastly, in the place for “any additional comments” once again the point was made that it is vitally important to communicate frequently. Others mentioned they were grateful for the questionnaire, and said thanks for the opportunity to respond. They also mentioned that they hoped this would highlight problem areas and motivate responding parties to correct some errors and others said “people must be made aware of how we address and talk to people as being very important”. Still others learned to appreciate each other as a result of the questionnaire and one respondent said that the organisation has a wonderful training programme in place that covers communication for its staff under its supervisor and administration training, however, it would appear that this programme is not widely-known.

**Question 14** is not discussed here, although it appears on the appendices. This question was simply to establish who would like to participate further with the research and to gather their details, and as such it formed a purely administrative function.

Chapter 5 discussed the numerical results from questionnaire questions. Unfortunately the quantitative data supplies very little information on people’s motivations, attitudes, and interpretation of facts. On their own, the numbers give a very limited view of the reality of the communicative environment of this institution. To provided a more detailed picture a discussion now follows on qualitative data collected from both questionnaires and interviews. Where applicable, numerical data from this chapter is re-visited to triangulate qualitative findings.

## **Chapter 6: Qualitative data discussion**

Chapter 5 showed responses from managers and staff members to specific questions asked in the questionnaire. Chapter 6 now goes on to use some of these numerical questionnaire results, open ended responses as well as more in-depth, qualitative responses to examine issues raised in the questionnaire and further discussed in interviews in more detail with six people from the organisation, who have been called Mary, Tom, Sally, Rebecca, Graeme and Gertrude.

### **Interview findings**

The difficulty with in-depth research is to try and narrow down the incredibly rich data that emerges from participants baring their souls. This difficulty falls into two parts: firstly, knowing when to stop gathering the richly informative information and having the willpower to stop and, secondly, knowing how much of the data to try and squeeze into the research findings. Lindloff (1995:245) says that,

In the final analysis, qualitative reports are all about perspectives of lived experience. The researcher must decide what kind of author he or she will be, and what sort of story to construct of the ‘facts’ of the case.

Thus the presentation of the facts in this chapter is the researcher’s choice. As an author I have decided to construct as many aspects of the case as I am physically able. Since so many delicious points for discussion emerged each discussion will, of necessity, be brief. It is hoped, however, that the “story” emerging on each topic will nudge the reader towards a broader understanding of these topics as well as encouraging them to find out more on their own.

Key issues that emerged from questionnaires and that were subsequently discussed in interviews, as well as issues that emerged during interviews, are listed below:

- 2) **General communication, awareness of communication**
- 3) **How much to know**
- 4) **Effective communication**
  - Motivation and praise
  - The role of listening

- Building relationships
- Respect
- Language and culture
- Teamwork
- Communicating often, face to face
- Email, technology and putting it in writing

#### 5) Challenges to effective communication

- Time
- Stress
- Space

### 6.1. General communication, awareness of communication

“The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech.” - Edwin H. Friedman

Since the starting point of this research is communication, let this discussion begin with what those being researched felt was the purpose of communication. Observant respondents answered the first question of the questionnaire by acknowledging the very central role communication played in their daily life, saying, “Without communication, nothing can be done - work-related and in one’s personal life.”

So it would appear that participants are aware of the importance of communication. But what role does it play in their lives? For one interview respondent communication literally is her job. Rebecca (not her real name) works with telephony every single day of her life, both in the installing of new telephones, maintenance of existing lines, and everything to do with the switchboard. For her the questionnaire was easy to answer because, as she says, “Our business is communication!” The fact that the questionnaire was answered by so many respondents (a 26% response rate is unusual for a questionnaire) is also indicative of a positive interest in communication.

Interviewees each gave their own explanation of the purposes of communication. They mentioned, in the very first question, the importance of communication going

both ways, listening to one another and giving feedback. One said communication was to create understanding and acceptance and in another interviewee's own words, Gertrude (not her real name) says,

Gosh, imagine if we didn't communicate with each other. I think it's very important to communicate. I wouldn't really be able to do a lot of my job if I didn't communicate with people.

But the most eloquently phrased answer was from Graeme (not his real name), an academic dean who says this is the purpose of communication in a work environment:

It would be to allow the development of shared aims and goals. It would be then to allow a means of deciding on how to achieve those goals and aims. It would be a way of feeding in what you think would be the most appropriate way of doing it. It would be a way of listening to counter-ideas and ways things are happening. It would involve or offer opportunities for monitoring, for hearing how it's going, for reflecting... for admonishing, for questioning, disciplining. It's so huge it's almost like saying what's the role of human interaction, because communication is verbal, non-verbal, it's the whole tooti!

Knowing that communication is vitally important seemed to be a common awareness possessed by all six interviewees but how will people send and receive messages in a way that promotes understanding? Sally (not her real name) mentioned that something she had noticed about getting the message across is that people will only receive the information **if they want to hear it**. As Reuss and Silvis (1981:18) put it,

Whether the audience gets the message from formal channels in the organization or from the grapevine, the audience is still compelled to interpret the event according to its individual and collective experiences... The fundamental question is, What does this mean to *me*?

Getting messages out there in a way that people will actually want to pay attention to them is a constant struggle for Sally since part of her daily job is to keep people informed of the institution's vision and strategy. "I get frustrated at how difficult it is to communicate", she says. Managers **do** try to get the message across in numerous of ways to their staff. They will call them together for meetings, chat when they bump into each other in the corridors, pop into one another's office to talk, put notices up on notice-boards and send emails to one another. In fact, one of the most effective ways of disseminating information to a large group of people is using email mailing lists. Gertrude said,

My boss is very good about telling us what goes on. We've all got e-mail, we're all on his mailing list. And, look, I mean, he's got a big staff. But we always know what's going on in the university. He's very good about telling us.

However, there are a large number of people at lower levels in the organisation who believe that they are not being given the full picture. One reason may well be the afore-mentioned factor of, "What does this mean to me?", that makes them ignore certain information. "I think because until something becomes of personal importance to an individual they very often won't take cognisance of what it is" says Sally. In some instances there are gate-keepers who do not pass the information along. An interview respondent commented of their boss, "He seems to think that keeping us in the dark and not consulting gives him an edge and keeps us off balance. It is a very frustrating management style." Referring to certain managers who do hold on too tightly to information Sally said,

Ja, I think that is it to a certain extent. But even when they don't pass it down and make it available it's much easier for the person to say "I didn't know about it" than to take the trouble to go and read the notice-boards. There has to be some form of proactive action on the part of the individual as well.

Another interviewee, Mary (also not her real name), agrees with her but points out that even if information is not passed down there are ways of finding it out.

We all have access to (the internal newsletter publication). We all have access to the internet. So if they don't know where to find policies and procedures on the internet then why not go up to HR and then ask where on the internet it is? There are circulars that go around. There might be some things, now and then, that get lost in an office because of the volume of work in there but then I would communicate, for instance, to the head of HR and say can you please email it to me?

Another way of getting information across an organisation is through the grapevine, and informal channels. De Mare, in Reuss and Silvis (1981:14) says,

The first and by far the most common level of communicating is that which goes on below the conscious control of social mechanisms and channels. Perhaps 70 percent of the communication in an organization occurs at this informal, unorganized level.

Using informal mechanisms appropriately is perhaps one of the key success areas of a department, division or section which shows signs of healthy communication

practices. Time and time again, throughout the questionnaires and interviews, respondents mentioned how important it was to have frequent meetings, regular feedback, and informal time to just discuss things that weren't necessarily relevant to work, in order to keep communication running smoothly. The grapevine is one way of getting information to people who are managed by gate-keepers or simply to get the message across from one side of the organisation to the other.

The term *grapevine* applies to all informal communication including institutional information that is communicated verbally between employees and people in the community. It coexists with the administration's formal communication system" (Lunenberg and Ornstein, 1991:193).

In small towns, like the one in which the university is situated, the grapevine can even cross over organisations. A conversation from an interview with Sally illustrates this point nicely.

Interviewer: So the close nature of our organisation and our community, our town can be a double-edged sword?

Sally: Oh yes. Absolutely. And also because I think we all wear different hats in different environments. For instance certain people are on school governing bodies and so they see people in the different environment there and might talk about issues there which affect them in their university environment. And people who are married to each other often have to deal with issues that are very sensitive in their respective work areas. So I might hear about someone who is applying for a position at the organisation that my husband manages (name of organisation deleted for anonymity), for instance, who might be in a very close relationship to me, which I wouldn't know about otherwise. And that's where it's a small town and you've got to actually be very circumspect about what you say and how you communicate those sorts of things.

This is another aspect of what Lunenberg and Ornstein refer to when they speak about the negative features of the grapevine. The close overlapping of roles in society, the nature of people "having their fingers in many pies" comes out when information is disseminated within and across groups who, in a work context, do not have much to do with each other. And because people are so closely connected in a small town something that is one person's business soon becomes the business of everyone else who is interested.

One of the negative features of the grapevine, the one that gives the grapevine its poor reputation, is rumour. Because the information

cannot be verified, rumours are susceptible to severe distortion as they are passed from person to person within the organization” (Lunenberg and Ornstein, 1991:193).

However, “While a major disadvantage of grapevines is the spread of rumours, informal networks serve a number of purposes in formal school organization” (Hoy and Miskel, 1996:361). These purposes include: being a useful source of feedback for leaders, satisfying “social or affiliation needs not met by formal channels”, and filling gaps in information dissemination by carrying a great deal of information (Hoy and Miskel, 1996:362). As one questionnaire respondent said,

It is great working in our department. People get along and the grapevine is constantly growing and it works for us. Especially since we have the monthly meeting. We are always trying to improve our service to students.

The role of the grapevine is both potentially positive and negative and it is important, as a manager, to be able to tell what information your staff would really benefit from hearing and when that information is too sensitive to pass on. Another manager interviewed, Tom (not his real name), acknowledges the importance of listening to the underground.

The underground talks a lot and it feeds information through from various sectors at different times and I think it’s imperative to listen to that because it sometimes tells you what is really going on against what you’ve been told is really going on.”

Knowing what is really going on is vitally important for a manager who wants to make decisions that are relevant and insightful. Using any and all the means at one’s disposal helps give managers a fuller picture but often, the link between what you know and how you tell it is a very subtle one and open to personal interpretation, as I will discuss in the next section, “How much to know”.

## **6.2 How much to know**

*“Effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what you know.” - Jim Rohn*

I believe the primary purpose of communication in any situation is to develop relationships. Without sustainable relationships, which result in trust and respect, any information is useless. If you don’t

trust a company then you will not believe their adverts, if you don't trust or respect your manager then you will not put value to their communications. – Questionnaire response

Trust, relationships and respect, are all important aspects of manager-staff communication that came up in questionnaires and interviews. Making people feel like they belong, like they are part of something bigger, requires a certain amount of information to be passed down and often that information is supposed to be confidential. One respondent mentioned that her feeling of being “in-the-know” has a lot to do with the open attitude her boss has towards sharing information.

My boss (name deleted for confidentiality) is the kind of boss, and I'm not sure if this is common knowledge, but every week, at our request, he reads out the minutes from senior management.

As much of a “breach of etiquette” or “betrayal of confidence” as this may seem, it seems that the extent to which information from senior management meetings is passed on differs only in the degree of accuracy of the passing on of information. Several interviewees mentioned a previous manager at the organisation, a bit of a legend in his time, who, although he ran an extremely tight ship, was very good at getting staff buy-in. Rebecca recalls:

He would come from a senior management meeting and say this is what has been decided will happen, how do you feel about it, how is it going to impact on your job, how can we sort out all this? And you were never left in the dark, you were always part of the decision, whether you liked it or not.

Graeme agrees that there is a difficulty, as a manager attending senior management meetings, of knowing what to pass on. “We go to meetings and there's a fine balance to know, what things could you share, because some of the stuff is confidential. On the other hand, you know, a helluva lot of it isn't.”

The key to gaining support for organizational objectives, policies and programmes is to serve the organization's internal audience: to know what information they want and the media they prefer. Even though these needs might never be met completely, people who feel they “belong” and are important to organizational success will be much more likely to support their organization than those who say that “management hardly tells us anything and they couldn't care less about what we think” (Reuss & Silvis: 1981, 6).

How to most effectively serve your audience and to provide information to one's staff is the job of the manager to decide. Sally says she prefers to give people too much, rather than too little information.

Well, I think the more information that people have the more likely they are to feel part of the organisation. And it's not just the everyday stuff that they need to know about. I think people need to know about the big issues as well, every now and again.

Knowing about the big issues can really help staff members in their daily tasks. A response from the questionnaires illustrate this point.

We have a very informal relationship and often discuss topics relevant to the university and its mission but perhaps not directly related to my immediate job. This gives me a broader perspective and adds interest to my job

said a staff member who filled in the questionnaire. Access to information about the bigger picture helps motivate staff as well as informing them. But information overload plays a subtle and complex role within this question. Sally would rather have too much information than too little and comments on how disappointed she is by the number of people who voluntarily request to have themselves removed from the university's official email mailing list, top-list.

I've noticed how many people want to be de-listed, for instance, from top-list. They do not want that information in the first place. They don't want to be bothered. They see there's an information overload. And I find that quite sad because I would rather remain open to all that information then you have the choice to exclude it, rather than take the chance of missing out on what might be very important information.

Not everyone chooses to remain open to the information, but it is partly the manager's responsibility to choose information to pass on to his or her staff that the staff are open to. According to the numerical data obtained from the questionnaire managers feel that they give more information than is required, whereas staff members feel they get less information than they feel is required. 44% of the managers who answered this question indicated they give more information than required to their staff, but only 32% of staff members felt their managers did this. 24% of managers who answered the questionnaire felt they gave just enough information, compared to 50% of staff who felt they gave just enough information. This would indicate that

managers feel they are actually giving more information than needed, and staff members believe that getting just the right amount of information is important.

Managers are responsible for choosing how much to communicate to their staff and these questionnaire results indicate the importance of choosing to balance information passed on very carefully. This is a point that could be usefully discussed between managers and staff – how much information is enough? Clearly, viewpoints differ. One staff member commented in a questionnaire response about the subtle balance of information they receive from their manager:

In my experience, my manager provides sufficient information; sometimes more than basic, which is great, but doesn't "overload" me with information, which can also be good, because superfluous information is also negative, as it may "cloud" the important stuff.

This is reinforced by Quible *et al.* (1996:23) who say that

Communication problems may arise when a sender fails to give sufficient information to the receiver. In most cases, however, senders simply miscalculate the amount of information receivers need for proper understanding. When the gap between sender intent and receiver comprehension becomes too wide, significant communication problems are created. To overcome such problems, the sender must try to determine the information that the receiver will find helpful – and then provide the desired type and amount of information.

Questionnaire responses are filled with examples of over- and under-communication, although there are more problems with under- than over-communicating. Managers would often rather provide more information than less, Sally, in her questionnaire said, "I would rather provide too much than too little information. It is up to the individual as to what information they would like to use and what to ignore." Staff members generally don't seem to see receiving information that puts them in the know as too much of a problem, unless the manager is explaining things that the staff member already knows, as in this quote from a questionnaire response, "Sometimes too much information that makes a person think that the manager thinks you don't know how to do your job". Quible, Johnson and Mott (1996:23) point out the danger of giving too much information:

Providing the receiver with too much information, either oral or written, can create communication problems. When receivers have an excessive amount of written information to digest in a limited

period, they do not have the time to read it carefully and completely. Either way, they will miss significant information.

Nevertheless, it is rare that people actually feel they're being talked to "too much". Graeme is a possible exception. In his questionnaire response he said that he was aware of the fact that he might talk too much to his staff and colleagues.

I realised that I struggled to answer some of these questions, and wondered why. Maybe it is because there is so much communication in the [...] department. We are forever talking with each other in our offices, in the corridors, in meetings, at tea, etc. We are, in fact, in danger of information overload; not everybody needs to know everything that is going on. Maybe our communication could be more streamlined."

In an interview Graeme elaborated on why he said this. Here is an extract from the discussion.

Interviewer: What gives you that impression (that you talk too much in your department)? Are you saying things that don't need to be said?

Graeme: Okay let me put it this way... I don't have time in my daily working life to do much research. Why? Because I don't have the time. But, when I'm sitting in my office I don't sit for more than 10 or 15 minutes and I'm up and I'm talking to somebody. Why? Because we are helluva social beings, people there, and I enjoy talking with people, sharing ideas, moving, I don't enjoy spending 3 hours in the library on my own. Okay? So what this means is that, and I found also when I'm totally hell-bent on a task that I'm doing, it might be writing an article, it might be that I'm finishing a report or something, then suddenly I find all these things which are normal parts of my day irritating and get in my way, whereas normally they don't. Now, then I ask myself but why? Because suddenly I've then got more of a focus on something else and then I realise well, actually, I could do this every day if I really wanted to and I think that goes for all of us. Staff are eminently available any time of day or night and we enjoy talking about ideas of learning and education.

Interviewer: So you actually have to make the choice, sometimes, not to talk and rather to get on with the job?

Graeme: Not to be so bloomin' sociable! So I think sometimes we could be more disciplined and I'm saying we are too available and then it makes it easier for anybody to pop into your door down the corridor because we don't have times on our doors.

But countless more managers and staff members struggle with not getting, or passing on enough information. Managers occasionally find that they assume their staff know

more than they do, (“I assume that they know what to do and don’t bother them with trivia, when sometimes I find that I have assumed too much.”) and staff members feel frustrated that they are left out of decision-making, that their boss “forgets” to tell them things they need to know, or changes his/her mind at the last minute without telling them. Indeed, most of the frustration expressed in the questionnaires centred around managers not giving enough information, while praise came from those who felt they were in the know and empowered by this knowledge. “Not enough time spent explaining what is required”, said one staff member who felt frustrated by under-communicating. A manager also felt that under communicating could be dangerous, commenting that their communication is,

Generally effective, but sometimes not enough of it so that key people are un- or mis-informed. We are a complex web of functions and role (sic), and without communication we can become unstuck and perhaps unravel.

Similarly, a staff member who said that there was enough communication also added, “But sometimes that is not enough as the manager does not remember which information has been shared”. And even when vital information is shared, there is still occasionally the feeling that people are still not really “talking” to one another, as this questionnaire response points out, “We don’t communicate often enough, but in the absence of no issues, why communicate! Maybe informal/social/ ‘I just came to chat’ communications might be good.”

An important part of the process of communication, a two-way street, according to the management communication model provided in Appendix I, is being able to give and receive feedback, though this is not always easily done up the chain of command.

The opportunity to communicate upward – to know that one’s suggestions and comments are being heard – is the other half of organizational communication exchange, and whatever can be done to facilitate this exchange – specifically the upward flow – should be done” (Reuss & Silvis, 1981:15).

From questionnaire responses it would appear that a lot of staff members feel that they are being heard. They rate listening as an extremely important tool for successful management communication. “He LISTENS! and then guides/discusses”, said one staff member who appreciated his/her ability to get the message back up the chain. “My manager has a very non-threatening approach to dealing with issues. This does

not make me fearful of him when he asks to talk to me. He is very open-minded and a good listener which encourages me to share information.” But there are others who are not so lucky. One questionnaire respondent said,

I haven't been lucky enough to experience much feedback on my performance in my job, which can sometimes be frustrating and unsettling; simultaneously I have not been the recipient of criticism, which then, by definition, assists me in feeling that I do perhaps perform adequately. In addition, to my knowledge there are not formal structures in place for evaluation, so unless I directly request them those are also not forthcoming.

The role of communication in management is perceived differently by managers and their subordinates. According to numerical data obtained from questionnaires, more managers rated dialogue and team-building as the primary role of communication in organisations (a rating of 1.64) than staff members, who rated this as the fourth highest role. Staff members rated giving facts and information to do the basic job as the most important role of communication and gave this a rating of 1.47. Interestingly, both managers and staff members rated resolving work-related issues as their second choice, with a rating of 1.57 and 1.24, respectively. Possibly by balancing the flow of information to suit both managers and staff, 'resolving work-related issues' would fall away from its position as the second most important role of communication.

Generally, it is difficult working out how much information should or can be passed on. Not only staff members struggle to pass information up the chain. Managers often feel that they are not being listened to by their managers, or senior management. Some of the managers who were interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction as in this extract from Rebecca's interview.

Interviewer: Do you think if there was someone or a group of people who were involved in working with communication, all the time, as part of their jobs, that it could actually make a difference?

Rebecca: Maybe, but I feel, you know, if you've got a group of people who are not prepared to communicate, like senior management, is it going to make any difference?

In an ideal world, commented another interviewee, if management actually listened and if there was honest communication without ulterior motives perhaps they could pass information upwards. But at the moment these managers do not feel there is

room for upward flow of communication, and are uncertain of how much to let their senior managers know, as evidenced in the following interview extract:

Interviewer: Do you see communication making any difference, not necessarily in your relationship up, but generally, if people can understand more, can talk more, can get the message out there more effectively, in an ideal world, do you think that will make any difference?

Tom: Gina, in a world where people trust each other, yes. I would guard my comments in a number of environments because I would be cautious as to how those were being taken. Because I think that sometimes the forums which are created for communication are not ideal and they are very much one-way and that the time-frames given for that communication don't allow resolution of understandings. Some people might be inclined to hear what you're saying, but from *their* perspective, and not what you're actually saying.

Without effective communication programmes and without the ability to give and receive the right amount of feedback from all areas, levels and representatives of the organisation, communication is doomed. As Reuss & Silvis (1981:16) explicitly state.

The effectiveness of communication programs will increase as they facilitate the *exchange* of information, ideas and feelings among people from all levels of the organizations. And the importance of communication in organizations will continue to grow as it becomes apparent that communication activity has a real impact on overall organizational results. In truth, management itself *is* communication (their emphasis).

### **6.3. Communication policies**

At the moment there are no policies or procedures discussing communication at the organisation under study. While there is a language policy this discusses mainly the use of different languages in circulars and written documents to accommodate people who speak different languages, in order to accommodate second language English speakers. Sally, who is involved a lot as part of her job with the drafting and formalising of policies, has this to say regarding an explicit policy on communication:

Well, the communications division has, over the years, produced several documents which seem to have just quietly died along the way about communication and strategies and what everybody should be doing. I don't know if there's anything current. In the language policy we have tried to bring in the communications division a little

bit more. Perhaps we haven't spent as much focus on communication as much as how we deal with [different] language[s]. Perhaps a university policy in that area wouldn't be a bad thing, although I'm also wary of policy sometimes being a bit limiting. As soon as people feel like they have to follow steps 1,2 and 3 it kind of puts people off doing anything at all. So, I'm not sure. I'd have to have a look and see the issues that would be in such a policy would be before I could comment.

There appears to be a subtle line between dictating how things should be done and letting people get on with the job the best way they see fit. And yet, it would appear that in some instances managers and staff do need rules in place to tell them to communicate regularly. This interview extract demonstrates how Sally, a manager who is very aware of the importance of communication is surprised by the fact that some managers do not appear to be aware of the need to do it frequently and in detail.

Interviewer: I was aware when I first started this exercise, coming from the bottom up, that people were really struggling to feel part of the organisation, to feel that they had a sense of purpose. And in that mindset that I was I was going why is there no policy on communication? Why is there nothing saying you need to talk to your staff at least once a week? You need to actually have time when you sit down and you get personal. And I don't know if that is the responsibility of the bigger picture.

Sally: I think it is. It's almost an unwritten assumption that that is one of the responsibilities of a manager. It's quite frightening to think that there are some managers who would believe that that's not part of what they need to do.

The lack of communication can go both ways. As one manager says of their staff, "They sometime JUST DO NOT communicate and that's FATAL!!" But communication policies need to do more than just dictate how frequently managers and their staff should communicate. One questionnaire respondent indicated his frustration with meetings that do take place, but are often rather pointless.

Because everyone is generally over-worked and experiencing high levels of stress, communication tends to be sporadic. Most weeks there is a meeting in which everyone is meant to report on progress, but these tend to be boring and ineffective.

One cannot expect a policy to dictate how effective communication should be achieved, especially since there are no (or very few) hard and fast rules to ensure that communication, of any sort, runs smoothly. However, the simple things that both

questionnaire respondents and interviewees have pointed out as useful tools (like listening, respect, frequent interaction and honesty, to name a few) can help make a difference in how managers and staff talk to each other and ultimately, one would hope, in their efficiency and happiness in their work environment. Communications and management policy need to include some ideas about the volume of information to be shared, and ways in which this can be monitored and agreed on by staff at all levels of the command chain.

#### **6.4. Body language**

How much one knows, or how effective communication can be, also depends on one's ability to read a situation. Body language and tone played an important role in people knowing how to communicate easily. According to numerical questionnaire data 60% of both the managers and staff members taking part indicated that they believe body language can play a role in how people will receive messages. Several respondents mentioned that someone who looks them in the eye when they are talking to them will make them feel more like they are being listened to. Similarly, an abrupt tone can indicate that now is not a good time to talk to a manager. One staff member discussed their way of using their manager's tone as a clue to how to deal with them, "When he is in a good mood or not too busy, he has time to "chat". If in a hurry or angry over something, it is quite clear by his tone of voice that now is not the time to shoot the breeze." Another manager in the questionnaire mentioned that he is aware of how not paying attention to his staff when he's busy can cut them off.

I'm inclined to carry on working (sometimes) when staff pop in to see me - keep looking at the screen reading emails - bloody awful I think - it says: Get out of here I'm busy ...What happens then is that staff leave quite soon (which is what I want) but I have failed to hear them or give them the space they need (a bit of MY space).

#### **6.5. Effective communication**

A CEO, referenced in Reuss and Silvis (1981, 8) said the following

Our job, and mine at the corporate level, is to motivate and support operating managers to communicate. We can help upgrade their communication skills and show that communicating is important, but we have to do it by showing and encouraging, not by edict.

It has already been demonstrated that policies, while important in raising awareness about a particular point, cannot help those within an organisation, without the people firstly choosing to pay attention to what the policies say, and most importantly, in the end without them choosing to behave in a certain way.

In the questionnaire study 74% of the staff members who answered the question asking them to rate communication in their section as effective or ineffective described it as effective. 90% of the managers also described communication as effective and 100% of those who answered as both a staff member and manager concurred. This would indicate that there is a large body of satisfied people. However there still exist significant enclaves where people are frustrated and feeling left out of communication (26% of staff members). My conversation with Sally confirmed the fact that you will never reach a situation where every single staff member will feel satisfied with communication in their work environment. But she also believes that comparatively, people at this organisation are remarkably “clued-up” about what is going on.

Interviewer: Do you think the average person stuck in an office on the other side of campus who never leaves their office or sees what’s going on is actually more aware of the bigger picture of this organisation than people in other large organisations across the world are?

Sally: Yes, I do. I do, because of the size and because of the very personal relationships that people have. So I think they’ve got a much better chance of hearing about something, whether it’s in a pub downtown, on a bowling green, on a golf course, wherever, than they would in another institution because we generally socialise with similar people from the institution, etc. So if you don’t hear about it at work you might hear of it, you know, in a place like WITS everybody goes home and you don’t see each other again until you come back to work. So there are more opportunities for getting the important messages across. I think also that, I’m not a scholar of communication theory, but I do believe, it doesn’t matter whatever system you have, the nature of organisations is such that you will always get some who are dissatisfied, you will always get some who will say they are getting too much and some who are getting too little. So there is no ideal out there that we will finally say we’ve arrived, everybody’s happy, that’s never going to happen.

Bearing this in mind the challenge now is to find out what is happening in the areas where people are happy and communication is successful. One question specifically asked managers and staff members what they believed were their own strengths, as well as the strengths of their respective bosses or subordinates. A summarised list of strengths is discussed below. For more information refer back to question 11 of the table in the previous chapter.in Table 1, Chapter 4.

While there were differences between managers' and staff members' opinions of communication strengths I will discuss the points that overlapped, and hence were seen to be important from both sides. The ones that will be discussed here are: motivation and praise, listening, building relationships, respect, language and culture, teamwork, communicating often and the use of email and technology as well as the importance of putting things in writing.

#### **6.5.1. Motivation, praise, encouragement and support**

*“Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you. Love me, and I may be forced to love you.”* – William Arthur Ward

Let us first look at the role of motivation and praise in management communication. Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on one good compliment”. Compliments oil the wheels of communication. It is much easier and more fun to do something for someone who appreciates you and verbally demonstrates this appreciation. According to numerical data collected on the question discussing motivation, 61% of managers who answered the question believe that talking to their staff differently can motivate them, compared to staff members who were split 50/50 between a yes and no answer to the question. Even though only half the staff members answering this question believed that managers could motivate them by talking to them in different ways there were a large number of positive responses indicating pleasure in receiving praise, motivation and encouragement. One questionnaire respondent pointed out how a good word can make you work harder for your manager, “If your manager speaks to you like you are needed and appreciated, it seems to pick the staff member up and they seem to work harder and perform better.” Similarly, in her interview Gertrude said this of a manager with whom she works,:

She (name deleted for confidentiality) can motivate people. She can get you going. And she makes things sound interesting and exciting even if they are just very ordinary, mundane things. She can make them sound so much better than what they really are.

Tom believes strongly in bringing his staff into the office to deliver praise as well as criticism.

Whenever we get a verbal or a written comment that gets passed to the relevant individuals, either individually, sometimes they get summonsed to the office, because it's good to have the summons to the office for discipline as well as for compliment because you see people's faces light up when they realise that they're on the red carpet for praise, they're not on the red carpet for trouble.

From a staff member's perspective, Gertrude appreciates the positive feedback she gets from the head of her division, as well as the manager just discussed.

There are so many of us, that if you do something well, he will email you and he will say well done. Or I'll give him a report and he'll think it's an excellent report he will email me and he will say well done, you know, excellent work.

Similarly Rebecca is thanked by her bosses, as well as the people with whom she interacts with on a daily basis.

Interviewer: Do you have that at all, that you find you're thanked?

Rebecca: I am. Both by (my boss) and (his boss) (names deleted for

confidentiality). And you know, even the people that I go out and do chores for, you know, well not chores, my job. They are generally... I rarely, rarely can think of someone who's rude or cross or. I find if I explain to them why that it is. No, I can't complain about that at all.

Like with so many aspects of communication and management, there has to be a balance of praise and criticism. Gertrude appreciates the praise she receives from her head of division because, "Likewise, if you do something wrong he lets you know that you've done something wrong." Graeme agrees that praise is important, but that it is

also important that people do not feel over-praised, and hence not take the praise they do receive seriously.

I think I'm fairly good at affirming people, at recognising them. So generally I will concentrate on that and affirming what's going on and well done and not be patronising either. It's a delicate thing. But, yes, it's an important one. But it must never only be affirming and strengthening. If it doesn't sometimes carry something about balance in that then sometimes you think, well, has that devalued someone because there's no opposite side?"

It is important to also give the opposite side of praise, constructive criticism. But too much criticism can be incredibly damaging. Clearly not all managers are getting the balance right.

Questionnaire responses indicated a mixed result for the kind of feedback received. While the staff member group showed a trend towards receiving congratulations more frequently than other kinds of feedback (congratulations rated 28%, followed by encouragement at 19%), managers said they give congratulations, encouragement and suggestions for personal benefit to their staff most frequently (20%, 20% and 16% of the total responses by managers to this question). But from the staff-member's perspective, criticism was the third-highest rated type of feedback, scoring 18% of the response and closely following encouragement, which received 19% of their total response. This could be an issue to investigate further. Formal evaluation was given the least frequently, according to staff members, who rate this the lowest, at 5%. Managers and staff members rated "personal information about oneself" as the lowest and second-lowest, respectively, indicating that personal feedback is given the least frequently of all responses.

Obviously the above-mentioned results are generalisations. Indeed, there are instances where negative feedback greatly overshadows any positive or constructive comments given. A questionnaire respondent had this to say, "I would love to receive praise from my Manager and not only have feedback on my performance, when that feedback is negative." Another said, "there is never anything positive relayed". And yet another insightful respondent had this to say of criticism given in its extreme form, i.e., shouting:

Shouting at one never gets a positive response, neither does intimidation - it just encourages contempt. It also lowers one's self esteem, and you begin to believe you are useless, and deserve to be yelled at - I had this in my previous job.

It is likely that the 10% of managers and the 24% of staff members who feel that communication in their division is unsuccessful would probably have similar comments to those just mentioned. Verbal motivation as a tool of successful communication cannot be underestimated. But motivation does not only need to be verbal. In his questionnaire Tom mentioned other ways of pointing out when his workers do a good job.

Letters of commendation are posted on staff notice-boards for all to see. When there has been a "big push" for an event that has gone well and all staff have been involved as a team the entire group is called together for commendation. Photographs are sometimes posted on notice-boards when appropriate.

To return to verbal praise, Sally feels that she is constantly verbally acknowledged for a job well done by her boss. In her own words, perhaps they share too much praise. But she is also highly aware of the role the giving appropriate praise can play in one's work environment. It is important to pass on praise when one believes it is worthwhile, and often people are surprised and delighted by receiving a compliment. It does not only need to be from their own boss. Sally recalls a discussion with a fellow staff-member where she passed on a compliment she had overheard on this person during a senior management meeting.

Interviewer: Linking very much with that is the idea of praise, telling people that they're doing a good job. Do you find that you can do that, with the staff member that works for you and that (sic) the person who you work for? Do you get a lot of praise, do you share a lot of praise?

Sally: We do, in fact, and maybe too much. You know, I definitely make a conscious effort to give praise where I feel it is due and I'm quite surprised sometimes. I said that to somebody the other day who is in a relatively senior position. I said "You're doing a really great job" and "Well done". And they looked at me in surprise and said "You know, you're the only person who has told me that". And I said, "Surely not, because I've heard so many other people say what a good job you're doing". And they said "Well, no-one's actually told me".

It seems that managers are not often told when they're doing a good job. Although one questionnaire respondent indicated, "I try to be positive and give praise to all (even the boss)", Graeme says,

I'm affirmed far less than I affirm my staff, by them, because they don't think I need it. But sometimes you think, bugger it guys, I'm just like you, I need it as much as you do. But I get it elsewhere.

Tom agrees, it's hard to be affirmed by the people who he ultimately reports to, but there are people on the ground who appreciate his work. "I think I must acknowledge the fact that there are a lot of people outside of the senior administration who appreciate what we're doing. So affirmation of a job well done encourages you to do more." Still, it is important to receive acknowledgement from the people who employ you, who pay your salary. As Tom again says, "It probably comes back to this thing of affirmation, that when your affirmation comes from people who don't pay you, you begin to wonder whether what you're doing is important."

The adage goes "it's lonely at the top". If appreciation is not always forthcoming from those above you, it is even less frequent from those who work for you. Occasionally, and probably more often than their staff members would think, managers need motivation and encouragement from their staff. From personal experience I have found that giving encouragement, support, and information back to your boss is of vital importance. But having an open relationship will greatly affect the possibility of such interaction, as will the relationship of individual participants. Other responses from the questionnaire demonstrate that managers also need to be affirmed and praised for a job well done, as well as having their staff acknowledge the fact that they are human too and can also make mistakes. "Shit it's a hard job", says one manager who answered the questionnaire,

because I also have a life. There's the crunch: I have a Faculty to run, but I ALSO have a job as teacher/supervisor/academic and balancing these is just hectic for me.

Tom shares an incident below where he pointed out to a staff member that he is also human and sometimes even managers have to get back to the office 15 minutes late.

Interviewer: Have you had any instances where you think, "You know, it's difficult, but I'm human too. I'm a manager, yes, I'm looking after you, but I'm also human, don't forget that".

Tom: Oh yes, ja, on a number of occasions. More particularly from bottom up, but also from top down.

Interviewer: Do you think there is a way of making people more aware of the fact that you're also human?

Tom: I say it sometimes. And I mean, it doesn't happen that often that it's a major issue in my life but certainly it has happened and I've said, different situations, one guy once stood at the door when I came in late, after a lunch break and he looked at his watch and said "Hah, 15 minutes late!". My response there was, "Were you here at half past seven like I was this morning?"

Even though being a manager is a hard and often thankless task, at the end of the day, for the people I spoke to, doing their jobs is about more than just earning an income. While Tom acknowledged that he needs to work to put bread and butter on the table and provide a home for his family, he also does it for a more meaningful reason. "But I also, then, have other reasons to work and that is to make a contribution, from my professional point of view, that maybe others can have a better environment in which they live." Rebecca works because she has to work, but believes it might as well be pleasant. What she believes is,

As I say I do believe that we've all got to work, and we've got to work for 8 hours, so let's try and make it as comfortable as well as doing, which is our most important function, the job that we have to do.

Gertrude also works because she has to, but she loves what she does.

I love my job. Actually, the one day when she (her manager) spoke to me some months ago she said "You really enjoy what you do, don't you?" and I said to her, "yes I do." I actually don't know why she said that. She said that so many people don't enjoy their jobs. Yes there are days when I don't feel like coming to work, not because I hate my job or anything, I just think, oh dear, there's so much to do at home, I'd really like to be at home and I'd really like to do this. But I find that I miss my colleagues, hey, when I'm on leave too. I miss everybody. It's nice to go on leave but when the leave starts getting towards the end it's nice to come back.

Although motivation is an important management tool it is often an added bonus, rather than a necessity when it comes to employing and working with largely self-motivated people. In Gertrude's case it would appear that she comes to work and consistently enjoys her work without explicit motivation from her boss. A staff member who answered the questionnaire also said that the question explicitly asking about motivation was not applicable since "My boss does not need to specifically

motivate us - we are self motivated and very much appreciated by our boss". In his/her appreciation of them the motivation is implicit. Some managers are very obviously aware of the role it plays:

I mostly motivate by email - so that I can print out their highlights and lowlights and keep in their personal appraisal file. This helps for merit awards etc. I think I must motivate more verbally than I do at the moment.

However, it was generally agreed that getting positive feedback, encouraging one's staff, and giving praise for a job well done does motivate people highly. So does motivation play a role? "Yes it does, a friendly but firm boss who keeps motivating staff is the most important thing to make people want to come to work". Constant affirmation, reassurance, and encouragement are all part of building an effective team. As one participant said, "I have had one letter of thanks and motivation, which really made an impact. I felt part of the team and felt I was doing a worthwhile job."

To summarise: the impact that positive feedback can have on staff cannot be underestimated, but it must also be sincere and balanced. Even staff who received a lot of positive feedback appreciate it when managers also give them feedback on what they aren't doing so well. By the same token, it was shown to be vitally important not to give consistently negative feedback. One staff member felt particularly demotivated by their boss, as this comment demonstrates: "Well done or positive feedback is very seldom given. Errors are often highlighted and continually used as a stick." When this occurs frequently staff members lose interest, energy and enthusiasm and work is likely to suffer as a result.

### **6.5.2. Listening**

*"The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words."* - Rachel Naomi Remen

*"We have two ears and only one tongue in order that we may hear more and speak less."* - Diogenes Laertius

*"Two monologues do not make a dialogue."* - Jeff Daly

An aspect that was raised again and again is the impact of “listening”. In one case a staff member mentioned in the questionnaire that s/he is particularly positively inclined towards their boss stating the reason as, “He LISTENS! and then guides/discusses”. It appears, particularly in this case, that the manager under discussion who is, incidentally, new to the post, is bringing an openness to communication and a willingness to be open himself, unlike a past manager whose closed-ness may have been detrimental. The same person who praised their current manager for listening had this to say of a prior boss. “Previous manager (who held a higher position) held information close to his chest. At times when I was proactive in requesting more information I felt as though I was being put through an inquisition!!”

Graeme is particularly aware of the importance of listening to his staff and colleagues, and they appreciate this. He says,

There are staff yes, who certainly do talk, who say, yes they do appreciate me being approachable, they appreciate that they can go in at any time, to one’s office and be listened to and taken seriously and acted upon. I think those are, yes, those have been appreciated.

Both Graeme and Tom realise that communication is as much about listening as it is about talking. As Peter F. Drucker says (reference unknown), “The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said” and that can only be accomplished if one is listening, hard and intently. Tom says that the secret is listening without reacting.

Ja, I think the biggest issue in terms of communication is trying to get to where people are at. And even in a western environment not everybody is at the same space in time. And so that idea of empathy with people and developing an empathy with people and a willingness to listen without reacting, that goes back to trust. And having had kids where I know I have reacted, particularly with the older ones, where you react first and then you listen afterwards, but it’s too late. That willingness to allow people to be outrageous and maybe even hyper-critical of you and to say, well, that might be your feeling, I disagree with you, or I look at it from a different perspective, I think that’s important in terms of communication, that somebody can say “Hey, you bloody so-and-so”.

It is difficult to discuss listening without acknowledging the role that having respect for the other person’s opinion plays, as does showing a genuine interest in the person

you are listening to. Graeme agrees that a secret to effective communication is respecting the other person's point of view.

Um, I think probably respect underlies it, that we respect each other's opinions and because of that communication is better because communication takes as much listening as it does talking. And yes, we do, and we value each other's contribution in a very egalitarian, collaborative way.

It is also important to listen, even when one disagrees. "Communication needs to be two-ways", says Tom. "And the fact that it's two-ways doesn't mean to say that I necessarily agree with what you are saying, but I need to hear you."

Rebecca also realises that listening is an important tool, but as she, herself, says, "I don't think I listen enough".

Interviewer: You don't have the time to listen enough?

Rebecca: No, and that's one of my concerns. To me, my personal thing, my staff are my most important tool. I don't believe that I'm doing them justice."

In her situation it is incredibly difficult to listen enough because all her staff are desk-bound all the time (answering the switchboards) and she is often out of the office, all over campus. "It's definitely a skill that one has to work on all the time", says Sally, "especially as the more knowledge one gets the less inclined one is to listen. So the higher one moves up the hierarchy the less likely one is to listen to what people are actually saying." Gertrude also agrees that listening is vitally important.

Gertrude: I do think it's important to listen to someone... I think it's very important. But you see now that problem I don't have because I work closely with (name deleted for confidentiality purposes). She listens. She will listen. You can tell her anything and everything.

Interviewer: And she sometimes listens to the things you're not saying as well?

Gertrude: Ja, and she, she always listens. She's never in too much of a hurry. She will always listen to what you've got to say.

Interviewer: Even if she's too busy?

Gertrude: And even if she's busy she will stop what she's doing and she will listen.

The ability to stop what you're doing and give your staff your full attention is a very important part of building a relationship with them, making them feel important and

valued as an individual. It's part of the respect that managers and staff members have brought up so often in the questionnaire and interviews. As a questionnaire respondent said, "Our manager is a good listener and when busy we just arrange to discuss the issues at hand a little later. He has never been [un]interested (sic) in the questions posed to him."

### **6.5.3. Building Relationships**

*"The quality of your life is the quality of your relationships." –  
Anthony Robbins*

*"The relationship is the communication bridge between people". -  
Alfred Kadushin.*

Developing positive relationships at work is vital to the success of the work environment. As Mary, in her interview said,

I believe the more informal you are with your co-workers the better your communication level and your relationship. Because we spend more than 7 hours a day with our co-workers so if you're not going to communicate with your co-workers all is lost. You go home, you might be awake for 2-3 hours, you go, you sleep. Tomorrow morning. So, I think you basically spend 3-4 hours per day with your household people and 7-8 hours per day at work.

It makes sense that a friendly working environment, one that promotes openness and honesty, an environment where people respect one another, get involved in things as a team, share information, have an interest in one another's lives and can use humour to lighten the mood is a successful environment. But how does this work?

Listening and paying attention both form part of developing a quality relationship with one's staff. It's what I call "getting personal", not in the sense of taking things personally, but of taking an interest in one's staff, finding out more about them. Tom has a large staff complement and realises that he is not as personally involved with his staff as he could be.

I maybe as an individual will say that I err more on the side of being more focused on things and results than on people. I'm not a natural people person. It's an area in which I am growing. So to sit down and talk to someone about their children or about their holiday when

it's working time, I'm developing in that area because I'm aware that that builds relationships.

He mentions that he struggles to build these relationships often because he doesn't share the same home language with his staff. Gertrude is fortunate to speak an African language, which really helps her interact well with her staff, the casuals she employs. But it's more than just knowing the language, she takes a genuine interest in their lives, their families and what's going on at home because all of this makes a difference to how they will perform at work.

Gertrude: Also, you know, the casuals talk to me a lot, even the staff. Often when staff have to come in for something they will always ask if I can be there to interpret or whatever. But my casuals too, they will come and tell me if they've got a problem at home and if they won't be available for work and they feel quite comfortable with that. And, for instance, if they've got a sick family member I'll always inquire if I see them again if the family's okay. If I hear there's a death in the family, for instance, if I phone a casual she says, look I can't work this weekend, a family member of mine has died, when she eventually comes back again I'll say are you alright and did it go well, that kind of thing. I'll talk to them a lot.

Interviewer: So it's taking an interest in people?

Gertrude: Ja, I think you've got to try and take an interest in people to try and get them to perform well. I certainly think so. And certainly when someone takes an interest in me... Let's put it to you this way. I treat people I would like them to treat me. That's the basics.

#### **6.5.4. Respect**

*"Love and respect do not automatically accompany a position of leadership. They must be earned."*  
—Source Unknown

Treating people the way you would like to be treated is a basic principle involving respect and common decency that has been raised again and again in both questionnaires and interviews. A questionnaire respondent said one of their strengths in dealing with their staff was, "constant interaction, treat as colleagues rather than subordinates". A staff member said the same thing, from the other side. Success came because of the way they deal with their manager: "Treat as colleague rather than as boss". Again and again people said, "I have a simple philosophy : treat others as I

would like to be treated” and “my manager speaks and treats me with with respect and from my side it is automatically the same. We work well together.”

Respect can be expressed as well as earned by listening, by taking an interest, as well as doing simple things like greeting one’s employees and trying to learn to speak their language, even if it’s only a few words. Mary elaborates on how she communicates with her staff on a daily basis:

Mary: In the morning I normally have the service staff coming in here and late in the afternoon. I also have the other staff coming in and there’s nothing wrong with “Hi, how are you?”. Just that friendliness opens a door for you. Which, if they walk in and you start rumbling or just, you know, not paying attention. You are not going to earn their respect. And also trying to bridge the language barrier. I’ve learned a lot of words?

Interviewer: What? Xhosa words?

Mary: Ja. It’s like and then they would answer me back in Afrikaans, things like that. So the importance of when you see them the first time for the day and there’s nothing wrong with, even if you see them in the passage “Hi” again. But most people think it’s degrading to greet service staff. I’m serious!

### **6.5.5. Language and Culture**

*“We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native language. Language is not simply a reporting device for experience but a defining framework for it.” - Benjamin Whorf*

Speaking different home languages can be quite a barrier to communication but learning more about different cultures and even bits of other languages helps to facilitate effective communication. Tom agrees, but points out that language and culture are not the same thing.

I think learning the language and the culture are two separate things, definitely. But if you can learn the language and the culture and understand them. That makes a big difference. I think that’s an ongoing process. That needs to be a two-way street as well. Why do we as whites do things in a certain way? And why do we as, a certain academic on campus says “we as blackies”, do things a different way?

Tom struggles, occasionally, with cultural differences with his staff. One particular difficulty is when his staff say they understand his instructions and they don't. It is rude, according to their culture, to say no to their boss, even when he is asking them if they do or do not understand what he has said. It appears that others filling in the questionnaire had similar problems, expressing their frustrations when "some of them don't ask when they don't understand and then do things incorrectly, which then has to be corrected afterwards. Another said, "I get impatient when they don't understand but say they do".

Sometimes, depending on the relationship, the receiver may be too intimidated by the sender to ask appropriate questions. Then very little can be done to salvage the communication process (Quible, Johnson and Mott, 1996:23).

Not asking questions when one does not understand is deleterious to getting the job done and not admitting that one does not understand when asked is incredibly dangerous to the working relationship as well as to performing the task at hand. Tom understands this and is trying to explain to his staff why he needs them to admit when they do not understand. But it is a battle against centuries of cultural conditioning.

Other questionnaire respondents indicated that in other instances "cultural differences sometimes hamper proper dialogue" and "language is sometimes a barrier". There was also a respondent who indicated their trouble with different cultures and languages in communication was that they felt left out when staff spoke different languages that they couldn't understand. "Speak in Xhosa to each other which makes me feel excluded".

We live in a multi-cultural and a multi-lingual society. It is becoming more and more advantageous to speak another language (or even several additional languages) over and above home languages and those taught at school. Gertrude finds speaking an additional language is vital in her job.

Gertrude: And also I speak their language which makes it easier.

Interviewer: So you do actually speak Xhosa?

Gertrude: Ja, I speak Xhosa which is one of the reasons why I think I've also probably been put into this job and I also try and build up a relationship with my casuals.

Although Tom struggles with cultural differences he does know a lot of Xhosa, which helps in dealing with his staff. He also realises that speaking someone else's language, even if it's only a few words, shows an interest in them

Interviewer: Do you speak the same language as your staff? Do you speak an African language?

Tom: I am not fully conversant but we will very often conduct meetings in Xhosa.

Interviewer: Do you think that makes a big difference in the relationship?

Tom: Ja, without a doubt. I think, I mean. If I look at (my assistant – name deleted for confidentiality), he came here as a non-Xhosa speaker and even he has attempted to learn the language. My secretary (name deleted for confidentiality) attended the Xhosa course. My assistant would have gone but he let the secretary go because she deals a lot more with the staff. You can see that the staff appreciate it because now there's a bit of banter because you're learning and you make mistakes so now there's a point to joke around, hey, you fluffed that one! Ja, and I think it kind of says "I'm interested in you, as to where you come from" and it's a two-way street.

Interviewer: It develops a relationship with them?

Tom: I would say so. There might be areas where it's not critical but even when you're travelling if you start speaking someone else's language, no matter how rudimentary your language skills are it opens a door which says "You are... and I'm interested in you". And I think that's the way we are.

#### 6.5.6. Teamwork

*"The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I'. And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say 'I'. They don't think 'I'. They think 'we'; they think 'team'. They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit.... This is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done." – Peter F. Drucker*

"People want to know that they are important and that the work they do is valuable" (Reuss and Silvis, 1981, 11). One way of making people feel important is to involve them in projects with other people and share things, responsibility, goals and projects. Working as a team is another factor that both staff and managers mentioned as a key to success. Once again, it goes hand-in-hand with respect. As Mary again points out,

I always work on you give me respect and you will have my respect in return. So if I start treating my staff differently I won't have their

respect. We work on a give and take, the whole time. And I work with them as a team. And it works. We're living proof.

Questionnaire respondents agreed that teamwork is important. One said,

We most often work as a team to meet deadlines, identify goals, resolve problems, develop systems etc. and consequently, the level of consultation between us is often greater than would generally be the case for someone in my position.

Being part of a team means sharing information, honestly and openly. A questionnaire response had this to say about discussing a problem immediately, and not letting it fester.

I think we are a good team, and if something is bothering us we tell each other straight away, we also feel if it is a bigger problem it can be discussed in front of our manager, otherwise our office is a very "Happy Office"

Once again it is about building relationships. These quotes from questionnaires below reflect on the importance of team-work and involvement. A staff member discusses how they believe their manager should involve his/her team members, a manager reflects on his/her ability to involve his/her team. A staff member reflects on their appreciation that their manager includes them by asking for their opinion on things, a manager reflects on the role of communication in team-work and another manager discusses the importance of having an open-door policy.

- I think that a managers ultimate goal ie. to build a team relationship with you, supportive and authoritative, which will in turn grow respect for that manager, will encourage and incentivise your performance.
- I like to think we are effective. I know what the staff strengths and weaknesses are ; what their needs and what their gripes are. On the other hand, they know all there is to know about the department, what is happening on each day. We do work as a team - this is visible when we have a staff shortage and require extra shifts to be worked, and when there is a crisis
- We work together as a team and my manager often comes to me to ask what my opinions are on an issue.
- The work gets done, generally without complaint and errors are at a minimum. This can only come about if its done as a team, and the team is only as good as its ability to communicate properly, even at a personal private level, building up relationships. If people know each other better personally, then the attitude to work together as a team is that much better. If a team is working on a big project, each in their niche, for that project to succeed, many forms of communication has to operate to keep that loose threads together.

- Your door must be open to your staff all the time, its the only way to build trust and have effective communication to work as a team.

It is not enough to acknowledge an individual, to take an interest in their home life and family, without also taking an interest in their work. This means sharing responsibility, wherever possible, and team-work assists with this sharing, particularly the sharing of information.

### **6.5.7. Communicating often, face to face**

*“The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate”*  
*– Joseph Priestley*

Over and over and over again employees say that they prefer to get information about the organization from their supervisors. And communication research shows that this relationship is the element that most strongly affects such attitudes as job satisfaction, group cohesiveness and morale (Reuss and Silvis, 1981:15). In our internet age, where communication across the globe is almost instantaneous, sometimes technology can get in the way. Although email helps get the message across in an organisation to a larger group of people some managers are relying more on technology and less on face-to-face communication to get the message to their staff.

How to get the information across is a challenge, as is how much information to give. Earlier in this chapter, in the section entitled “how much to know” I looked in more detail at the quality and quantity of information passed between managers and their staff as well as confidentiality and the difficulty of knowing what one is allowed to pass on versus what one should pass on.

However much one chooses to pass on, one the most important success secrets to effective management communication is doing it personally, and doing it often. In her questionnaire Gertrude said,

Whilst my communication with my manager is just about nil, the general communication in our department is very good as we use our e-mail all the time and are connected to everyone else, even our kitchens in the department.

Having the time available to talk frequently as well as making the time to talk about all sorts of things, including things that do not, immediately, appear to be work related, but that can affect how one relates to other people at work, is vitally important.

How are managers and staff at this organisation getting the message across? They mostly seem to be talking often, and, by and large, they appear to be talking to one another in an open way. According to numerical questionnaire data, a comparable number of managers and staff believe that they have an open-door policy with one another. 48% and 49% of managers and staff, respectively, who answered the question regarding the openness of interpersonal communication, say that the door is open and any subject can be discussed, compared to 1% of both groups who feel that open discussion is not encouraged. 21.5% of managers and 19.5% of staff believe that they can discuss any subject, provided they make an appointment and talk about the issues in private meetings. This is an encouraging number reflecting a large group of respondents who seem willing to talk openly with one another. One person who answered both the manager and staff member questionnaires attributes her department's success to their openness and the frequency of their communication, saying, "We talk all the time - have fairly regular meetings - interact daily." Another manager says "I work hands on with everyone mostly and network all the time with them".

Many interviewees pointed out the importance of having regular meetings. Gertrude feels that her department does not have meetings frequently enough, indeed, at all.

I do feel that we need to have more, we should have meetings on a regular basis even if it's once a quarter, or whatever. But we're not actually getting to that at the moment because we are busy.

Having frequent meetings, however, is not enough. There has to be time that is set aside just to build relationships. Having "tea" together, although it can be seen by some as a time-waster, is an important part of developing and growing relationships within an organisational group. Gertrude elaborates:

Gertrude: When I was down in admin, my manager (name deleted for confidentiality) made a point of say[ing] every second week or whatever, we would have tea together on a Friday afternoon at 3 o'

clock we'd sit down and have tea and chat, that sort of thing. And what we've started, we've started a similar thing here where maybe once a month we have tea on a Friday morning and we almost have breakfast, as it were, but we've started doing it so that we can actually mix with each other and interact with each other. Otherwise everybody sits in their offices and we are so busy that you could literally be working in this office and you wouldn't know who's in the office next door. I mean, I know, I have days when I come into work when I just sit down all day. I just find I'm too busy to even go and have tea. Our tea lady will bring me tea. So I can sit here the whole day without seeing anybody.

Interviewer: So when times get stressed and pressured actually you need to make that time to set aside.

Gertrude: You need to make time to stop and get together, once a month, once every two months or whatever... But when you get together you do discuss a lot of staff issues, you discuss people and you learn a lot. You learn a lot about people that you don't know about. And I think that's important too.

Sally agrees that it is important to make the time to build relationships.

Interviewer: Do you feel you have enough time available to build relationships, to communicate effectively with everyone that you need to?

Sally: I think that time is available BUT it's a question of how you allocate it. Perhaps we don't allocate enough of our time to the communication aspect of it and possibly I don't either. I think in terms of planning how to communicate, because it's not something you can just do spontaneously either, and people, I don't think, realise that you actually have to plan right in the beginning how you are going to be communicating... But it's a choice. One has to prioritise communication and perhaps that's what we're not doing enough of.

#### **6.5.8. Email, technology, and keeping it in writing**

*“Regardless of the changes in technology, the market for well-crafted messages will always have an audience.”*  
- Steve Burnett

*“Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who with their soul encourages another person to be brave and true”.*  
- Charles Dickens

In addition to making the time to have both formal and informal meetings another issue that came up regarding meetings is the importance of keeping records of them.

One manager indicated in the questionnaire, “I need minutes of meetings - often the results are not recorded in writing”, as did another who said there was “not enough formal recording of decisions”. A staff member acknowledged one of his/her weaknesses as being “do not commit all communications to writing/file note for record purposes”. This is one of the ways in which email has played a very important role in modern management communication.

The change to new communication technologies promises to have personal, social, and pedagogical consequences. The widespread adoption of new technologies has altered the communication process itself. Each new medium imposes its own special requirements on how messages are composed, governs the speed and convenience of message transmission, and influences the ways receivers reconstruct meaning (DeFleur, Kearney, and Plax in Hoy and Miskel, 1996:351).

Email and email mailing lists are an incredibly useful tool. They help get the information out there en masse, quickly, and without transmission errors. It is also useful when people are away or out of the office a lot and for keeping written records. In the words of a questionnaire respondent “face to face often is forgotten later, written/email is recorded”, so written communication in the form of email definitely has its advantages. Gertrude says “email has made a helluva difference to our lives!” She discusses an example where the manager with whom she works was simply so busy on a particular day when she needed to speak to her that she emailed the information because she simply could not get into her office down the corridor to talk about it. “I find email very, very useful”, she says, and elaborates on a few ways in which email has made a difference in her life.

You see, long ago when there was no email that is why you never knew what was going on between your head of department and that. Now our head of division (name deleted for confidentiality) sends us emails regularly. He’ll send us an email and say from x date to y date so-and-so will not be in the division, they’ll be on leave, or we are a bit isolated up here, he will email to us, say, the notice from this manager saying we have to work on such a date or the university is closing on such a date, or this public holiday is going to be taken, or we have to work, and how the staff are going to be paid. So email plays a very important part in my life. Also with finance. For instance, I was off sick last Wednesday and somebody else had to pay a couple of people for me and they never coded the payslips. It was just, instead of rushing down to admin, trying to retrieve them all I did was I emailed the salaries lady (name deleted for confidentiality) and said these people must be paid from that account

number, those people must be paid from those account numbers. It's fantastic!

Email can also save a lot of time. Instead of talking to dozens of people individually it is often quicker and more effective to send out a group email. Rebecca says she simply could not work without email.

Rebecca: For me it is essential. Because a) I'm out the office, except of course I have a cellphone and they can communicate with me. But we have to do a lot of changes on the system and my previous experience taught me this because I find people have very selective memories. So now, if they want anything done ... and if there are any changes to be done I ask for them by email... But email is, in my job I can out of my office and have 9 new ones when I come in, in half an hour... I like everything in writing.

Interviewer: It's useful that email speeds that up a lot.

Rebecca: Absolutely. Email is phenomenal in my job.

In terms of putting things in writing and having a record of it email is also a very useful tool. But it has its downsides. Sally discussed why email and technology are so useful to her but also points out how instant technology can contribute significantly towards stress.

Interviewer: Do you find email a useful tool?

Sally: Yes I do. I think it's been an amazing development but I think it's also one of the reasons why people feel so much more stress now than they used to because everything is so much more immediate. You know, when you send an email you expect an almost immediate response. Where it used to be you'd send a letter and it would take a week to get there and then you need to think about it and then write back. So with emails, faxes and cellphones, I think that is what has created a huge amount of additional pressure for people and why they think they have less time. You also have to respond without having a chance to process the information. You almost are tempted to hit the reply button because you know if you don't do it immediately it's quite likely that you won't get to it for a while, so you probably send off your initial thoughts and maybe those are not, if you had time to think about it, the same kind of response that you would give an hour, a day later.

Technology has its benefits as well as its disadvantages. Tom believes that having access to more recent technology would help him immensely in his job.

You don't have to sit in the office and work, you don't have to be connected. People can phone you through modern systems, and again the university is going that route, so that you don't have to incur another cost to pick up a call out there. So I don't think that we're making enough use of the technology that's available to us in order to free us up from being deskbound. As I said, things like a PDA or a laptop would mean that you could take a camera, a laptop and a PDA, you could go out where guys are doing a planting job and you could actually be physically there recording, instructing, and planning, all at the same time.

Gertrude agrees that without her computer she would be lost. "I know how to do the work physically, because that's how I started, and I can only get through the volume of work that I do because it's computerised". Rebecca agrees that her university cellphone is essential to her being able to do her job more efficiently, since she is often out of the office and can take calls while on campus as well as planning her movements around campus so that she makes better use of her time. But Graeme warns that technology can't replace the human touch.

Graeme: I think it's the quality of the communication, really, that counts. I think as a leader I think it's important to have frequent communication, I also was never one to, if I can speak to somebody I will walk and go sit in their office rather than phone them or email them. The same goes for university admin. If I want to speak to the registrar or somebody, or some filing clerk is doing something. If possible I'd rather go speak to them face-to-face. I just think it allows much easier [communication]. But yes, one can overdo it. You can.

In addition, email can often be misconstrued. Sometimes people say things in email that they would not normally say face-to-face, things that can be hurtful or taken in the wrong way. The tone of an email also carries meaning that can sometimes be misinterpreted. One staff member said this of his struggles with communicating with his boss, his boss "prefers to send poorly toned e-mails to everyone than address the issue personally and directly". Another questionnaire respondent is also sensitive to using email when it is appropriate: "I never tell people difficult things over email: always face to face. Email communication on tricky subjects can cause serious upset, because it is a highly reduced communicative context." In addition, sometimes spelling and grammar mistakes can cause confusion, as this respondent discusses,

“regarding email - some staff are not prolific writers - so the way they write email can often lead to miscommunication - spelling and grammar play a great part”.

## **6.6. Challenges to effective communication: time, stress and availability**

*“I know you believe you understand what you think I said. But I’m not sure you realise that what you heard is not what I meant.”* - Anonymous

*“There are men who would quickly love each other if once they were speak to each other; for when they spoke they would discover that their souls had only separated by phantoms and delusions.”* - Ernest Hello

Communicators have always tried to assess the effectiveness of their programs, or to examine the relevance of what they were trying to say with what senior management wanted them to say, or to make sure what they were saying was being heard by those they were trying to reach. If they didn’t do these things, and on a regular basis, either one of two bad things happened: they found themselves looking for a new job or, worse, they discovered that they were working for an organization that did not care about communicating or did not want to communicate (Reuss and Silvis, 1981:49).

Is this organisation communicating enough? The responses to questionnaires and interviews indicate that yes, by and large, they are. But are they paying enough attention to communication? That is not certain. “Perhaps a university policy in that area wouldn’t be a bad thing”, says Sally, the person who works most closely with university policy. There is certainly room for improvement, as there always is, in any area. A communication audit might be a solution to giving communication more attention than it currently receives. “The goal of an audit is to determine which of the organization’s philosophy and goals need communication supports” (Reuss and Silvis, 1981:53). But it is certainly not an easy process to undertake. “It is a very complex and time-consuming process and involves skills and techniques not always found in the communication process or among those who direct the process” (Reuss and Silvis, 1981:50). There are already processes in place that ask university employees to reflect on their communication practice, as Sally discusses below, but these are infrequent, and, as she admits, it is possible to “fudge” the results a little bit.

Every few years we have a review of academic departments and we have a review of our support divisions... And what we do there is

we ask a question about communication, how do you communicate with your staff? What sort of management style do you have? And people can fudge that a little bit. But then we also ask them what process did you follow in developing this document? And we also interview people and ask, anyone in the department can submit their own comments and submissions so in that way we do have a way of accessing what's happening beyond that manager level.

This questionnaire and these interviews have, to a certain extent, fulfilled a portion of what a communication audit would achieve. It is possible that this is the most in-depth management-communication study of this organisation that will be undertaken for a long while, but there seems to be an emerging interest in this area. Two studies that I have come across undertaken by the university since this research began two years ago have focused on communication and how information is passing through channels and how people feel about that. The question is whether formalising such investigations would have merit for the organisation. In the absence of any more official and broadly-scoped research the findings of this thesis will have to point the way towards finding out what is working well and what is not working quite so well at the organisation.

### **6.6.1. Time**

*“Slow down and enjoy life. It is not only the scenery you miss by going too fast - you also miss the sense of where you are going and why.” - Eddie Cantor*

*“Time is the scarcest resource and unless it is managed nothing else can be managed.” - Peter F. Drucker*

There are a few issues that present large challenges to effective communication at this organisation. Although I touched on this topic earlier I think that “time” is enough of an issue to merit a more in-depth discussion.

If one were to glance again at the quotes scattered throughout this chapter from managers and staff-members, one would notice that many of them mention “not having enough time” as a significant deterrent to getting the message across.

One questionnaire respondent felt that their manager, “Could share more. Often too busy and preoccupied to unwind and chat.” This is often a problem even when managers are aware of the need to communicate. Due to time constraints the interpersonal bonding factor can often be ignored because it simply can’t be fitted into the schedule. “Sometimes there isn’t enough communication, because the manager has too many other things on her plate”, said another respondent, illustrating this point. “Manager is over-busy so does not have time to discuss tasks in any more detail”, was another response, as was, “because everyone is generally over-worked and experiencing high levels of stress, communication tends to be sporadic.”

There is a common conception that “time is money and talk is cheap”. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that communication has not been seen as a particularly important part of management until fairly recently, with the growing realisation that the human aspect of management is an important factor in successful organisations. An extract from the interview with Sally highlights why taking the time to talk with one’s staff, colleagues and managers is important.

Interviewer: One of the issues that people also raised was the issue of either over communicating or under-communicating... What would your situation be?

Sally: Well, I think, first of all that’s an excuse and I think it’s an unacceptable argument to use, that “I’m so busy I don’t have time to talk to my staff” because I think effective leadership is based on communication with your staff... In my own job, my response to that would be you have to find the time! Communication is important enough to say that if you don’t get that right you might as well not bother with whatever it is you’re doing. Because we just don’t exist in our own little island.

Making time for your staff is a choice. Graeme said earlier, and I repeat his quote here now for ease of reference, “I don’t have time in my daily working life to do much research. Why? Because I don’t have the time.” Graeme has chosen to spend his time developing his staff rather than focussing on producing research. And Mark, while he realises the importance of developing his staff says he simply does not have enough time to be able to focus on what he knows is his weakness.

We’ve just had a workshop this week where the comment was passed that managers shouldn’t spend 5 hours a day doing office-type work. I don’t know how I would get my work done if I didn’t

spend at least 5 hours on most days, in the current situation, because we're working in the current environment where response times are so much quicker, or expectations are much shorter.

Rebecca is also concerned that she doesn't have enough time available to share with her staff. She says,

I don't think that I have enough time to talk to them by nature of their job. It concerns me that when they have personal problems, which always impact on one's job, that I sometimes don't give them enough time to help them through this rough period. I've got one at the moment and to pin her down to just say "Talk to me" is probably difficult because she's always got their backs to the wall...

Mary believes that if the people in her office want to get to know her better they must make the time to share things, to ask about her and to show a genuine interest.

Mary: ...And if they can only show a little bit more interest and humanity towards co-workers their lives would also be better.

Interviewer: What about people who say they don't have the time to show interest or humanity?

Mary: ... if you don't have the time then make time! Those 10, 15 minutes aren't going to take such a gap out of your day that if you can see one of your co-workers is either in a bad mood or crying or something, get the person one side and try and help.

Another thing that managers said they would do, in an ideal world, if they had more time available, is use it to plan better. The inability to plan fully constantly puts managers on the back foot and this can cause undue stress.

### 6.6.2. Stress

*"The time to relax is when you don't have time for it."*

- Sydney J Harris

*"Stress: The confusion created when one's mind overrides the body's basic desire to choke the living daylights out of some jerk who desperately deserves it."*

- *Author Unknown*

I think one of the biggest challenges facing this institution, but a lot of institutions too, because I have a lot of contacts nationally, is that more and more organisations are expecting people, particularly people in the middle management level, to do a helluva lot more

than they were doing with the same amount of hours in a day that they have to work, without resourcing them. And so there's this huge expectation, you can deliver, but without the affirmation of "thank you, you've really done a bloody good job!" – Tom, in interview.

Managers are having to cope with more and more stress in their daily lives as they are expected to take on tasks that were never part of their jobs before, particularly in an academic environment. In the university under study academics seeking to be promoted to higher ranks (e.g. from a lecturer to a senior lecturer position) have to possess solid administration skills, research and publish often, obtain higher degrees of their own, get involved in community work and show an interest in the administrative life of the department. All this in addition to teaching solid courses, marking numerous essays and tests and being available to provide academic support to struggling students. But it is not only the academics in a university who are under immense pressure. As Tom says above, the expectation on managers is to do more and more with fewer resources and staff in less time. Is it any wonder that staff are suffering from the physical effects of stress?

Stress came up frequently in questionnaire responses as an issue that can affect communication. "When under stress, there have been outbursts", said one respondent of their department. A staff member pointed out that stress makes them less eloquent, "When stressed/rushed, I know what I want to communicate but don't do so clearly, point by point, thus the manager might not get a clear picture". Knowing how to communicate with a manager who is showing signs of stress is an important skill that many staff members have had to learn, as this interview respondent discusses, "I wait for the right moment before I speak to her as she is continually stressed". Another staff member agreed, "I sometimes leave a query over until the next day when she is less stressed". In general, questionnaire respondents demonstrated an awareness of how stress affected their ways of speaking, as in this example:

Particularly at stressful times when we are all under pressure - there have been times when I have taken offence to a tone or a comment which affects my interaction (on my part) with my manager for some time afterwards. The difficulty is that the tone or comment was probably not deliberate, but just as a result of incredible pressure to meet unmoveable deadlines.

Interviewees had different takes on stress. Most of them felt stressed at times during their jobs. Mary constantly has to deal with stress, saying of stress, “I invented it!” and Gertrude said, “No, look, I do stress a lot but it doesn’t affect my work that I don’t perform. I actually tend to work better under stress, like I am at the moment.” Rebecca can’t sleep when she is under too much pressure, as well as finding that it has an effect on the way she talks to her staff.

Interviewer: Tell me more about how you cope with stress and if it changes your verbal behaviour.

Rebecca: I think it does. I think when I’m very stressed I’m probably a bit abrupt as well, without intending to be. The other thing I find when I’m really stressed and pushed is I sometimes forget things. That’s why I carry this (pointing to a notepad). It impacts when I come home, I don’t sleep. But that’s my problem. There are times when I’m just run off my feet, who isn’t?

But Graeme and Sally have different takes on stress. Sally says that avoiding stress is about realising that one has choices and one can choose to succumb to stress or not.

I think stress, to a large extent is a very personal challenge. I think people have choices and a lot of people don’t realise the choices that they have. I think working in a university environment is less stressful, again, than working out there because I’ve seen how difficult it is to fire somebody. So even if you can’t get to that work that you know you should be doing, and as long as you have a clear conscience about why you can’t get to it, the chances are you won’t get fired for not doing it, I just think to myself well, why stress about it? You do as much as you can and that is my own personal philosophy. So I think it’s my own personal management skills that help me not get too stressed.

Similarly Graeme believes that stress is something that one can create or avoid, depending on how one sees oneself, as the person in charge of the overwhelming action, or as a victim of it.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about stress and how that will affect the way you talk.

Graeme: I generally don’t suffer from stress.

Interviewer: You’re very lucky.

Graeme: I think it’s more than luck, unless it’s something in the genes or what we’re born with etc. etc. But I think it has got to do with one’s approach to things and what causes stress. I think stress can be a power thing, in terms of, the more out of control you feel the more stressed you’re going to become, because you’re a victim of forces

over which you have little control. The more you feel that I can be an agent in this world, I do have the power and the capacity to make things happen and not just be a victim, the less stressed one is about that or caught up in that. So I think that's an issue. And I've got a strong belief in our capacity to make things happen. So I don't necessarily feel myself as a victim of greater things. On the other hand, I do believe there are forces greater than us of which we are a part. But I've learned to trust the process over the years so that I'm not too terrified by those, or worried about them. So, no, stress is not a great thing for me. It has been. It's something I've grown into more.

The challenge as a manager in a busy and often pressured work environment is to be able to take charge of things without feeling that things are taking charge of you. And the key to successful relationships is knowing how to deal with those around you when their behaviour changes. One staff member responded to the questionnaire question on body language with this comment:

It (body language) helps to assess mood, and knowing my boss well now allows me to judge whether frustration or excitement etc are directed at me, or simply a result of something else, so I don't take the wrong things personally, or assume that they are directed at me.

### **6.6.3. Space**

*"The space within becomes the reality of the building." – Frank Lloyd Wright*

Although the physical proximity of employees to one another and the physical space available has already been mentioned as a factor and discussed with the question of "openness", being physically unavailable for your staff or manager can cause difficulties with communication.

Another problem of communication flow is distance. Communication with those who share an office suite is much easier than it is with those who are in separate buildings. The usual geographical dispersion of a school district can create communication problems that should not be overlooked. (Campbell, Corbally & Nystrand, 1983:157).

One questionnaire respondent said "Being located on the far side of the building to the rest of the team - I don't make the effort to constantly integrate myself in their work and dialogues". Another respondent commented that,

Private offices mean that the non-team players do not emerge often enough to communicate with. It has confirmed my desire to push for structural/building changes as open-plan scenario would enhance the comms.

Another staff member from a different department confirms that being in closer proximity to one another aids communication flow, “We’re spread all over campus, so I think we could work better as a team by being in the same location, even though we have a meeting every 2 weeks.”

“We’re very short of office space at the university”, says Gertrude. And the university is growing, steadily, but increasingly. So the chances are the people will become more spread out and “out of touch” with one another as time progresses. Rebecca’s staff work the switchboard, so they can never leave the office and keep in touch, physically, with what is happening around campus. Rebecca feels she owes it to them to let them “get out” more, so that they are not just a “voice” to people. She says,

I feel they must go out and see campus. They are just a voice to most people. When I say to them the new AMM building, they say, “What?” Whereas I had to go and have a tour of the building. I just feel it’s important.

“Management by walking around” is one management theory that gained popularity a few years ago. It’s not enough to see one’s staff working in a well-oiled machine from the glass office far above all of it. The popularity of TV programmes like *Back to the Floor* demonstrate that managers walking around their own businesses and coming to grips with the basic services they provide is an extremely popular idea. If it attracts viewers on television, surely this idea would be a popular one in the work environment too.

Having a manager that walks around, or simply is available all the time (or most of it) makes a big difference. Sally says that one of the reasons she does not feel extremely stressed in her work environment is that she has direct access to her boss whenever she needs it, even though he is the head of the organisation.

The other reason why I’m possibly not as stressed as other people is because I have direct access to my boss almost any time. And that’s a huge support, that you know you can pick up the phone or pop down there, you know... he’s got an open-door policy and it’s not just for me, it’s for all the senior management and for all the heads

of department, in fact for anybody. A student can walk in and say, please can I talk, and he'll make a plan. So I think that also helps.

She also mentions that she is comfortable in her job because she knows that the organisation is solid, stable and secure, as is her role within it. Physical proximity to the head of the organisation may well assist her in this feeling, as she is well aware.

I think the fact that I have insight into the institution and know that it's a very stable and financially healthy and well-respected institution makes me feel a lot more secure in my job. I mean, somebody who's down working in Grounds and Gardens might not feel the same way. They might feel that their job is on the line and that, ja, that would make a person a lot more stressed. And how communication can help that, I don't know, except for us keeping on trying to get the message across that this is a stable organisation, it's a successful organisation, it's been around for a long time, it will continue to be. That it's a learning organisation, I think that's what we need to try and communicate more.

Should management be communicating more? It is clear that Sally, who has direct access to the organisation's ultimate manager, takes comfort from the knowledge she gains from this privileged position, as well as from the permissive attitude she feels she gets from her boss. But as an illustration of her point, Tom, who is, as Sandy guessed even though she had no idea of his participation in this study, is in Ground and Gardens, far away from the central university hub and feels frustrated with his physical and emotional distance to upper management. The lack of physical proximity to the boss certainly can't help.

The next chapter goes on to discuss some secrets of communication success from management communication literature as well as talking about what the university is currently doing with its organisational communication practices. It also talks more about leadership and how communication can help leaders and managers manage better.

## **Chapter 7: Drawing it all together**

This chapter attempts to review this research within a broader organisational perspective and draw in some literature discussed in previous chapters.

Why is it important to acknowledge the role of communication in management? Hopefully by now the readers will have no doubt in their minds as to its vital role. But to re-emphasise this point, here is a response from a questionnaire participant.

Without communication, everything would fall apart, not only in the workplace, but in our everyday lives. How would we teach our children right from wrong? How would we say how we feel? Or ask for a job to be done? I think communication is one of the most important things in life - it goes hand in hand with understanding. If we don't understand, how to we indicate that without communicating?

### **7.1 Management and communication**

So communication is undoubtedly important. It makes sense to say that any organisation concerned with improving the quality of its service must turn its focus to how people are getting messages across, both internally and externally. Barrett (2002:220) believes that

If management can be coached into realizing that employee communication is a key ingredient in becoming a high-performing company, they will more likely give it the time and energy it needs and deserves.

What is happening with communication at this organisation? It would appear that there are areas where communication is successful and enclaves of dissatisfied employees who used this questionnaire as an opportunity to vent their frustrations. The number of responses to this questionnaire (a 26% response rate) is a positive indication that managers and staff members want to know more about communication and this research is, as such, a step in the right direction. So, knowing that people want to know more, what is the organisation doing about communication, and what should it be doing? Fletcher (1999:156) stresses the importance of providing employees with a sense of the bigger picture:

Organisations cannot expect to be successful if internal communications are ineffective and employees are frustrated by an environment in which they feel completely uninformed and without direction.

Sally, who interacts closely with the head of the university under study, does not feel frustrated or uninformed. She says that knowing she works for a stable, financially secure, and well-respected organisation gives her confidence in the organisation and in her role within it. But not everyone at the organisation feels the same.

The challenge is to get the message of solidity, security and confidence to all employees across the campus and to all areas of the university's working life. This is not to say that the university is not trying to get messages across to its staff. It has a good internal communication newsletter for staff, as well as one for students. It has numerous email distribution lists that send vital messages from management right into the in-boxes of all staff members with computers. Circulars are distributed regularly by email and in printed forms in several languages to accommodate staff members for whom English is a second or even third language. There are flyers, posters, and notices attached to salary slips. And many savvy managers make good use of the grapevine to get information across informally as well as to receive information that they may not otherwise have access to. But there are still people who say they are not receiving the messages. This happens for several reasons. Firstly, there are some gate-keepers in place who believe that holding on to information and not passing it on gives them power. Secondly, people are opting not to receive the information. It is easier for them to say they didn't know than to try and find out what is happening, even if that is as simple as reading an email every second day from upper management. They choose instead to remove themselves from the generic staff mailing list.

So saying, there may be adequate ways of getting information from the top down, but what about feeding information up the chain? In departments and divisions where managers belong to management committees and sit on important boards and decision-making groups, the messages that are perceived to be important enough can be taken higher and acted upon. It is also easier for these managers to pass information about the bigger picture to their staff because they are more privy to this

information. But as the university spreads itself further and further away from a central administrative hub, departments spread out and lose contact with one another and the organisation's aims, as well as finding themselves in a position where they struggle to make anything happen and lack a "champion" to take on their causes.

In chapter 2 I quoted Bennis (in Hoogervorst (2004:300), saying that organizations are often "over-managed but under-led". While certain departments at the organisation have exceptional leaders, I believe that there is often not enough access to a "leader" figure. While the organisation's current head has an open-door policy not many people would take him up on this. As a student I made an appointment to see the Vice-Chancellor. As he was away from the office, I got to see the Vice-Principal instead. The policy was open-door enough to accommodate my request for an appointment, but how many people with problems are brave enough, or feel that their issues are important enough to take them right to the top? Perhaps the issue is not that there is not enough access to *a leader figure* as much as to *several leader figures throughout the chain*. This organisation is a bureaucracy. There is a definite hierarchy to be followed, which would explain why those at the bottom are reluctant to take up their issues with the person at the top. There are unwritten rules that prohibit jumping steps in the chain of command. Bolman & Deal (in Bush (2003:9) say that

Organisations which are over managed but under led eventually lose any sense of spirit or purpose... The challenge of modern organisations requires the objective perspective of the manager as well as the flashes of vision and commitment wise leadership provides.

I argue that in departments or divisions where that section's head possesses both leadership and management abilities, a sense of spirit or purpose lives on. But other departments lack the flashes of vision and commitment from a purpose-driven leader. These sections need someone else they can take their issues up with. The struggle is either to place a "leader" within the existing hierarchical structure, or to give people access to a leader with whom they can comfortably associate. For many employees the Vice-Chancellor is simply too much of a God-like figure to approach. After all, it is human nature to complain about a distant figure (like God) who does not answer prayers. But having to deal with a God on the ground would be a much more daunting

task. This is why prophets and priests play a vital role in many societies. Should we not have someone playing the role of an intermediary in a top-down, hierarchical system such as a university bureaucracy? In other South African organisations Fletcher (1999:157) found that

organisations are underestimating the importance of leadership development and do not understand that employees who are lacking the support and guidance of a strong leader corps cannot possibly be effective and motivated.

So how can organisations promote internal communication? Since the work of Parker Follett and Barnard in the human relations approach (1920-1940) (Hellriegel *et al.* 2001:59) management has been striving towards including the workforce in decision-making processes and problem-solving. Is there room for this approach in an organisation that still operates in a very hierarchical way?

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Van Staden *et al.* (2002:23) suggest several hints for more effective communication across levels in organisations. These include: constantly keeping communication routes open; encouraging and enabling lower-level staff to gain access to their superiors; and a shorter communication chain that avoids the broken-telephone effect and flattens the communication hierarchy pyramid.

This is precisely the kind of advice that this organisation needs. Middle managers need to be able to talk to their supervisors easily, and staff members must have access to their bosses as well as their bosses' bosses. But this will not happen without the organisation specifically paying attention to the facilitation of messages up the chain.

## **7.2. Motivation**

*"What does the word "work" mean to you? To some, it means unpleasantness, stress, and drudgery. To others, it means happiness, fulfilment, challenge and gratification." - Catherine Pulsifer*

Companies are learning to place more importance on the happiness and motivation of the employees in their organisations because happier staff are more motivated staff, and the more motivated a staff member is, the harder and smarter he or she will work.

A motivated employee is a happy employee and a happy employee creates a happier board of directors and a more positive bottom line. According to Sunter (1999:88)

One foxy English company measures the happiness of its workforces as part of an annual social audit and publishes the result. Imagine that – indexing happiness as well as productivity!

Kurt Lewin realised, many decades ago, that people need to feel valued in their jobs, a place where they spend a large percentage of their lives.

Work, he insisted, had ‘life value’. It gave meaning to a person’s existence... ‘The worker’, wrote Lewin, ‘wants his work to be rich, wide and Protean, not crippling and narrow. Work should not limit personal potential but develop it. Work can involve love, beauty, and the joy of creating’ (Lewin in Weisbord, 1991:76).

It is rare, in this day and age, that people come to work each day with a sense of anticipation and return home with a sense of satisfaction. But there are a number of people who work at this organisation for whom work nevertheless has a deeper meaning. One interviewee indicated that although she enjoys her leave time, she is happy to come back to work at the end of the holiday because she misses her work and her colleagues. Another interviewee, while currently dissatisfied with his work and frustrated with the lack of acknowledgement he is receiving from the top managers of the organisation (his bosses), nevertheless motivates himself to come to work to make a contribution and to improve people’s lives in some small way.

While managers can and should try to contribute to the meaning that their employees can get out of their work, it is important to find the right way to do it.

### **7.3. Management versus leadership**

*“The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.”  
– Ralph Nader*

There is a subtle distinction between managing and leading. There are managers at the organisation, such as Rebecca, who clearly show tendencies towards leadership, trying to develop their staff, encouraging them, putting their needs first and trying to fulfil their greater emotional needs. And yet they would never classify themselves as leaders. On the other hand there are academics who call themselves leaders and

struggle with fitting in management tasks, although these are required as part of their job function. As one questionnaire respondent put it

It is perhaps inappropriate for high-flying academics to take on managerial positions. They are good at their academic activities (which contribute to the University's reputation as an institution of academic excellence), and management and related issues are not necessarily their speciality.

To me it would seem that a manager, especially someone in middle-management, can choose to concern themselves only with the day-to-day functioning of their environment, and academics are not often able to specialise in the areas of both management and leadership. These academics/managers are content to “allocate human and material resources and direct the operations of a department or an entire organisation” (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1996:5). But a leader, even one who does not intuitively recognise him- or herself as possessing leadership abilities still, “influences others to act toward the attainment of a goal” (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1996:445).

Tom is one such leader who sees his role as creating other leaders. He understands that often staff members who appear to be trouble-makers are leaders looking for a place to lead. He sees his role as developing those with leadership potential in different ways, using their strengths to encourage them to be all they can be. Tom says that

Some leaders are scatter-brain[ed] and they're like butterflies. And butterflies can't be harnessed, because you damage them. Whereas a horse, you can put a bit in its mouth, and you can point it where it has to go and it will do that. And we have those kind of leaders too, who are happy to be harnessed, and they want to be steered, they want to be directed, but once you've steered them they'll keep going.

Tom subscribes to the view that if you “Label someone a leader – give him or her the leader's role – and a conscientious person tries to be or do what the label implies” (Heifetz in Elgin, 2000:11).

#### **7.4. Comparing the results of this study with published research**

The findings I discovered in this research, namely: that motivation and praise play an important role in developing relationships with staff; that it is important to have respect for one another and one another's different languages and culture, and to

listen, really listen, to what people are saying; that it is important to be involved in management and communication as a team and to communicate often, using technology when appropriate and to put things in writing to avoid misunderstandings, are duplicated in management texts focusing on communication. For example, Gibson and Hodgetts (1986:393-395) stress the importance of giving positive reinforcement, being open and honest, taking a genuine interest in one's employees, communicating frequently, listening, soliciting employee feedback and setting a good example. Adey and Andrew (1990:33-34) recommend that managers must use face-to-face communication, be sensitive to other people's backgrounds, use direct, unambiguous language, repeat instructions if necessary, be a good listener, and be supportive.

Similarly, the frustrations experienced, particularly by managers who feel they can't communicate up the chain, are also repeated in published research. Again, Tourish and Hargie found that staff felt a need for information and upward communication, and believed it was important for senior managers to be visible and involved, they also stressed the need for proper communication channels and the power of the grapevine (1998:179-180). Similar findings were repeated again in Quinn and Hargie (2004:146-158), Lotter, Ripley and Reynolds (2004:10) and Tourish and Hargie (1996:46), while Thornhill *et al.* (1996:19) have suggestions to improve communication. They recommend that consistent, credible and employee-focused communication be practiced in order to obtain a commitment to quality in the organisation.

Systems, including communication systems, are rarely 100% perfect. As a questionnaire respondent pointed out, even though s/he is happy with the communication in their department, things could always be better. "We have a good communication system in my place of work and feel that even though there is always room for improvement in anything - our department comes out tops!"

So what are the secrets to communication success? Lunenberg & Ornstein have a few suggestions of ways to promote effective communication (1991:189). They recommend that you view everything you do as a form of communication, be aware that communication is often the first step in preventing and solving problems, want to communicate with others, model effective communication, adapt to the

communications needs of others, want others to communicate amongst themselves, provide opportunities for communication, provide in-service programs on communication and reward effective communication.

There is room at this organisation for a greater focus on communication, particularly between managers and their staff and also in departments where people are further away from the decision-making processes and committees, physically and emotionally.

Reuss and Silvis also share some insights and recommendations on how to improve policies and objectives of organisational communication. They give the following advice: 1) Establish regular communication with all employees, 2) distribute regular downward communication at least once a week, 3) have a publication including in-depth coverage of internal and external issues, 4) issue a special management publication to address the special needs of managers, 5) emphasise subjects relating to corporate objectives, 6) hold regular meetings between management and employees and encourage questions and open discussion, especially regarding the bigger picture, 7) give employees information regarding the business review (finances, etc.), 8) encourage supervisors to meet regularly with employees, 9) communicate information about the organisation to employees no later than it is distributed to outside news media, and 10) encourage employees to ask questions, conduct surveys to evaluate communication effectiveness and evaluate the objectives annually to ensure they are in line with organisational objectives (Reuss and Silvis, 1981:10).

I believe that all ten of these recommendations are in place, in spirit, at the university under study. The challenge is to find leaders within each department and section who will take up each recommendation and hold their staff and managers accountable for their communication practices. Someone needs to be the person to encourage employees to ask questions, conduct surveys, hold regular meetings and ask about the business review.

James Humes (reference unknown) says that the art of communication is the language of leadership. As the university travels forward into the next century with a new leader, it needs to take stock of its current practices, particularly with regards to

communication in order to learn how to speak the language of leadership more successfully.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

“This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning”. – Winston Churchill

Reaching the end of a journey is a satisfying experience, but one simultaneously fraught with potential disappointment. Firstly, there is the sadness that comes with a satisfying task reaching its end. This is also often accompanied by doubt in the validity and usefulness of one’s study, in the scope and breadth, in the way in which the data is put forth, and a myriad of other small apprehensions.

In order to diminish any potential doubt and help this journey reach a satisfying conclusion, I will now review a few of the central themes that we have visited along the way and try to bring it all together so that we leave one another with a sense of accomplishment rather than dissatisfaction.

### 8.1. Review of chapter contents

The thesis began by introducing the research focus on management communication from my personal history. To re-cap, I approached this study because of a personal interest in communication developed largely by my family and an emerging interest in management as I observed its successes and failures in the organisation at which I was employed.

The thesis title, **Communication strategies in management: a case study of interpersonal manager-staff communication at a South African university**, aimed to answer three questions, namely:

4. What role do managers and staff think communication plays in their work relationships and how do they use communication in their daily working lives?
5. What do managers and staff perceive to be effective and ineffective communication strategies?
6. What strategies can they suggest that might be used to promote or enhance effective communication?

I started investigating this topic by looking at communication as a central function of human existence, defining a working role of management communication and using

Rasberry & Lemoine's (1986) communication model to place communication in the central role in management that it deserves.

In chapter 2 I discussed how organisations work and how humans use communication within an organisation.. This subject was then followed by a discussion of the importance of management communication in management theories across the decades and an attempt to trace communication in management from the era of scientific management, through the human relations approach towards post-modern approaches which consider language to be at the very essence of human existence.

After a brief glimpse at social theory and language in society I moved on to look at communication in the context of study, pointing out some subtle distinctions between management and leadership. I then took a walk through motivation theories and tried to grapple with language, power and misunderstandings before noting how language functions in organisations. A look at current research ended Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 began with a description of our era of the "epilogue or after-word" (Hodgkinson in Greenfield, 1986:xi) and led on to a discussion of the interpretive paradigm, how all research is, actually, interpretive, and how the strength of this research lies in acknowledging the central role that the researcher plays in creating meaning from participants' descriptions of their management lives and communication occurrences. In describing my use of a case study approach I explained that studying a single case at an instance in time creates access to a unique situation and looking at this case interpretively helps participants reflect on their actions. I then touched on the uniqueness of this organisation, an academic institution that hosts many of its students on its grounds and employs staff to cover a multitude of functions from administrative to academic to aesthetic, and the challenges associated with its unique situation. Using an online questionnaire and interviews were ways of collecting data that could capture a wide range of perceptions, while still honing in on individual responses. And although it was difficult to select individuals to interview, simply because so many interesting people were willing to give their opinions on this subject, it was possible to select 6 respondents who shared a wealth of information and personal experience on the subject of management

communication. Finally in this chapter I acknowledged this study's weaknesses and discussed issues of generalisability, validity and reliability.

The next chapter moved on to describe the practicalities of data description: the questionnaire design, testing and implementation, contents, and results as well as touching briefly on interviews.

Chapter 5 began the complex process of data discussion. Because both quantitative and qualitative data needed to be discussed and brought together in a unifying whole it was decided to divide the data discussion into two chapters. Chapter 5 dealt with quantitative data from questionnaires as well as bringing in some textual data from questionnaire responses to explain numerical results while Chapter 6 tackled interview findings and data from open-ended questionnaire questions. The discussion revolved around issues of general communication; awareness of communication; how much to know; and effective communication including: motivation and praise, the role of listening, building relationships, respect, language and culture, teamwork, communicating often, the use of email and technology and the importance of putting things in writing. It also included a discussion on challenges to effective communication namely: time, stress and space.

Chapter 7 was a unifying chapter, attempting to marry theory and research findings into a conclusive whole by re-examining issues brought up in Chapter 2 and comparing and contrasting them with research findings from Chapters 5 and 6. This chapter took theoretical knowledge and applied it to current research, harmonising management communication theory with the practice of management communication in a tertiary-education organisation.

## **8.2. Findings**

By its very nature, management is a complex process and, therefore, is a multidisciplinary field of study. Management is a combination of science, art, philosophy, social sciences, psychology and industrial psychology (Pindur *et al.* 1995: 75).

It is appropriate that a university that studies science, art, philosophy, social science, psychology and industrial psychology pay attention to management, and communication as an aspect of the complex process that is management. But is this university learning its own lessons?

It appears that managers and staff at the university under study are communicating differently in different environments. There are areas where staff are incredibly happy with the communication relationships they have with their managers and they attribute this success to several factors, some of which were discussed in detail in the research findings. Firstly, being praised for a job well done and being constantly motivated played a large role in encouraging staff members to work more effectively and generally made them happier to achieve a task. There were instances where staff also motivated themselves, but even they felt that having an encouraging boss would make them happier to undertake requested tasks. Having an open relationship including an open-door policy, where one could talk to the boss as frequently as necessary, also encouraged a positive communication environment. Both managers and staff felt that it was very important to listen to one another and to treat one another with respect. Respect goes both ways, up and down the communication channels and power structure. Often both managers and staff members indicated that “treating others as you would like to be treated” was a centrally important attitude to promote open relationships and communication. Using technology effectively also had a positive effect on getting the message across and putting messages in writing once they had been discussed also contributed towards keeping instructions clear and in the open. People also found it important to respect the languages and cultures of others that were not their own. Learning more about each other, including how to speak different languages, even if it was only a few words, showed an interest in the person with whom one works. Lastly, building a team, encouraging open discussion, accepting criticism and encouraging people to be involved in decision-making processes were also successful in motivating staff and encouraging them to communicate openly.

Aspects of manager-staff relationships that discouraged open communication were a lack of time which often caused stress, and difficulties with physical space. Although other areas that were raised under the question dealing with managers’ and staff

members' weaknesses were not discussed in this section these were mainly the corollaries of successful aspects of communication as listed in the previous paragraph. For example, I felt that issues mentioned as challenges to effective communication such as not listening, not showing respect, being aggressive or too scared were adequately covered in discussions of positive factors contributing to communication success and, as such, I did not discuss their opposites under the negative factors.

There was a general awareness that although communication is extremely successful in aspects of the university, in other areas people definitely need to work on it. Several managers felt dissatisfied with senior management, feeling that they were not being acknowledged for the work they do, or that there was no way of making themselves heard up the chain. There was also an awareness that communication, while important, was not really a focus of university management or policy.

### **8.3. Recommendations**

#### **8.3.1. Recommendations for practice**

Reflecting on one's communication practices is an extremely useful tool for any manager who wants to use communication as a powerful way of motivating staff and getting buy-in. Weisbord (1991:86) says that "If you want to be an effective leader you need to do more than study group dynamics. You also need to learn more about yourself." But knowing how to speak to other people is not only something that managers should do. Chapter 2 discussed in great detail the importance of communication in management as well as the vital role that communication plays in human interaction. Paying attention to one's speech patterns and learning ways of giving and receiving messages so that greater understanding is reached more easily and quickly is an important lesson for each and every single human being. Haslam (2002:14) stresses that

Communication skills are essential business tools, as well as a prerequisite for management of global economic organisations and effective government in complex society. Communication underpins Western values and ensures that, through feedback processes,

organisations appreciate the different value sets that can impact upon the success or failure of policies and enterprises.

It is my recommendation that not only should managers take heed of the principles behind communicating effectively, as described in this research, but that every human being should be taught to understand whether what they think they are saying is coming out in the way they think it is. People also need to learn to match others' words with their intentions so that communication becomes less of an esoteric art and more of a popular one. Peters (1999:265) stresses the need for speakers of a language to understand that what they are saying may not be what the listener is hearing, and vice-versa.

The image of conversation as two speakers taking turns in order to move progressively toward fuller understanding of each other masks two deeper facts: that all discourse, however many the speakers, must bridge the gap between one turn and the next, and that the intended addressee may never be identical with the actual one.

### **8.3.2. Recommendations for research**

In terms of conducting future research on topic I recommend a combination of large and small scale data collection techniques. Using findings from open-ended questions to questionnaires as well as in-depth interview responses allowed the construction of a bigger picture while still retaining a small-scale, personal feel. I also believe that using online questionnaires is a useful tool, particularly when one is looking at groups of people who spend most of their working lives in front of a computer. Furthermore, the impact of sending emails to individuals, inviting them to participate in research, cannot be underestimated. So, my recommendations are that research into management communication continue in a similar vein to this study, but delve even deeper into specific aspects. Since this was an exploratory study it needed to touch on issues only briefly, particularly in the questionnaire. I would be encouraged to see future research that focuses on, say, body language in management communication, or the subtle role between leaders' and managers' use of communication strategies. Above all, I recommend that management communication continue to be studied! The value of finding out what is really going on in one's own organisation cannot be underestimated. The communication audit plays an important role in discovering this,

but personal, in-depth research as well as general interviews can examine aspects of organisational communication that a general communication audit cannot.

#### **8.4. Limitations**

One of the most disappointing limitations of this research for me is the fact that it is not possible to explore many of the aspects of communication which emerged during the study. The first is the issue of culture in communication. This topic has great potential for study but was simply beyond the scope of this research. Management communication and the subtle link with culture is an area that can most certainly be more fully explored in future studies.

It would also be useful to explore the link between leadership and communication. Is the ability to communicate easily and effectively a trait of leaders? Are there managers who can communicate vision and motivate staff but still do not fit the bill of a real “leader”? These and other issues around the link between communication and leadership would be a fascinating study but one that is, again, beyond the scope of this research.

This research has also not been able to address factors that discourage or negatively affect communication in any great detail. There is certainly room for further research in this area.

There are other limitations to this research as well. Firstly, since this research is conducted in an interpretive paradigm it is possible that there will be those who dismiss these results as not scientific enough. It is hoped that they read this research with an open mind and a reflective attitude towards their own communication before they voice this accusation. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that a case study is, by its very nature, focused on a very limited sample. Further research will, once again, be able to strengthen the applicability of these results by drawing on the research findings to come out of it and apply them to future research.

It must also be acknowledged that this case took place in a fairly unique environment. It is entirely possible that some of the findings of this research may not be applicable

to other larger centres or countries with different challenges to their communication practices. I do believe, however, that although the research was conducted in a fairly unduplicatable venue that the findings are more general to human nature because of the scope of research (several hundred participants) and the collation between responses of a fairly surface nature (questionnaire responses) and those that focus in more depth from interviews with participants who really discussed the meaty issues they experienced in their daily communication activities.

Other limitations to this research must also be acknowledged, including what this research did not do, where the findings were inadequate, and whether a different approach would provide more useful results.

Firstly, this research did not aim to provide statistically viable numerical results. While a few numerical questions were used, these were not statistically valid, nor were they intended to be. In addition, this research did not aim to give a very broad overview of communication practices at the organisation under study, but to look at a specific instance of communication, between managers and staff members. I cannot make generalisations for all staff members, or for the unique relationship between academics and their heads of departments, or claim that these research findings represent the communication situation between *all* staff members at the organisation. It is simply a useful way of providing a slice of life.

There were instances where findings did not provide sufficient information. A data glitch in question 2 of the questionnaire meant that I could not numerically analyse how managers and staff members communicate, i.e. via email, telephone or face-to-face. Perhaps future studies can look at the mode of communication in greater detail. Once again, this study was also inadequate for generalisation purposes, but that was also not its intention.

Would a different approach provide more useful results? If one is looking for statistical, quantifiable, repeatable data this study will not give this information. So another study attempted through a different research paradigm will certainly give different results. Whether these results will more useful or not is up to the reader to decide. I hope that a reader approaching this text from an interpretive perspective will

find results reflect individuals practice and provide sufficient in-depth interpretation of the meaning that managers and staff make of their communication practices with one another.

## 8.5. Conclusion

In concluding this research I would like to direct you to look at your own communication practices. Whether you are a manager or managed by someone else, whether you believe you possess strong or weak communication or leadership skills, may this research serve to challenge you to examine your own assumptions, behaviours and expectations of communication.

Bush (2003:17) impresses upon the reader the importance of acknowledging both the theory and practice of educational management, saying:

In an increasingly global economy, an educated workforce is vital to maintain and enhance competitiveness. Society expects schools, colleges and universities to prepare people for employment in a rapidly changing environment. Teachers, and their leaders and managers require greater understanding, skill and resilience to sustain their institutions. Heads, principals and senior staff need an appreciation of the theory, as well as the practice of educational management.

Understanding the role that communication can play in facilitating management in educational institutions, as well as further afield, gives today's manager access to a powerful magical amulet that will never lose its potency. If work has life value, as Lewin (in Weisbord, 1991:756) asserts and it "[gives] meaning to a person's existence", then we owe it to ourselves and those we interact with for the vast majority of our waking lives to treat our work and all aspects of it with respect. Understanding the power of words, non-verbal messages, the importance of creating and maintaining respect and building relationships by listening and motivating, as well as the importance of providing opportunities to communicate frequently and openly, gives both manager and non-manager an unequalled advantage. I challenge you to, as Lewin (in Weisbord, 1991:75) puts it, to "put burrs under complacent saddles, agitat[e] people to question assumptions, use common sense, and find out what works by *trying it* (their emphasis)", particularly with regards to communication.

Because “If you want to be an effective leader you need to do more than study group dynamics. You also need to learn more about yourself” (Weisbord, 1991:86).

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## Appendix I

Rasberry and Lemoine's (1986: 27)

### Model of Effective Managerial Communication

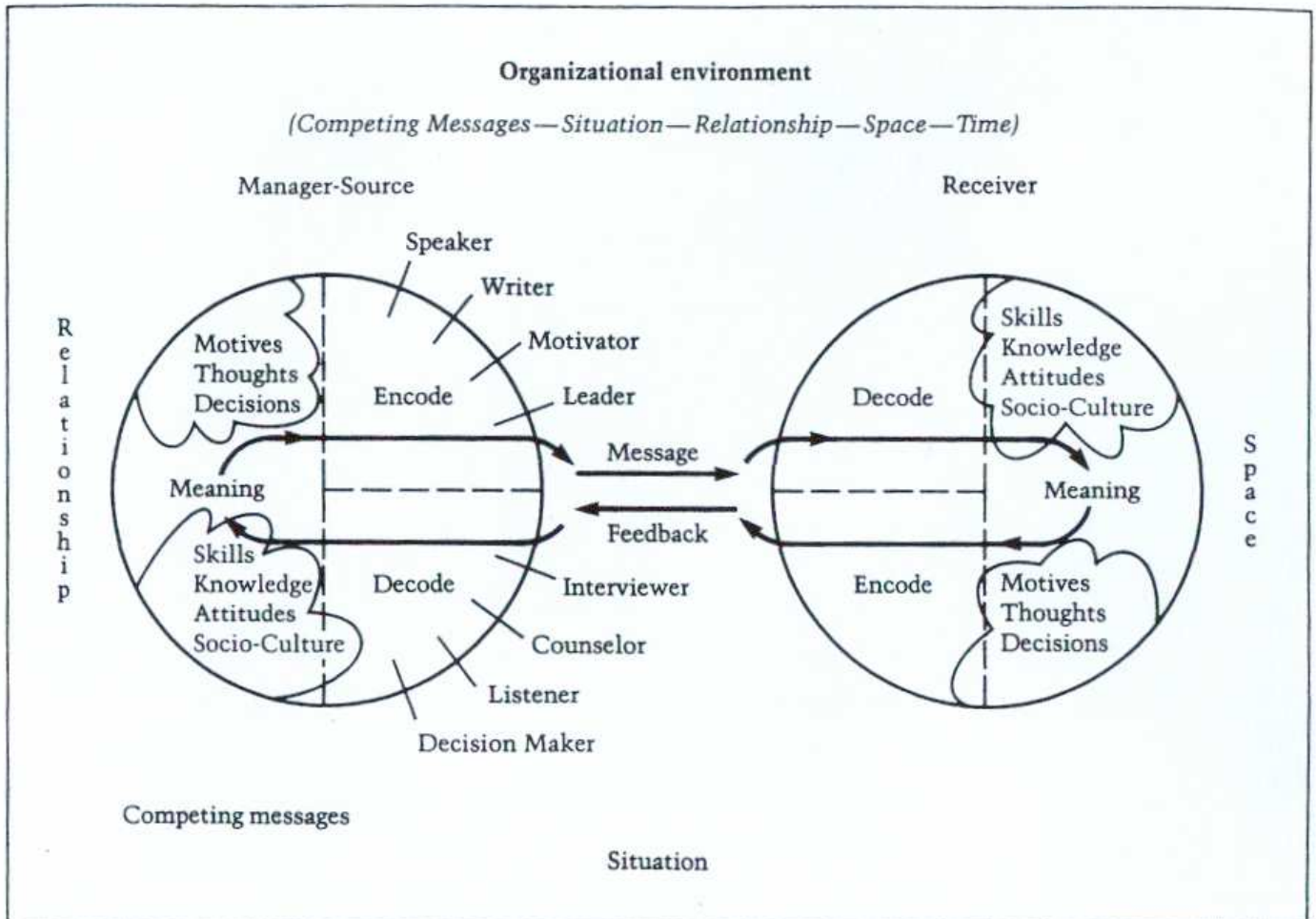


Figure 2.2 • A Model for Effective Managerial Communication

## Appendix IIa

### Manager - Staff Communication at X University

I have been given permission by X University to conduct research into communication at this organisation, as part of my Masters degree in Educational Leadership and Management.

The aim of my research is to gather a range of perspectives on communication practices at X University between managers and their staff which will help gain a larger understanding of communication in general at the organisation.

I would appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the attached questionnaire as honestly and openly as possible.

Please note that there is space at the end of the questionnaire for general comments. Use this space for anything else you may wish to add.

If you have any queries concerning this questionnaire or research, please do not hesitate to contact me at [g.balarin@ru.ac.za](mailto:g.balarin@ru.ac.za) or at 084 517 9504.

**Please note that all information will be treated as confidential.  
Your anonymity will be preserved throughout.**

Please click on the link below that best describes your level of responsibility.

**Manager**

**Staff Member (who does not manage anyone)**

**Manager and Staff Member**

**Manager Questionnaire**

You have indicated that you are **a Manager who is not directly managed by anyone else**. If this is incorrect, please click [here](#) to go back and choose the correct option.

Please select the Department, Division or Unit where you work from the list below.



## Manager Questionnaire

You have indicated that you are a Manager in the Finance Division. If this is not the case, please go **back** and change your selection as appropriate.

This questionnaire is intended to be answered by those who **only** manage staff and are not managed in turn by others.

There are 14 questions and it should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire, depending on how much information you give. Please give as much information as you can and feel free to make comments in the section provided at the end.

Each question will be presented on a different page which is accessed by pressing the "Next Question" button. The questions are numbered in such a way as to show how far through the questionnaire you are. The final question will have a "Submit" button which will take you out of the questionnaire after saving your last answer.

Please complete the questionnaire in one sitting - as the questionnaire is anonymous, it is not possible to save your place and return to the questionnaire at a later time.

## Manager Questionnaire

### Question 1 of 14:

What, in your opinion, is the **primary role of communication** in organisations?

Choose 3 of the following statements which you think best answer this question and rank them from 1 to 3 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important.  
(Enter the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the boxes next to your choices.)

- To deliver instructions
- To give facts and information needed to be able to do the basic job
- To give information about the higher purposes of the organisation
- To motivate staff to work harder or feel part of the organisation
- To assist with helping or resolving **work-related** issues

- To assist with helping or resolving **interpersonal** issues
- To enable dialogue and team-building

If you feel the role of communication is not adequately covered by the above statements, please indicate below what you think it is:

### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 2 of 14

In an average week **how do you communicate** with your staff?

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

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

- E-mail
- Informal meetings
- Formal meetings
- Written documentation that is not e-mail
- By telephone
- Other:

### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 3 of 14:

In general, **how much information** do you feel you give to your staff?

- Not enough information to do the job
- Just enough information to do the job
- More information than is required to do the job

Please explain your choice:

## Manager Questionnaire

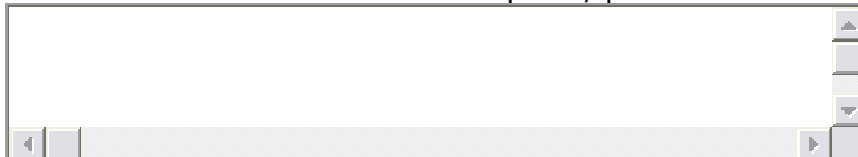
### Question 4 of 14:

**How open** are the **lines of interpersonal (face-to-face) communication** between yourself and your staff?

Select the most applicable statement(s).

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

If these statements are not adequate, please comment below.



## Manager Questionnaire

### Question 5 of 14:

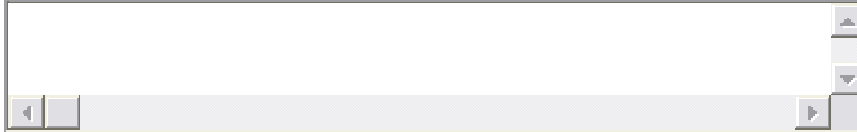
What sort of **feedback** do you give to your staff?

Select the most applicable option(s).

- Congratulations on a job well done
- Encouragement to keep going or to do better
- Criticism when a job is not done to your satisfaction
- Coaching on the job
- Suggestions for personal benefit (e.g. information about further training opportunities, etc.)

- Personal information about yourself
- Formal evaluation as required

If there are any other types of feedback you use, please list them below.



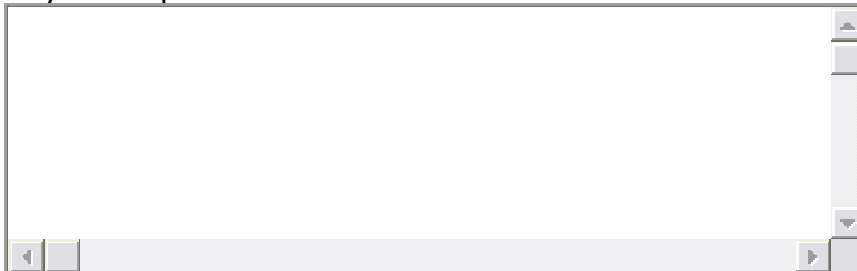
### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 6 of 14:

Do you think that the **way you talk** to your staff (for example, your word choices, tone of voice etc., i.e. **verbal factors**) can or does affect their response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



### Manager Questionnaire

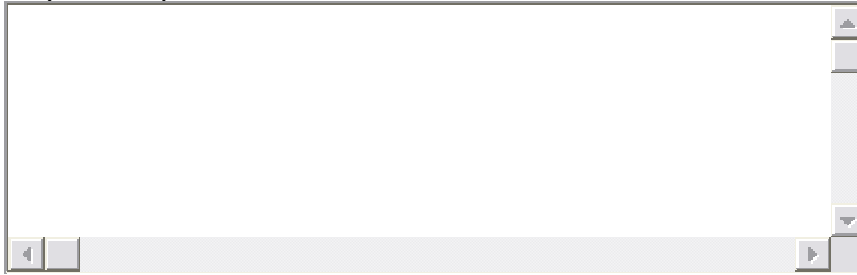
#### Question 7 of 14:

Do you think that your **body language** when talking to your staff (e.g. crossed arms, looking at the floor, hands on hips i.e. **non-verbal** factors) can or does affect their response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it

in your explanation.

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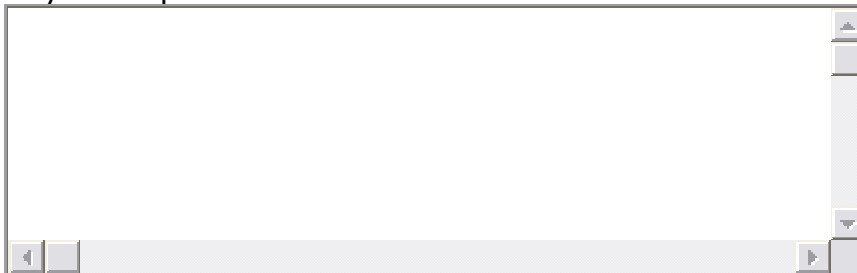
### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 8 of 14:

Do you think **you** could **motivate your staff** differently by talking to them in different ways (e.g. by shouting, persuading or encouraging)?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. It is intended for the user to provide a specific incident that elaborates on their answer to the question above.

### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 9 of 14:

Think about any **strengths** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

**List three main strengths in the way you communicate with** those you manage.

Three empty rectangular text boxes stacked vertically, each with a thin black border. They are intended for the user to list three main strengths in the way they communicate with those they manage.

List three main strengths in the way those you manage communicate with you.

### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 10 of 14:

Think about any **weaknesses** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

List three main weaknesses in the way you communicate with those you manage.

List three main weaknesses in the way those you manage communicate with you.

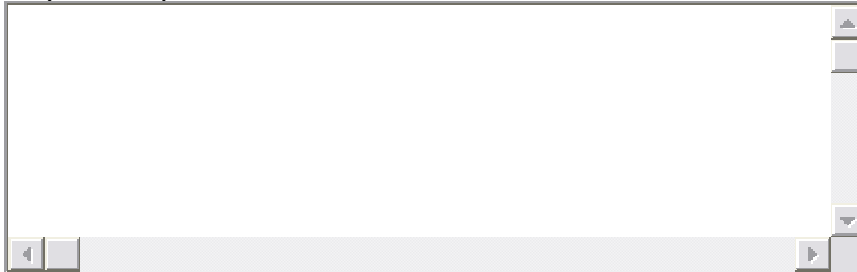
### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 11 of 14:

Would you generally describe communication in your department, division or section as **effective** or **ineffective**?

- Effective
- Ineffective

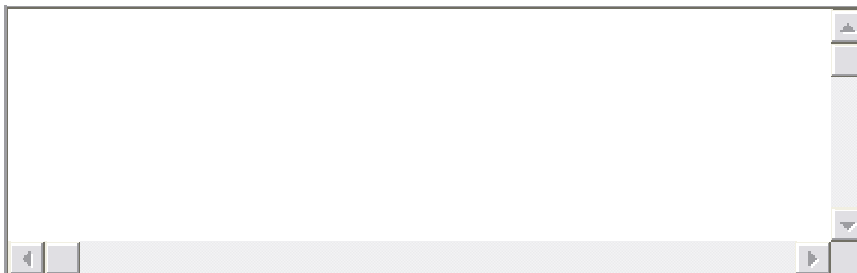
Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.

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### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 12 of 14:

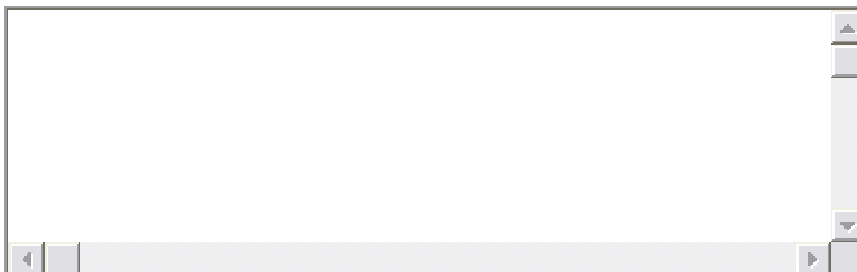
Has this questionnaire made you think or reflect more on your communication practices at work? If so, how?

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray border. It has a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, indicating it is a scrollable area for providing a reflection on communication practices.

### Manager Questionnaire

#### Question 13 of 14:

Do you have any comments or anything else you would like to add? Please answer in the space below.

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray border. It has a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, indicating it is a scrollable area for providing additional comments.

### Manager Questionnaire

**Question 14 of 14:**

Would you be willing to be interviewed about your responses to this questionnaire in order to help further with this research? **Please remember that if you are interviewed, all information will continue to be treated as confidential and your anonymity will be preserved throughout.**

Yes

No

If you are willing to be interviewed, please enter your contact details below.

**Name:**

**Email:**

**Telephone:**

## Appendix IIb

### Manager - Staff Communication at X University

I have been given permission by X University to conduct research into communication at this organisation, as part of my Masters degree in Educational Leadership and Management.

The aim of my research is to gather a range of perspectives on communication practices at X University between managers and their staff which will help gain a larger understanding of communication in general at the organisation.

I would appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the attached questionnaire as honestly and openly as possible.

Please note that there is space at the end of the questionnaire for general comments. Use this space for anything else you may wish to add.

If you have any queries concerning this questionnaire or research, please do not hesitate to contact me at [g.balarin@ru.ac.za](mailto:g.balarin@ru.ac.za) or at 084 517 9504.

**Please note that all information will be treated as confidential. Your anonymity will be preserved throughout.**

Please click on the link below that best describes your level of responsibility.

**Manager**

**Staff Member (who does not manage anyone)**

**Manager and Staff Member**

#### Staff Member Questionnaire

You have indicated that you are a **Staff Member who does not manage anyone else**. If this is incorrect, please click [here](#) to go back and choose the correct option.

Please select the Department, Division or Unit where you work from the list below.

#### Staff Member Questionnaire

You have indicated that you are a Staff Member in the Sol Plaatje Media Leadership Institute. If this is not the case, please go **back** and change your selection as appropriate.

This questionnaire is intended to be answered by those who are managed by others and are **not managers themselves**.

There are 14 questions and it should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire, depending on how much information you give. Please give as much information as you can and feel free to make comments in the section provided at the end.

Each question will be presented on a different page which is accessed by pressing the "Next Question" button. The questions are numbered in such a way as to show how far through the questionnaire you are. The final question will have a "Submit" button which will take you out of the questionnaire after saving your last answer.

Please complete the questionnaire in one sitting - as the questionnaire is anonymous, it is not possible to save your place and return to the questionnaire at a later time.

### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 1 of 14:

What, in your opinion, is the **primary role of communication** in organisations?

Choose 3 of the following statements which you think best answer this question and rank them from 1 to 3 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important.

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

- To deliver instructions
- To give facts and information needed to be able to do the basic job
- To give information about the higher purposes of the organisation
- To motivate staff to work harder or feel part of the organisation
- To assist with helping or resolving **work-related** issues
- To assist with helping or resolving **interpersonal** issues
- To enable dialogue and team-building

If you feel the role of communication is not adequately covered by the above statements, please indicate below what you think it is:

### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 2 of 14:

In an average week **how do you communicate** with your manager?

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

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

- E-mail
- Informal meetings
- Formal meetings
- Written documentation that is not e-mail
- By telephone
- Other:

### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 3 of 14:

In general, **how much information** do you feel your manager gives you?

- Not enough information to do the job
- Just enough information to do the job
- More information than is required to do the job

Please explain your choice:

### Staff Member Questionnaire

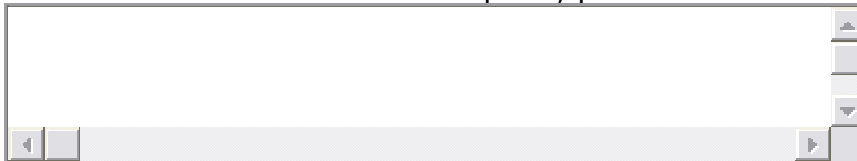
#### Question 4 of 14:

**How open** are the **lines of interpersonal (face-to-face) communication** between yourself and your manager?

Select the most applicable statement(s).

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

If these statements are not adequate, please comment below.



### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 5 of 14:

What sort of **feedback** does your manager give you?

Select the most applicable option(s).

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

If there are any other types of feedback they use, please list them below.



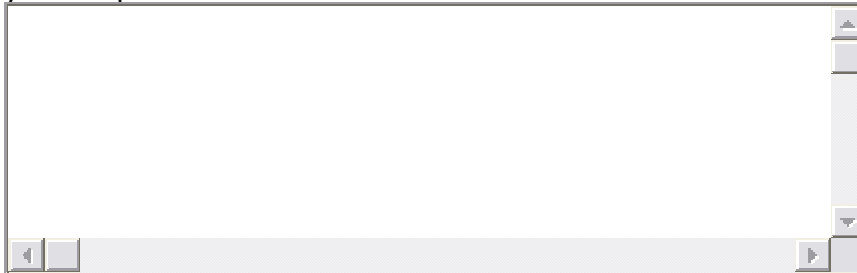
### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 6 of 14:

Do you think that the **way your manager talks to you** (for example, their word choices, tone of voice etc., i.e. **verbal factors**) can or does affect your response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



### Staff Member Questionnaire

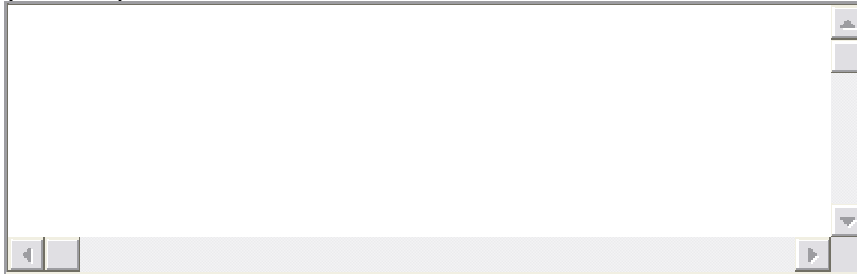
#### Question 7 of 14:

Do you think that the **body language** your manager uses when talking to you (e.g. crossed arms, looking at the floor, hands on hips i.e. **non-verbal** factors) can or does affect your response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in

your explanation.

A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. It is intended for the user to provide an explanation for their previous answer.

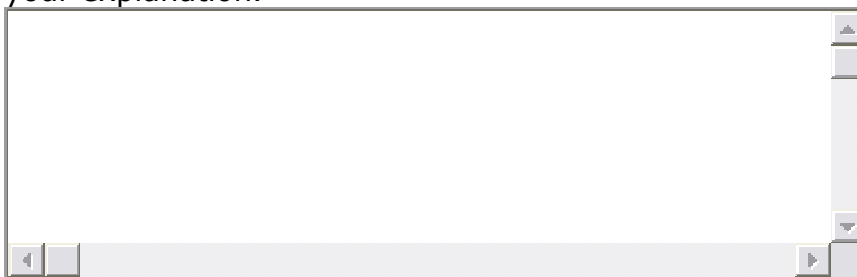
### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 8 of 14:

Do you think **your manager** could **motivate you** differently by talking to you in different ways (e.g. by shouting, persuading or encouraging)?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.

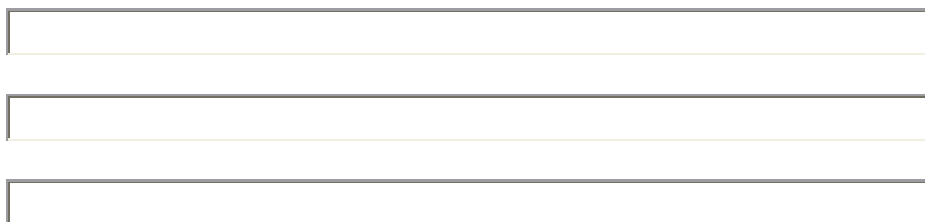
A large, empty rectangular text box with a light gray border and a vertical scrollbar on the right side. It is intended for the user to elaborate on their answer to Question 8.

### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 9 of 14:

Think about any **strengths** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

**List three main strengths in the way you communicate with your manager.**

Three empty rectangular text boxes stacked vertically, each with a light gray border. They are intended for the user to list three main strengths in communication.

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

### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 10 of 14:

Think about any **weaknesses** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

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

**List three main weaknesses in the way** your manager **communicates with** you.

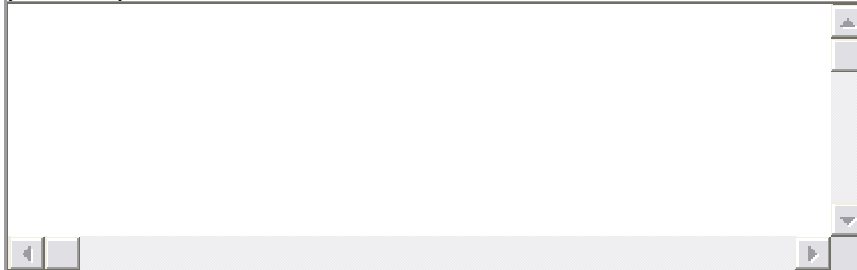
### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 11 of 14:

Would you generally describe communication in your department, division or section as **effective** or **ineffective**?

- Effective
- Ineffective

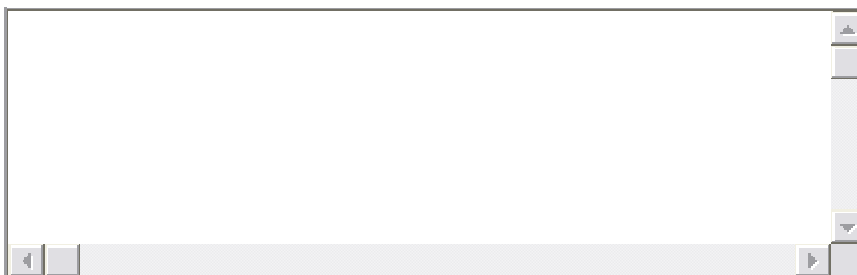
Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



### Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 12 of 14:

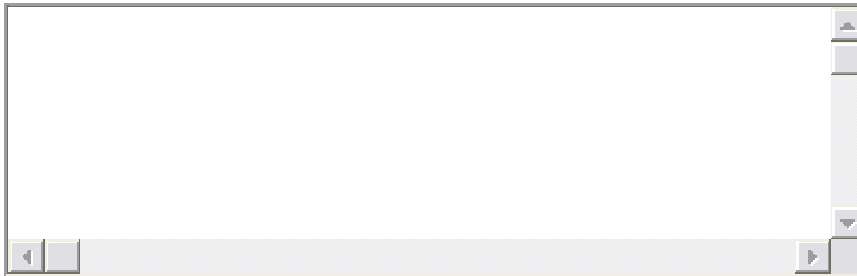
Has this questionnaire made you think or reflect more on your communication practices at work? If so, how?



### Staff Member Questionnaire

**Question 13 of 14:**

Do you have any comments or anything else you would like to add?  
Please answer in the space below.



**Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 14 of 14:**

Would you be willing to be interviewed about your responses to this questionnaire in order to help further with this research? **Please remember that if you are interviewed, all information will continue to be treated as confidential and your anonymity will be preserved throughout.**

- Yes
- No

If you are willing to be interviewed, please enter your contact details below.

**Name:**

**Email:**

**Telephone:**

## Appendix IIc

### Manager - Staff Communication at X University

I have been given permission by X University to conduct research into communication at this organisation.

The aim of my research is to gather a range of perspectives on communication practices at X University between managers and their staff which will help gain a larger understanding of communication in general at the organisation.

I would appreciate it if you would take the time to complete the attached questionnaire as honestly and openly as possible.

Please note that there is space at the end of the questionnaire for general comments. Use this space for anything else you may wish to add.

If you have any queries concerning this questionnaire or research, please do not hesitate to contact me at [g.balarin@ru.ac.za](mailto:g.balarin@ru.ac.za) or at 084 517 9504.

**Please note that all information will be treated as confidential.  
Your anonymity will be preserved throughout.**

Please click on the link below that best describes your level of responsibility.

**Manager**

**Staff Member (who does not manage anyone)**

**Manager and Staff Member**

### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

You have indicated that you are **both a Manager and Staff Member**. If this is incorrect, please click [here](#) to go back and choose the correct option.

Please select the Department, Division or Unit where you work from the list below.

### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

You have indicated that you are a Manager and Staff Member in the Campus Protection Unit. If this is not the case, please go [back](#) and change your selection as appropriate.

This questionnaire is intended to be answered by those who **both** manage staff and are **also** managed in turn by others.

There are 23 questions and it should take between 13 and 18 minutes to complete the questionnaire, depending on how much information you give. Please give as much information as you can and feel free to make comments in the section provided at the end.

Each question will be presented on a different page which is accessed by pressing the "Next Question" button. The questions are numbered in such a way as to show how far through the questionnaire you are. The final question will have a "Submit" button which will take you out of the questionnaire after saving your last answer.

Please complete the questionnaire in one sitting - as the questionnaire is anonymous, it is not possible to save your place and return to the questionnaire at a later time.

The Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire will take a few minutes longer than the others. Should you feel that you do not have the time to complete the longer questionnaire, please complete either the "Staff Member" or "Manager" questionnaire instead. Click [here](#) to go back to the beginning to choose another option.

## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

### Question 1 of 23:

What, in your opinion, is the **primary role of communication** in organisations?

Choose 3 of the following statements which you think best answer this question and rank them from 1 to 3 in order of importance, where 1 is the most important. (Enter the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the boxes next to your choices.)

- To deliver instructions
- To give facts and information needed to be able to do the basic job
- To give information about the higher purposes of the organisation
- To motivate staff to work harder or feel part of the organisation
- To assist with helping or resolving **work-related** issues
- To assist with helping or resolving **interpersonal** issues
- To enable dialogue and team-building

If you feel the role of communication is not adequately covered by the above statements, please indicate below what you think it is:

## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

**Question 2 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

In an average week **how do you communicate** with your manager?

Choose the 3 options which are used most often from following list and rank them from 1 to 3 in order of frequency, where 1 is the most frequent.  
(Enter the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the boxes next to your choices.)

- E-mail
- Informal meetings
- Formal meetings
- Written documentation that is not e-mail
- By telephone
- Other:

**Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 3 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

In general, **how much information** do you feel your manager gives you?

- Not enough information to do the job
- Just enough information to do the job
- More information than is required to do the job

Please explain your choice:

**Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 4 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

**How open** are the **lines of interpersonal (face-to-face) communication** between yourself and your manager?

Select the most applicable statement(s).

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

If these statements are not adequate, please comment below.

## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

### Question 5 of 23:

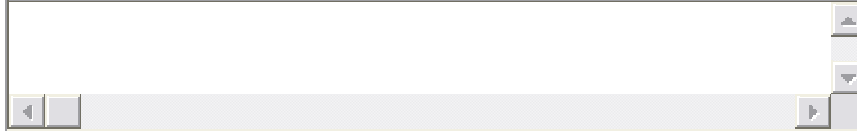
Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

What sort of **feedback** does your manager give you?

Select the most applicable option(s).

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

If there are any other types of feedback they use, please list them below.



## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

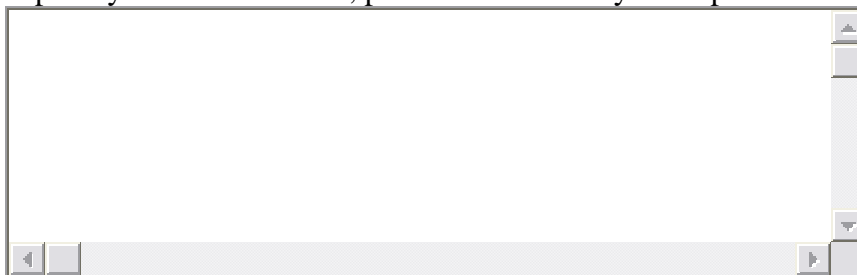
### Question 6 of 23:

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

Do you think that the **way your manager talks to you** (for example, their word choices, tone of voice etc., i.e. **verbal factors**) can or does affect your response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

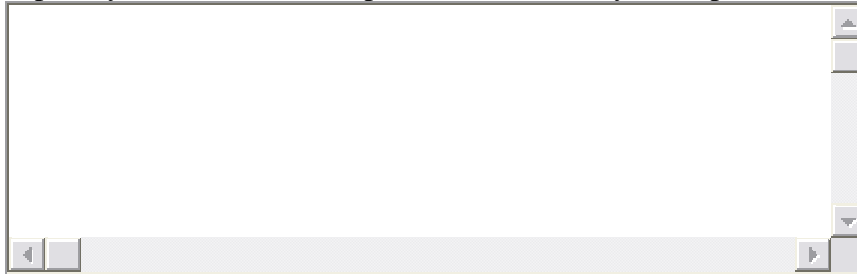
### Question 7 of 23:

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

Do you think that the **body language** your manager uses when talking to you (e.g. crossed arms, looking at the floor, hands on hips i.e. **non-verbal factors**) can or does affect your response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.

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### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 8 of 23:

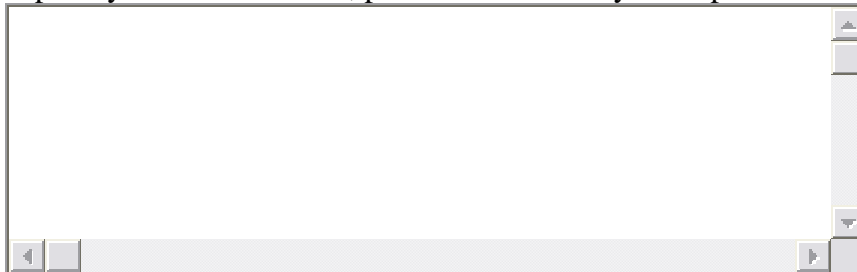
Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

Do you think **your manager** could **motivate you** differently by talking to you in different ways (e.g. by shouting, persuading or encouraging)?

Yes

No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.

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### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 9 of 23:

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

Think about any **strengths** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

**List three main strengths in the way you communicate with your manager.**

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

### **Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

#### **Question 10 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a staff member managed by someone else.

Think about any **weaknesses** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

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

**List three main weaknesses in the way your manager communicates with you.**

### **Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 11 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

In an average week **how do you communicate** with your staff?

Choose the 3 options which are used most often from following list and rank them from 1 to 3 in order of frequency, where 1 is the most frequent. (Enter the numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the boxes next to your choices.)

- E-mail
- Informal meetings
- Formal meetings
- Written documentation that is not e-mail
- By telephone
- Other:

**Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 12 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

In general, **how much information** do you feel you give to your staff?

- Not enough information to do the job
- Just enough information to do the job
- More information than is required to do the job

Please explain your choice:

**Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 13 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

**How open** are the **lines of interpersonal (face-to-face) communication** between yourself and your staff?

Select the most applicable statement(s).

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

If these statements are not adequate, please comment below.

### **Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 14 of 23:**

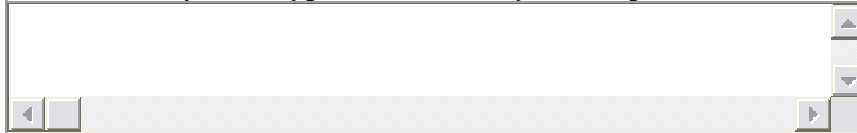
Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

What sort of **feedback** do you give to your staff?

Select the most applicable option(s).

- Congratulations on a job well done
- Encouragement to keep going or to do better
- Criticism when a job is not done to your satisfaction
- Coaching on the job
- Suggestions for personal benefit (e.g. information about further training opportunities, etc.)
- Personal information about yourself
- Formal evaluation as required

If there are any other types of feedback you use, please list them below.



**Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

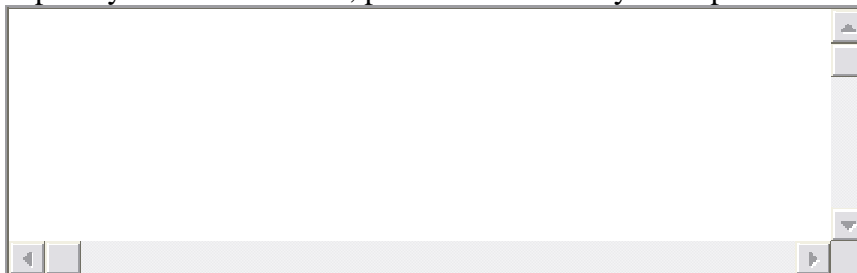
**Question 15 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

Do you think that the **way you talk** to your staff (for example, your word choices, tone of voice etc., i.e. **verbal factors**) can or does affect their response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

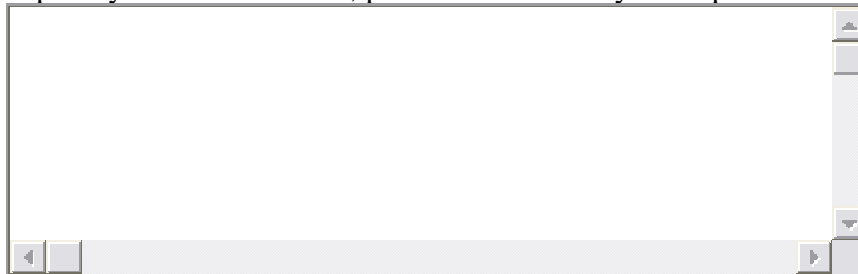
### Question 16 of 23:

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

Do you think that your **body language** when talking to your staff (e.g. crossed arms, looking at the floor, hands on hips i.e. **non-verbal** factors) can or does affect their response?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

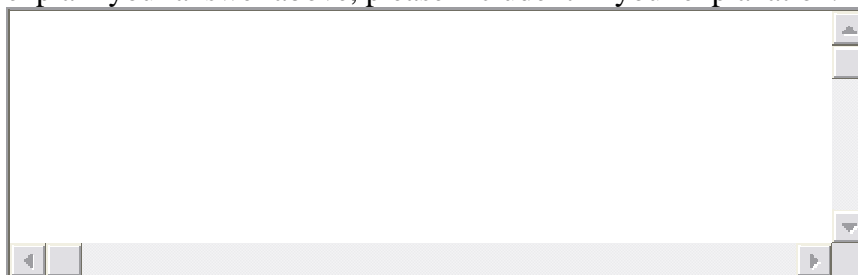
### Question 17 of 23:

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

Do you think **you** could **motivate your staff** differently by talking to them in different ways (e.g. by shouting, persuading or encouraging)?

- Yes
- No

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.



## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

**Question 18 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

Think about any **strengths** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

**List three main strengths in the way you communicate with those you manage.**

**List three main strengths in the way those you manage communicate with you.**

**Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire**

**Question 19 of 23:**

Please answer this question from your perspective as a manager.

Think about any **weaknesses** in the way that communication happens in your department, division or section.

**List three main weaknesses in the way you communicate with those you manage.**

List three main weaknesses in the way those you manage communicate with you.

### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 20 of 23:

Would you generally describe communication in your department, division or section as **effective** or **ineffective**?

- Effective
- Ineffective

Please **elaborate**. If you can think of a **specific incident** that is relevant and will help explain your answer above, please include it in your explanation.

### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

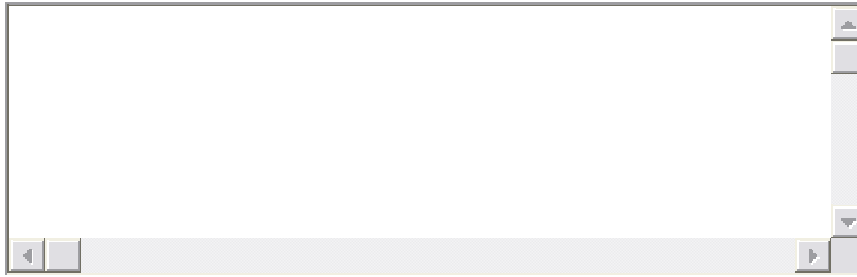
#### Question 21 of 23:

Has this questionnaire made you think or reflect more on your communication practices at work? If so, how?

### Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

#### Question 22 of 23:

Do you have any comments or anything else you would like to add? Please answer in the space below.



## Manager and Staff Member Questionnaire

### Question 23 of 23:

Would you be willing to be interviewed about your responses to this questionnaire in order to help further with this research? **Please remember that if you are interviewed, all information will continue to be treated as confidential and your anonymity will be preserved throughout.**

Yes

No

If you are willing to be interviewed, please enter your contact details below.

**Name:**

**Email:**

**Telephone**   
:

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire. Your responses have made a valuable contribution towards this research.

If you have any questions or comments do not hesitate to contact me at [g.balarin@ru.ac.za](mailto:g.balarin@ru.ac.za) or telephone me at 084 517 9504.

Goodbye and have a nice day!

## Appendix III

### Questions to ask during interviews:

- 1) What do you think the purpose of communication in a work environment?
- 2) You described communication in your section as (effective/ineffective). Would you elaborate on why you think this is the case?
- 3) What effective communication strategies do you employ with your subordinates?
- 4) Do these differ to the strategies you use with your boss? If so, how? Please elaborate.
- 5) What is the biggest challenge to effective communication in your section? What makes communication ineffective? (I noticed from your questionnaire response that you listed... as a problem OR that you didn't seem to think there were any problems, how do you think you can improve anyway?)
- 6) How can this be overcome?
- 7) This aspect of communication has been pointed out as an area of contention by people completing the questionnaire. How do you feel about this in your environment?
  - a) The university does not seem to always pass down information to different levels, or there are gatekeepers who withhold information along the way, goes hand-in-hand with availability of information and information about the bigger picture
  - b) Over-under communicating
  - c) Placement – physical availability
  - d) Time – how much time is available, links with email and written versus face-to-face communication.
  - e) Stress.
  - f) Listening
  - g) Learning from past managers
  - h) Leadership
  - i) Praise
  - j) Managing your manager
  - k) Thanking your manager
  - l) Multi-tasking
  - m) Are you happy?

- n) What could improve if communication improved?
- o) How aware are you of communication?
- p) How aware are the others that you work with of communication
- q) Email