INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY:

A CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN CONCRETE PRODUCTS (ACP) LIMITED

by

Aidoo, Yaw Sarpong
(PG 4083510)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the Executive Masters o Business Administration and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which has been accepted for the award of any another degree of the university, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Yaw Sarpong Aidoo (PG 4083510)   …………………   …………………….

  (Student Name & ID)   Signature   Date

Certified By:

Mr. K. Adjei-Seffah   …………………   …………………….

   (Supervisor)   Signature   Date

Certified By:

Prof. I. K. Dontwi   …………………   …………………….

   Dean, IDL   Signature   Date

ABSTRACT

This study examined how employees of a small to medium construction company communicate and exchange information internally. The challenges faced, the exact strategies employed to achieve effective internal communication as well as the role it plays in accomplishing goals and objectives the organisation were particularly focused on. The Cultural Approach to Organisation theory by Geertz and Pacanowsky (1973) provided a guide to examining the various components that form the basis of this research. Open-ended interviews with 10 employees mainly at the management level permitted respondents to answer in depth, and allowed the researcher to probe for useful insights. Findings indicate that the practice of internal communication is not effective enough as there is not a documented communication strategy, and consequently employees are not very conversant with the vision and mission of the organisation. Effective Internal Communication contributes to the achievement of an organisation's goals and objectives by way of better coordination and so on, but the Grapevine is a major challenge to the flow and exchange of information and needs to be monitored and perhaps capitalised upon. While email is preferred for information exchange among managers, the preferred communication channel among all other groups of employees is still face-to-face interaction. Interpersonal, dialogic communication remains important to employees at every level of the organization. Durbars, despite being acknowledged as time-consuming, were surprisingly valued as one of the best channels due to the ability to provide immediate feedback. Efficient communication strategies targeted at the internal audience give employees at all levels of the organization an understanding of the brand image and hence project this externally.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my dear parents George and Rose Aidoo who nurtured in me the continuous interest in education and the can-do attitude. Thank you both from the bottom of my heart.

Also to the woman of my life, my wife, Awurabena, for her unwavering love and support.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Internal communications has an important role in organisations given the evidence that companies with effective communications strategies are usually successful, while others tend to fall short of the optimal performance (Argenti & Forman, 2002; Tourish & Hargie, 2004a).

There has been considerable focus on how external communication – advertising, public relations, etc – helps corporations build a corporate image to differentiate themselves from competitors in an increasingly crowded marketplace. This corporate image is important as it is the basis on which stakeholders choose to establish contact or business transactions with the organisation and whether or not to attach good or ill will towards it (Schuler, 2004). However, the role of internal communication and training in building corporate brands has received less attention in the academic literature. Internal communications refers to the exchange between an organisation's management and the internal publics- i.e. employees. (Moore 1981). Internal communication has been recognized as a strategic focus for business communication, second only to leadership concerns (Barnfield, 2003). Internal communication is a subset of effective business communication, which is built around this simple foundation: communication is a dialogue, not a monologue. In fact, communication is a dual listening process. So Internal Communication, in a business context, is the dialogic process between employees and employer, and employees and employees.

Internal communication merits close attention as according to Dortok (2006), employees are considered one of the most trusted information sources about an organisation. They embody the

corporate brand and interactions between them and external stakeholders, and communicate the brand's values as much as (if not more than) traditional marketing communications (de Chernatony, 2002).

Research has identified communication as the heart and soul of organisations and businesses. Communication infiltrates every relationship between employees, between employees and management, between departments and between the organisation and its many and varied stakeholders. The failure in communicating within or to any one of these organisational sectors can have great implications for the others and can create a domino effect and escalate through them. Achieving success in internal business communication therefore requires significant levels of skill and well developed processes to maintain communication competence.

According to Robert Bacal's "Internal Communication Strategies (The Neglected Strategy) (2005), most organisations, be they public or private, understand the importance of strategic communication with customers and/or stakeholders, hence we have marketing and communication specialists who produce communication plans for external use. In the private sector that means more income; in the public sector it means better public relations, and better use of government services through client information. A seminal component of the functioning of organisations is organisational communication. Communication drives relationships and frames behaviours of people in the workplace and is a significant factor in the effectiveness of organisations (Pettinger, 2000: Vecchio, Hearn and Southey, 1994).

The importance of internal communication within African Concrete Products (ACP) Limited cannot be overemphasized. This is because the current practice is to focus mostly on external communication; thus communication is targeted at customers and other external publics mostly. The approach to Internal Communication is more reactionary than being proactive, and

communication is usually one-way i.e. from top to bottom. Managers usually communicate only when there is a problem; thus there isn't a comprehensive and purposeful internal communication strategy in place. An effective internal communication strategy will thus enable ACP Limited to create a workforce that is aware of and understands its mission, values and procedures and as such rally them round these goals to maximize productivity and eschew counterproductive vices like conflicts which lead to demotivation and wastage.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many organisations understand the importance of developing strategic plans to guide long term decision-making. The thinking is that without knowing where we want to be (and how we are going to get there), we cannot coordinate organisational resources so that we get there. Frequently, communication methodologies for communicating with customers and the public at large are included in strategic planning. However, few organisations address internal communication in the same way. Determining what should be communicated to staff, when it should be communicated, and how it should be communicated is often left to individuals' discretion. In other words internal communication strategies are developed, reactively, when there is a crisis or major event that clearly requires addressing communication issues. However, according to Sir Tom Farmer CBE (founder of Kwik-Fit), in any business there are two types of customers – internal customers and external customers. The business depends on both types. Effective internal communication is essential for establishing credibility, providing direction and generating enthusiasm, in order to make things happen. (www.bobhayward.com , 2nd July 2012) African Concrete Products Limited being a pioneer in the construction industry which is a very competitive yet very "unstable", fraught with strikes, demonstrations, lockouts,

misunderstandings and other undisciplined acts, it has become notorious for the afore mentioned acts. The most recent being the strike that occurred in November 2009, and the subsequent interdiction of all unionized workers. Most of these incidents have been attributed to the lack of effective internal communication. A sizeable percentage of the employees of ACP Limited are semi-literates and are most of the time suspicious and antagonistic towards management. This makes it very difficult to work together in the attainment of common goals. There are a lot of challenges in the construction industry in terms of managers carrying down information effectively. In ACP limited, this can be attributed to the organisational culture and a lack of a conscious effort to put in place a workable internal communications strategy with the aim of directing employees and management at a set of common goals on which they can act every day. Some management members of ACP limited seem to misinterpret communications to be the same as paperwork or bureaucracy and so do not engage in a high degree of communication. The culture within the organisation is such that employees and even some managers are ignorant of the vision, mission and strategic goals of ACP limited. This has a negative effect on organisational effectiveness and is counterproductive.

In view of these, it was necessary to study the current internal communication practices of the construction industry and establish the need for workable internal communication strategies that will contribute to the attainment of organisational goals and objectives.

1.3 OBJECTVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this research is to explore internal communication and information exchange within the construction industry and how these contribute to the attainment of

organisational goals and objectives.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the existing internal communication practices and their effectiveness within the construction industry using African Concrete Products Limited (ACP Ltd).

2. Identify and explore the existing challenges associated with internal communication and information exchange within ACP Ltd.

3. Determine the specific strategies that promote effective internal communication.

4. Determine whether effective internal communication contribute to the achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What internal communication practices exist within ACP Ltd and how effective are they?

2. What challenges are associated with internal communication and information exchange within ACP Ltd?

3. What specific strategies enabled effective internal communications within ACP Limited?

4. Does effective internal communication between members of ACP help in the achievement of organisational goals and objectives?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

"Communication is such a fundamental part of managing today that without it, virtually nothing can be accomplished" (Smith, 1991, p. 1).

ACP Ltd's vision is to lead the precast concrete industry in Ghana and the West African sub-

region as a convenient source of top quality concrete products with excellent customer service. Management in achieving this ought to communicate this vision and the mission to employees as well as generate "buy-in" for the organisation's objectives and strategies. No matter how brilliant the business strategy is, it must reach and "win" employees to achieve optimum effectiveness. Employees want to know where their organisation is headed and how they contribute to achieving the vision (Moorcroft, 2003). This is the main reason why this study is of immense relevance, as it contributed to knowledge in this area.

Also the study is important because according to Kitchen (1997), internal communication in the organisational context would help companies to create a more democratic and a harmony-oriented organisation. Thus communication strategies can be developed well and utilised strategically so that workers are more comfortable, well motivated and informed to maximize productivity and minimize unrests; as these counterproductive acts may delay projects, increase costs and inconvenience the society.

1.6 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The work is organised into five chapters. The introduction of the study was contained in chapter one. This encompasses issues relating to background of study, problem statement, general and specific objectives and research questions. The rest are the relevance, scope and limitation of the study. Chapter two contains a review of relevant literature; which elaborated more on what was already known with respect to the problem being investigated and the aspects that were not covered and were being investigated by the researcher. Results of other closely related studies as well as theoretical frameworks relating to internal communications in organisations were also covered in this chapter. The methodology of the study was also discussed in chapter three; this

comprise the design of the research, sampling procedures and techniques, as well as relevant models and tools used in the collection of data, analyses and presentation. The results and findings of the study were discussed and presented in chapter four. The summaries of the main findings, the conclusions drawn from the analysis and the recommendations made were presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communication

Communication is the exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another; it

involves a sender transmitting an idea, information, or feeling to a receiver (U.S. Army, 1983). The Webster's New World Dictionary of Media and Communications (1996) defines communication as the transmission or exchange of information, signals, messages, or data by any means such as talking, writing or via telephone, telegraph, radio, or channels within a group as directed to specific individuals or groups. Communication is complex and contains both soft elements, such as the skills of employees and managers to communicate with one another, to plan and implement communication strategies within the organisation's structure and hierarchical systems; and also the hard elements such as publications, notice boards, electronic media, and meetings. Failure in any one of these areas can have cascading effects on the others. Effective communication occurs only if the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intended to transmit. Many of the problems that occur in an organisation are either the direct result of people failing to communicate and/or processes, which leads to confusion and can cause good plans to fail (Mistry, et al, 2008).

2.2 Internal communications

Internal communication is a subset of effective business communication, which is built around this simple foundation: communication is a dialogue, not a monologue. In fact, communication is a dual listening process. Internal Communication, in a business context, is therefore the dialogic process between employees and employer, and employees and employees.

An important role of strategic internal communication is to generate "buy-in" for an organisation's goals and strategies. No matter how brilliant the business strategy is, it must reach and win employees to achieve optimum effectiveness. Employees want to know where their organisation is headed and how they contribute to achieving the vision (Moorcroft, 2003).

Employees need a "core story" that consistently puts strategy into the context of the mission and values of the organisation (Sanchez, 2004).

The increasing complex and competitive business environment has led to greater pressure on employees and greater need for internal communications. However, the nature and role of communications are seldom the focus of research or discussion because they are taken to be self-explanatory (e.g., Fiske, 1990; Tourish & Hargie, 2004b). In fact, the role of communication within organisations is far from clear, and the large array of academic terms in usage has made it difficult to establish 'common cognitive ground' (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 14).

Communication can be defined in many ways, but here it is interpreted according to Fiske (1990) as interaction through messages. Depending on one's background, i.e. corporate, management or organisational communication, the definitions for internal communications also vary accordingly. For example, within the domain of business communication, Bovée & Thill (2000, p. 7) define internal communications simply as "the exchange of information and ideas within an organisation." However, Argenti (2003) contends from the corporate communications perspective that internal communications is about creating an atmosphere of respect for all employees, and that communication should ideally come directly from one manager to the next and from supervisor to employee. He further asserts that due to the large and complex nature of companies, personal managerial communication is no longer feasible; hence the increasing need for the formal internal communications function. Internal communication involves four directions of information exchange; downward, upward, horizontal and diagonal. Downward communication involves managers communicating with employees they supervise. Upward communication involves employees communicating with their superiors. Horizontal communication involves communication among employees at the same level of hierarchy in the

organisation, and diagonal communication takes place between departments at different levels in the organisation (Folklerts *et al*, 1998)

2.3 Internal Communication Strategy

A communication strategy is a plan to shape the opinions of a company's key audiences and leverage a reputation to advance the corporate objectives and preserve the goodwill toward the brand (Randy Ryerson, 2003). A communication strategy has a number of elements. First, it is critical to identify what image the communication plan will present. Second, who the target of the communication is, how the image will be communicated and in particular, what types of media will be used, how often, and in what ways. Finally, regardless of the media and the target audience, it is necessarily to identify whether the message that is being presented is consistent, and whether all the audiences will receive the same message and have the same view of the organisation (Randy Ryerson, 2003).

An effective communication strategy should also fulfill a number of criteria. First of all, it must incorporate clear goals for what the internal communication is to achieve in order to engage and align the employees with the organisation's business goals. Further, the communication strategy should be flexible so as to give space for maneuvers (Larsson, 1997). Since information can be described as the currency of communication, the communication strategy should also ensure that individuals and groups within an organisation receive the information they need and that they are not burdened with an overload of information and/or distracting information (Thunberg et al, 1982).

A consistent and open internal communication strategy is a proactive approach to developing

better directed, more committed, and highly efficient employees. Successful companies and institutions have developed a workforce that understands the mission, goals, values, processes and procedures of the company. This understanding is communicated via formal two-way internal communication methods that support the business strategies of the company with the same consistent message being conveyed externally. Internal communication strategies seek to foster a strong communication culture within the business by creating a two-way flow of information that moves information from the top to the bottom and then moves feedback back up to the top. The goal is to filter the message(s) coming from upper management down to all employees to provide them with a better understanding of the purpose, goals, and directions of the business. There also needs to be a method in place for feedback from the employees to be delivered back to upper management. Fluid communication in both directions is key to the success of the internal communication strategy.

Communication strategies are used to create and reinforce desirable organisational cultures. People talk about the Hewlett-Packard "way", or the Wal-Mart "way" to describe what are essentially organisational cultures that are held in common by most employees in the organisation (Bacal & Associates, 2005).

To be successful, communication strategies must consider organisational culture regardless of who the ultimate target audience is. Even for parties external to the company, the communication strategy must present a message that is consistent with the organisation's culture and the activities it engages in if the message is to be credible. Communications within a company must consider culture since the credibility of the message is dependent on what is communicated by the internal publics. The communications must both reinforce desired aspects of the organisation's culture and present changes in a way that they will be accepted and

incorporated into the organisation's culture.

2.4 Cultural Approach to Organisations

Various theories have been developed for the study on Internal Communication. For this study, the Cultural Approach to Organisation theory by Geertz and Pacanowsky (1973) had been adopted to examine the various components that form the basis of the research. Internal communication is embedded in this theory as Geertz and Pacanowsky (1973) describe organisations as having their own culture, where meanings of things are shared through an understandable means of communication. This means that any given organisation has a particular culture in which the meanings for things are shared between individuals. Geertz and Pacanowsky (1973) discuss that managers and their chains of command can affect the way communication is passed. There is a pyramid form of communication where the information trickles down in a formal method with little to no horizontal passage at all. Then there is a lattice form of passing information where there are many lines both vertical and diagonal lines of communication in the company or culture, this is thought of as a more informal way of communicating.

This symbolic interactionist approach is influenced by the East, and Japanese companies that have moved into the West. The environment that surrounds each company is called the corporate culture and consists of the organisation's image, character, and climate. The culture is learned through the use of Stories (or metaphors) used to convey the messages the corporation wants to share with its employees. There are three types of stories told: Corporate stories, which is information that the management shares with the employees; there are also Personal stories, which include personal accounts of employees which they share with each other to help define

who they are within the organisation; finally there are collegial stories, which are stories (positive or negative) that employees within an organisation tell about each other. Using the scientific method of ethnography, we can learn to understand the rituals of a given culture of an organisation.

The life-like origin of this theory reminds us that we are all from the same earth, giving and receiving of it mutually. The cultural approach takes a humanistic look at what goes on inside the workplace. The particular culture will determine how communication within the organisation is structured to suit the working conditions of the particular organisation (Geertz & Pacanowsky, 1973). Just as any other organisation, ACP Ltd. has a culture where meaning was shared and understood through specific modes of communication. This culture helped them grow together as a company with one goal of achieving success. With this study concentrated on internal communication strategies in the organisation, the theory helped to identify the strategies through which information was passed from managers to employees, amongst employees and about employees.

2.5 Relationship of the Theory to the Study

Organisational culture is important in determining what message can be credibly presented, thereby impacting communication strategy. Corporate communications must reflect genuine actions, practices and commitment to ethics. Over the long run, significant discrepancies between the message and corporate activities will be discovered and publicised, frequently leading to adverse business results. Therefore, it is important to align an organisation's culture with the image it is trying to present to outsiders. Geertz and Pacanowsky (1973) cultural

approach to organisations theory discuss that, understanding a company's culture is important when communicating with employees, particularly when change is involved. The same way a good communication strategy as discussed by Randy Ryerson, (2003) can also be used to create and reinforce desirable organisational cultures. Some of the most successful companies and corporations create a workforce that understands the mission, goals, values and procedures of the organisation. Communications within a company must consider culture since the credibility of the message is dependent on what is communicated by the internal publics. A culture that is likely to be highly receptive to the message of change requires a completely different communication strategy than a culture that will be skeptical and even resistant to a message of change. The message and media choices will be made most effectively when culture is considered.

The intent of creating such cultures among workers of ACP Ltd was not to dominate or control employees, but to aim them at a set of common goals on which they could act every day. Thus when there was effective internal communication and workers are well informed about the company's goals and mission; it brought coherence to the workplace, and allowed better coordinated action. By clearing up ambiguity in what's, how's, and why's, the common culture permits employees to act with empowerment. The staff of ACP Ltd. was no exception as far as common culture in the organisation is concerned. As a Ghanaian construction company they had their own culture where meanings of things were shared. When the staff understood the basic values and purposes of an organisation, it provided them the opportunity to make decisions that fell within such parameters. Simply put, if we want to create a workplace that is populated by people who are working towards the same goals, and by the same rules, internal communication, in its broadest sense, is the key to achieving that. It would not happen unless workers are

proactive in their communication and coordinate their efforts, so they can convey consistent, combatable messages (Bacal, 2005).

Geertz and Pacanowsky (1973) talk about three types of stories told in the organisation which are told through certain outlined strategies developed by each organisation. These help determine what should be communicated to staff, when it should be communicated and how it should be communicated. It is for these reasons that communication strategies are developed to make it possible for these stories to be communicated. The details of how one plans for internal communication to create a coherent culture will vary depending on a number of factors, one of the most important being the size/level of the organisation being looked at. In a company such as ACP Ltd., internal communication strategies need to include many players such as a communications team, senior executives, and managers. It must view the company as one culture for meanings to be shared effectively.
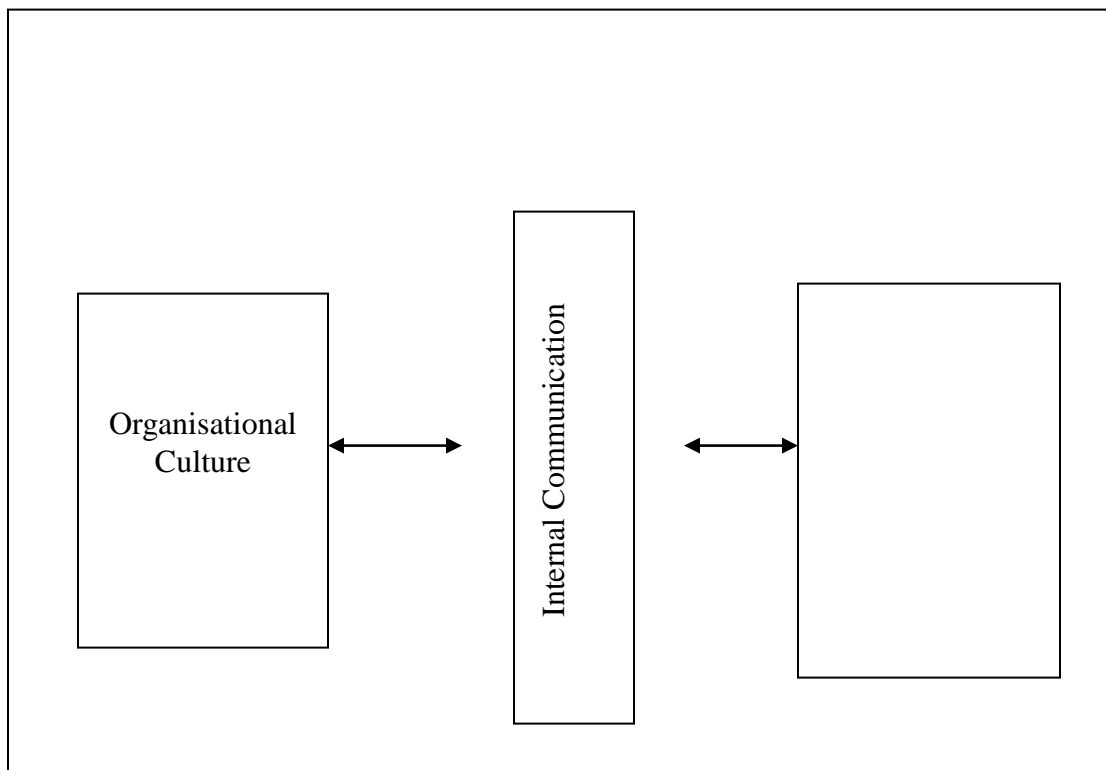
Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework of Study

2.6 Related Works

This part of the chapter reviews works by scholars in similar area of internal communication as this study. Some of the studies discussed internal communication in building organisational goals. Others outlined the communications strategies employed by other researchers in other organisations and institutions and whether they helped in building organisational culture.

2.6.1 Internal Communication in Building Organisational Culture and Corporate Brands

Larry Perry (2007) in a study of the Australian zoo sought to explore how common elements and components such as an organisation's culture, vision, mission, hierarchical structures and strategic goals were communicated within the organisation. Using a single case study the research was conducted to explore and understand internal communication as they applied to zoological parks and aquaria. In the research, Larry Perry (2007) utilized in-depth semi structured interviews and a highly interactive exploratory approach from (Newman, 2003) with the help of interview guides to identify how much the staff knew about their organisations

missions, policies and management processes. And to access the communication strategies and media used to inform, consult and engage staff.

After collecting twenty one interviews from senior management, middle management, supervisory employees and employees with no supervisory role, the researcher found out from issues raised by informants that, power and authority were dealt with only briefly. It was observed from the research that according to Larry Perry (2007) the use of email was acknowledged in both the literature and the data as being an important means of communication within organisations and yet the data from this research identified some significant flaws that prevented all employees from benefiting from accessing information and communicating via this media. Increasing access and resolving technical difficulties were ways in which the informants identified that communication competence could be increased to encourage improvements to information flow up, down and across the organisation.

The data identified that most of the informants perceived there to be little or no consultation and the majority of non supervisory informants indicated that they had received no information at all on the strategic goals. This key point contrasts with responses from senior management informants who indicated that employees were provided information about the review and development of new visions, mission and strategic goals and that all employees were offered opportunities to be included in these discussions. The research identified that focus groups were convened to discuss these matters; however it was also revealed that many of the focus groups were of selected key employees. The intent by senior management for these key employees to further communicate down the line to their employees was identified by senior management as an expectation of their role in the focus groups.

The case study data identified that the knowledge of the zoo's vision, mission strategic statements and goals were poorly assimilated, and that the vision and mission statements were confused with the core pillars and roles of zoos by all middle management and non-supervisory informants. Additionally, the expression of the zoo vision, mission strategic statements and goals by the majority of informants was varied and often expressed in very generic terms, although some informants were able to support their comments using examples drawn from the zoo programs and activities. The lack of knowledge of the vision and mission statements and the inability to express them clearly was evident in both management and non management employees, implying that the ability to communicate and transfer knowledge through the structure by the leaders was effective.

The researcher after conducting these interviews understood the significant and complex role communication played in organisations, employee engagement and in organisation effectiveness. The results of this research reported on significant failings in components of organisational behaviour. The results did not report extensively on organisational and individual behaviours that for the most part were working well, for to do so was considered to be counterproductive to identifying the significant opportunities to improve internal communication and organisational effectiveness.

Research also showed that too often organisational failings identified in research or reported in public forums were not acknowledged as legitimate issues of significance, but rather were attributed to misfits and troublemakers or as outliers in the data rather than being acknowledged as opportunities to seek out and improve the organisation's culture and effectiveness.

Mark Chong (2007) also studied the role of internal communication and training in infusing corporate values and delivering brand promise in Singapore airlines. This study examined the internal communication and training functions at Singapore Airlines –one of the world's best international airlines – and how it was used strategically to enable cabin crew and ground staff to live its corporate values and consistently deliver on its brand promise of being 'a great way to fly'. It showed that internal communication and training should be treated as the ' first frontier ' in the battle for the customer: when it was founded on strong corporate values, internal communication and training could help transform key employees such as cabin crew into ' walking embodiments ' of the core values, and key touch points into opportunities for fulfilling the brand promise.

This study was conducted from May to July 2006 and involved face-to-face interviews with senior managers of SIA ' s People Networks and Cabin Crew Training departments. In addition, the researcher observed the proceedings of a course (called 'The Magic of SOAR') conducted by the Cabin Crew Training department for cabin crew trainees. These interviews and observations were supplemented with analysis of corporate presentations, SIA's website and corporate publications as well as conversations with cabin crew trainees at the SIA Training School in July 2006. The grounded theory method (Glaser and Straus, 1967) was used in analysing the interviews, observations and communication materials. The researcher's analysis was validated by the vice-president of the People Networks department and the senior manager of the Cabin Crew Training department.

The communication structure showed that the employee communication function resided within

the People Networks department, which in turn reported to the Senior Vice-President of Human Resources, who was a member of the management committee that made the executive decisions for the company. The People Networks department focused on building and maintaining strong relationships among management and employees by communicating the company's mission, core values and strategic directions through a comprehensive and integrated communication network that comprised print materials, online communication channels, face-to-face meetings, bond-building extra-curricular activities and the organisational climate survey.

The study also showed that SIA had channels that were tailored to the specific communication needs of its very important cabin crew members and pilots. For example, the Cabin Crew Division produced three publications specifically for the cabin crew. Highpoint: is a monthly newsletter that featured cabin crew events and passenger comments. Cabin Crew Circulars: which were bi-weekly updates on service procedures, rules and regulations, security and safety guidelines. In addition, it sent out electronic news online through a cabin crew online portal and mass email updates for urgent announcements. There were also pre-flight briefings: conducted by in-flight supervisors or the chief steward / stewardess as well as cabin crew business meetings and fleet meetings for pilots.

The study again found out that what made SIA stand out was the number of face-to-face communication channels they employed. Meetings and road shows enabled employees to engage management directly and were tailored to the communication needs of different employee groups. In Sync was a fortnightly 'meet the people' session in which the Senior Vice President of the Cabin Crew division met the cabin crew members on an informal basis; anyone could talk

about anything in freewheeling and open-ended sessions. Then, there were dialogue sessions and ward get-togethers that allowed cabin crew members and management to address specific issues and express their views in face-to-face settings. In addition, 'road shows' gave senior management the opportunity to communicate key issues and new initiatives directly and to obtain feedback from the ground. SIA also conducted focus groups: these were agenda-driven and focus on generating cabin crew insights on topics such as organisational climate.

SIA's relentless communication of its core values reflected their strategic status in the company's internal communication and training programs. Accordingly, the company's six core values were communicated to all employees at four different 'touch points' in their tenure: when they first joined the company, when they attended training programs, when they attended corporate events and through corporate communication channels such as Outlook. When non-cabin crew employees first joined SIA, they underwent an induction program that included a segment on the company's core values.

The company's senior managers (including the Chairman and CEO) also harped on the importance of living the core values when they spoke at major events such as the Long Service Awards ceremony and other company functions. According to Cheney (1983), senior executives played a crucial role in influencing and persuading employees to identify with the corporation and develop a distinctive corporate identity. The core values were also printed on the second page of each issue of Outlook magazine and each employee was given a pocket-sized copy of the core values statements. By incorporating these core values into employees' key touch points, SIA aimed over time to infuse them into employees to the extent that they 'lived' these values. And

when they did, customers are much more likely to experience the company in a way that is consistent with what you have promised' (Mitchell, 2002: 100).

This paper showed how internal communication and training enabled SIA to consistently deliver on its brand promise to become the world's most successful international airline. Unlike most studies to date, which have focused on the influence of external communication on the corporate image and brand, this paper showed the strategic role internal communication can play in an organisation – especially when it is founded on the organisation's core values and intertwined with a training program that borders on zealotry (Mark Chong, 2007)

White, Vanc, and Stafford (2010) also examined how employees of a multi-campus university viewed information flow from top administrators in positions of personal influence, employees' communication preferences (amount, channels, types of information), their sense of community within the organisation, and the relationship between those perceptions and their willingness to advocate for the university.

The study found through 147 open-ended interviews with employees that the personal influence of the chancellor and top administrators had an effect on information satisfaction. Employees who had a relationship with the chancellor were more satisfied with the information they received and felt a greater responsibility to advocate for the organisation. Even the perception of a relationship with top administrators led to satisfaction. The direction and dimension of internal communication, as well as the channel dimension were important. Although e-mail was efficient for information exchange, the preferences for communication among all groups of employees were face-to-face, interpersonal and dialogic interactions.

From the study the respondents acknowledged that information flowed in a hierarchical, top-down pattern from the chancellor and top administrators to other levels of the organisation. However, at all levels of the organisation, there was evidence that employees wanted to receive information as directly as possible from the chancellor. More importantly, direct dissemination from the top was perceived to reduce uneven distribution of information and increase credibility of information because employees at all levels recognised that the top-down flow of information created bottlenecks at different levels of supervision and makes getting consistent information to all levels of the organisation difficult. In addition to the Problem of uneven distribution, the study found concern that information from top managers was often filtered, and sometimes distorted, as it was relayed through the layers of bureaucracy. Information was likely to get changed at each level as it came down to employees. By the time it got to the employees, they did not have all the information, or the whole truth, so people were confused about what was said. (Exempt staff). It was like; playing a game of telephone where you only hear what makes it to the bottom of the food chain. They felt the lack of face to face interaction did not foster a good sense of community among the workers.

It was also found that top administrators, not surprisingly, believed that they received sufficient information and were satisfied with the information flow. Of course, they had constant access to the chancellor, as well as access to privileged sources of information. However, although they acknowledge their position at the top of the information system, they were aware that others in the organisation may not be as well-informed. The administrators also admitted that they often did not have a clear sense of what was common knowledge among employees and what pieces of

information needed to be conveyed. They also admitted that they did not always know what happened to information after it reached the next level below them. Information voids were created when supervisors assumed that employees had already been informed through other channels.

With the exception of employees who received information from variety of sources, employees in position at top, middle and bottom of the organisation believed they received insufficient information about the organisation. They concluded that Interpersonal communication was found to be perceived as more trustworthy. The desire for face-to-face communication was consistent with the findings of Stein (2006). Both her study and this study found that communication-rich channels effectively fostered a sense of community and that employees sought a sense of community at some level in the organisation. Hearing information first-hand gave employees a sense of importance. Even e-mail messages received directly from the chancellor's computer were valued more than the same e-mail forwarded through the organisational hierarchy.

2.6.2 Communication Strategies in Achieving Organisational Communication Activities

Lisa Massie and Chritiana L. Anderson（2003), examined how a communication strategy named contact 20/20 helped ASCO achieve its communications objectives. Contact 20/20" was the title given to the communications strategy of ASCO, a global company which provides offshore logistics and supply chain management to the international oil and gas industry.

After gaining independence in 1996 due to a management buy-in, the company experienced significant growth, expanding to such places as Brazil, Trinidad and the USA. This growth, along with a major research project undertaken in 1997 examining perceptions of the company among

employees, clients and other stakeholders, indicated the need for a comprehensive communications strategy. One of the main objectives of Contact 20/20 is to ensure staff understand and adopt the business drivers of ASCO to achieve the company's mission.

Furthermore, Contact 20/20 aimed to ensure staffs were informed on what was happening in the company to help them understand and embrace the ASCO brand. The notions of ensuring staff are informed so that they can help achieve ASCO's mission is similar to an idea suggested by Horton (1995). He stated that managers employ the human relations approach in order to achieve objectives whilst also satisfying the majority of an organisation's members. The aim of this article was to examine how closely "Contact 20/20" related to theories of communications strategy developed in the relevant literature. A review of communications strategy literature was carried out in order to identify core themes and principles and to provide a framework from which to evaluate Contact 20/20. ASCO's company documentation, including the policy document for "Contact 20/20" was examined and interviews were conducted with the company's communications executive and ASCO's former corporate communications manager.

According to ASCO's communications executive, Contact 20/20 was two-way and needed effort on both sides to operate efficiently. It was stated that all information at ASCO was communicated under the Contact 20/20 strategy. Hence, it acted as a common vehicle which was recognised and could be used to disseminate all company information. ASCO's former corporate communications manager stated that recent research had shown that employees were, "better communicated with and knew more about the company". Tools such as road shows and the employee newsletters which were introduced under the Contact 20/20 umbrella had been cited by employees as part of the reason for the improvement. According to the firm's former corporate communications manager, a pride in the company had been created by the Contact

20/20 strategy. The strong brand image it has created has led employees to, "feel they were working for a leading contractor rather than a shabby second rate company". Therefore, with respect to internal communication, Contact 20/20's primary role to keep employees fully informed was achieved.

2.6.3 Influence of Internal Communication in Achieving Organisational Goals and Objectives

A study by Morales, Reche & Jover (2011) assessed the influence of internal communication on technological proactivity, organisational learning, and organisational innovation in the pharmaceutical sector. Their findings verified empirically that internal communication helped to develop a foundation for technological proactivity. In an increasingly globalised economic and social environment marked by the rigorous need to achieve efficiency in internal communication, the power of new technologies is more and more necessary to facilitate Internal communication to overcome barriers in time and space. Sender and receiver do not have to share the same space or time to be able to develop effective communication. New technologies also enable us to increase the capacity for storing and disseminating knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

It was also found out that the results of this research supported a positive relationship between Internal Communication and Oganisation Learning in technological firm. The study did not show that internal communication acted negatively, impeding the interrelation between the organisations subjects (García Morales, 2004; Gumus, 2007; Senge et al., 1994; Stata, 1989). Effective Internal communication creates and maintains organisational learning. Inside the

organisation, internal communication must create a greater sense of connectedness at all levels. Internal communication between managers and members of the organisation not only enhanced management support but also provided the organisation's members with feedback to improve their job performance (Conduit &Mavondo, 2001).

To reduce the possible bias associated with data collected from a single key informant, Morales, Reche & Jover (2011) used objective measures of organisational learning, innovation, and performance. For internal communication, they followed other similar studies and measured the variables using chief executive officers as the subject of study. However; the use of multiple respondents would have been preferable. It is unlikely that any one individual could provide a comprehensive view of one organisation (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000).

An article by Roger Hallowell, Leonard A. Schlesinger, Jeffrey Zornitsky, (1996) look at how (Heskett, 1990; Zeithaml, 1990, Berry; 1991) view internal communication. This literature suggested that to deliver high levels of customer satisfaction, organisations must identify, measure, and manage the internal elements that produce it. By measuring these components, managers may be able to determine which actions were required to improve customer satisfaction. This knowledge may then enable managers to take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to customer satisfaction.

Internal service quality (defined for this purpose as employee satisfaction with the service received from internal service providers) has received little attention in the empirical literature, although certain aspects of it have been discussed theoretically as far back as Barnard (1938). Only in the past decade has it begun to be examined as a holistic concept. Yet internal service

quality remains complex, in part because its composition can vary for different organisations at different times. In short, which internal services are important, and how important their quality is, depends on an organisation's tasks and employees. Although these authors approach internal service quality from different perspectives, they share a fundamental underlying belief that organisations attempting to deliver service quality to their external customers must begin by serving the needs of their internal customers.

Heskett's (1990) discussion was predicated on the Service Profit Chain (see Heskett, 1994), a causal model based on the proposition that 1) internal service quality drives 2) employee satisfaction, which enables the delivery of 3) high value service, resulting in 4) customer satisfaction, leading to 5) customer loyalty, which in turn produces 6) profit and growth. These ideas are closely linked to those of this paper which tests a portion of the model by linking measures of internal service quality to a relatively new summary measure of the work environment called service capability. Heskett (1990) provided several case-study examples that supported the importance of internal service quality. The organisations examined led their industries in results delivered for customers, and (often) financial performance. Heskett (1990) demonstrated that while the importance of specific internal-service-quality components may differ for individual organisations, leading service firms relied on exemplary internal service quality to achieve their set goals.

2.6.4 Barriers to Effective Internal Communication Strategies

Forssberg & Malm (2001) researched into a multinational company to describe and explain aspects within it that created barriers to an effective internal communication and to find out how a multinational company (MNC) could achieve effective internal communication. According to

Forssberg and Malm (2001) MODUL Service AB, the case company made it possible for them to identify and analyse the factors that could act as barriers to an effective internal communication within an MNC.

Through observations they were able to gain insight into the causes of the barriers. First the geographical distance between the headquarters and the subunits was an area that created a very distinct barrier to internal communication in the MNC both vertical and horizontal basically because the sender and receiver spread across national borders. The most obvious problems were that it was not possible for all of the employees to meet and discuss issues face-to-face which were a good communication strategy. The geographical distance implied that instead of having face-to-face meetings, the employees had to communicate via other channels such as memo, phone or fax.

Their findings also indicated that, there was no possibility for immediate feedback where employees had a chance to ask follow-up questions or clarify the information. Further, when communicating over geographical distances the sender was not able to see the receiver's expressions and gestures. This type of non-verbal communication is a very good tool to really make sure that the receiver has understood the message. The lack of feedback and control created a large barrier for the internal communication to be effective. It was also not possible for the foreign managers to be present at all meetings that were held. The geographical distance was, furthermore, a problem for the departmental managers in the foreign units, who also could not be present at the different meetings, held during which many decisions were taken.

Finally, the geographical distance contributes to the fact that the employees in MODUL Service AB were rather unaware of what was going on in the other units. From the interviews conducted, it was rather clear that there was not a regular communication about the development and situation in the other units. As a consequence, it was difficult to know what the other offices had done or were planning to do regarding certain issues.

Concluding, Forssberg & Malm (2001) suggested that in order to enhance the feeling of togetherness, it was important to deal with the mentioned issues that acted as barriers. They believed that in order to achieve effective internal communication, the coordination of information was required. If several managers were able to communicate it in an identical manner then they would be on equal levels. However, there was no formal way for how to forward the vertical information in MODUL Service AB resulting in the units not receiving the same amount of information. Well-coordinated information was of major importance, since it could act as a method for delimiting the barrier created by the geographical distance.

2.6.5 Internal Communication Channels

Chang, Pobocik, Ruesch and Wooldridge (2000) examined perceptions of three communication channels. Written, interpersonal and e-mail in a new organisation from the receivers' point of view for three functional groupings. The findings indicated that in spite of the argument for the ability of electronic mail and other mediated communication to mask differences and promote the free flow of ideas and information in organisations, interpersonal communication channels were the preferred standard for the organisation. The authors concluded that the findings underpinned the thrust of a social presence perspective, which explains the degree to which a

channel approximated the personal characteristics of face-to-face interaction.

Mueller & Lee (2002) in their study on leader-member exchange and organisational communication satisfaction in multiple contexts explored the extent to which the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) affected subordinates' perceptions of communication satisfaction in multiple contexts. Findings indicated that the quality of LMX strongly influenced subordinates' communication satisfaction in interpersonal (personal feedback and supervisory communication), group (co-worker communication and organisational integration in the workgroup), and organisational contexts (corporate communication, communication climate, and organisational media quality). Further, subordinates in LMX with their superiors were tightly coupled with larger group and organisational contexts with respect to communication satisfaction. However, the strength of coupling decreases as the "sphere of influence" became more distanced and less direct.

The findings reported in this study have important practical and theoretical implications. LMX theory postulates that superiors are largely responsible for the development of their superior-subordinate exchange relationships (Dansereau *et al*. (1975); Graen & Scandura, (1987); Graen & Uhl-Bien, (1995). Consequently, superiors strongly impact kinds of communication experiences that subordinates will have developing and sustaining differential LMXs and, thus, are primarily responsible for subordinates' affective responses to them. Therefore, to increase overall level of communication satisfaction among their subordinates, superiors should offer opportunities to develop and maintain higher-quality LMXs with as many subordinates as possible (more even distributions of personal and social resources across subordinates).

Herzberg, (1966) suggested that job satisfaction was greatly influenced by employee's perceptions of achievement, recognition, attraction of the work itself, responsibility, and advancement.

A study by Byrne and LeMay (2006), also examined the satisfaction in and perceived quality of information about one's job, business unit, and company, as well as perceived quality of urgent news (i.e., news about changes in business and generally considered legally sensitive material), communicated via different media (categorized as rich and lean media). Results from 598 fulltime employees revealed that the strategy involving the rich media (e.g. face-to-face) was most related to satisfaction in information about one's job and business unit and in perceived quality of information from the supervisor; lean media (e.g. company newsletter) was most related to satisfaction in and quality of information from top management, while moderate media (e.g. e-mail) was only significantly related to perceived quality of urgent news. Trust in top management was positively related to satisfaction in and quality of information shared by management. Lean media most strongly related to quality of urgent news, over and above rich communication.

The results of the study showed that employees derived most of their satisfaction with the information they received about their job from the rich communication channels such as face-to-face meetings with their bosses, phone conversations, and departmental meetings. Lean communication mechanisms such as the quarterly meetings, the employee newsletters, or written memos and notices contributed a small addition to their satisfaction level in information about their jobs. Email and the intranet (moderate communication mechanism) contributed nothing in

addition to the rich and lean media. Similar results were shown for satisfaction with information about the business unit. When employees were considering their satisfaction with information that was directly relevant to them, it seemed that the data supplied by the cues of rich communication were important.

On the other hand, when the information was about the company, employees were much satisfied with it being delivered via lean communication media such as the newsletters as compared to the rich media such as face-to-face. These findings seemed to contradict the notion of management who were satisfied with face-to-face communication. As suggested by media richness theory, however, their results may be because company information did not immediately affect individual employees and thus they felt more removed from this information. Hence, they preferred that it be delivered via lean media so that they could attend to it when convenient and have the data in writing to refer to more than once. This kind of communication (memos, newsletters, company-wide meetings) requires little interaction and exchange on the part of the employee; it usually involves learning about the company rather than discussing a critical decision that has an effect on the company. Thus, when receiving information that was not directly relevant to them, employees did not need the additional data supplied by visual cues, such as facial expressions, to be satisfied.

The practical implications of the findings suggest that organisations may use the lean medium for sharing information about the company to the satisfaction of employees. Supervisors should share job relevant information with employees in one-on-one meetings or via the phone, since communication of job related information via a rich medium was more highly related to

satisfaction in the information than when it was shared via a lean medium. Information from top

management was perceived as accurate, timely, and useful (i.e., quality) when delivered via a

Lean communication medium, thus top management need not worry about having to meet

everyone in person to ensure their messages were perceived with high quality.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a description of the study methodology that was followed in conducting the study. The researcher employed a set of in-depth qualitative interviews to get detailed answers from respondents from one focal organisation for this study. Qualitative research is a generic term for investigative methodologies described as ethnographic, naturalistic, anthropological, field, or participant observer research. The emphasis here is on the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are found. Detailed data is gathered through note-taking, open ended questions for interviews that provide direct quotations. The interviewer is an integral part of the investigation (Jacob, 1988).

The research design, study population, sampling and sampling procedure, instrumentation, data collection techniques and procedures were also discussed.

3.2 THE STUDY AREA

Founded in 1956, African Concrete Products Limited (ACP Ltd) is a Ghanaian limited liability company owned by private individuals and workers of the company.

Our vision is to lead the precast concrete industry in Ghana and the West African sub-region as a convenient source of top quality concrete products with excellent customer service.

Our activities include:

- Manufacture of concrete products
- Construction of prefabricated concrete structures

- Construction of buildings and civil engineering works

ACP Ltd. produces a range of concrete products meeting the building and construction requirements of public authorities, government contractors, international contractors, private companies and other builders. We supply our concrete products to construction sites all over Ghana and other West African countries.

ACP Ltd is registered with the Ministry of Water Resource Works and Housing as a General Building Contractor with the highest level of classification, D, and a K1 Civil Works Contractor, allowing ACP to compete at any contract level. (www.africanconcrete.com, 15th June 2012)

3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

For the purpose of this research, the study population was limited to the employees of ACP Ltd, classified according to the departments they belong. This was important because l'Etang (2005) has questioned the tendency for internal communication writers to treat employees as a single entity. These departments include Production/Engineering, Finance, Administration, Sales & marketing, Quality Control and Estates. The average total employee strength stands at 65, since most of the non-managers are casuals and come in as and when there is work to be done and they are idle.

Researchers usually cannot make direct observations of every individual in the population they are studying; instead they collect data from a subset of individuals (a sample) and use those observations to make inferences about the entire population (Zickmund, 1991). Ten employees, mainly senior managers and some staff were sampled and interviewed for the study. The sampling method used was the non-probability sampling which enabled the researcher to choose specifically which people were most relevant and interesting for him to interview as far as the

research problem was concerned. Within the frame of the non-probability sampling, a purposive sampling was used.

Purposive sampling (also known as judgment sampling) is any procedure where a researcher consciously selects a sample that he considers to be most appropriate for the study (Alan Wilson, 2003). Alan Wilson (2003) also asserts that judgment samples are particularly appropriate where the sample size for a research project is relatively small. This will better represent the mix of potential respondents in the population. A combination of convenience and snowballing under the purposeful sample was utilised. While convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where subjects are selected because of their convenient accessibility and proximity to the researcher, snowballing which is also a non-probability sampling technique is used by researchers to identify potential subjects in studies where subjects are hard to locate. After observing the initial subject, the researcher asked for assistance from the subject to help identify people with a similar trait of interest. This allowed the chosen respondent to give suggestions of other people who were appropriate and could be interviewed for the study.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data Collection plays an important role in impact evaluation by providing information useful to understand the processes behind observed results and assess changes in people's perceptions of their well-being. For this research, both secondary data and primary data were collected.

Under primary data collection, the researcher conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with key managers as well as staff of the case company. This made it possible to obtain direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings (Merriam 1998:69). The data collection utilised in-depth semi-structured interviews (Sarantakos, 2005:268), using a highly interactive

explanatory approach (Newman, 2003), with the help of interview guides. When the topic of the research is relatively sensitive, it implies that it is easier to approach it in an interview as opposed to a questionnaire (Downs, 1988; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1991). The specific purpose of the interviews was to verify topic areas found relevant based on academic research, establish possible new topic areas, and to gain a deeper understanding of the case company communications culture. The findings gained through these data sets were supported by case company documents and observations. Different case company documents ranged from the ACP Handbook, Memos, Notice boards, Intranet discussions and other correspondences. Observation took place during the interviews when I spent a number of days at the case company offices. Combining such methods is common, given that according to Eisenhardt (1998, p.534) "[c]ase studies typically combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires and observations". The different data collection phases have been organized in chronological order in Figure 3.1.
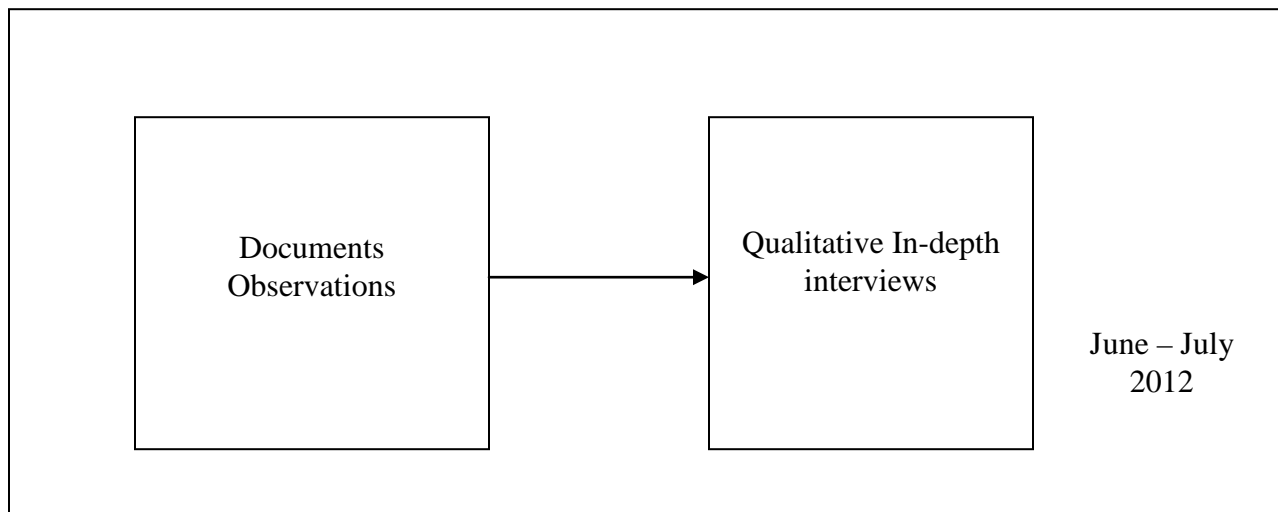

Figure 3.1 Data Collection Phases

Ten different interviews with durations varying between thirty minutes and one hour each were conducted in June – July 2012. The focus of these interviews was communication practices and

strategies and their relation to achieving organisational goals and objectives, the different media used to inform, consult, interact and engage employees were also studied (the thematic interview guides used are provided in Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted in English and Akan and each of them was recorded and then transcribed. There was a bias towards senior management interviewees from the Head Office in Accra but the sample was representative of the senior managers within the studied functions. Information on the background of respondents is provided in the Table 3.1.

Interviewee	Gender	Management Level	Functional Background	Geographic Location
1	Male	Senior	Production	Accra
2	Male	Middle	Finance	Accra
3	Male	Senior	General	Accra
4	Male	Middle	Quality Control	Accra
5	Male	Middle	Production	Pokuase
6	Male	Staff	Sales	Accra
7	Male	Staff	Sales	Accra
8	Female	Staff	Administration	Accra
9	Male	Staff	Production	Accra
10	Male	Staff	Production	Accra

Table 3.1. Interviewees' Background Information

The informants were drawn from five different departments within the organisational structure, and a specific interview guide utilised, depending on whether the respondent was a manager or

not. This number of informants represents a significant percentage of the organisation's total number of employees and was to provide greater clarity to the themes drawn from the data and from which conclusions were drawn. The advantage was that informants were not restricted to a yes or no answer but were given the opportunity to express themselves without restrictions. For secondary data, internal company materials such as reports, memos and surveys were utilised. These were obtained from key informants, search engines such as Google and other sources such as the website of ACP Ltd were consulted to gather adequate literature on the subject to help obtain a deeper meaning.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Interview guides help direct the conversation toward the topics and issues you want to learn about. They vary from highly scripted to relatively loose, but they all share certain features: They help you know what to ask about, in what sequence, how to pose your questions, and how to pose follow-ups. They provide guidance about what to do or say next, after your interviewee has answered the last question.

A comprehensive interview guide was developed and used in collecting the necessarily information needed from respondents. Interviews were conducted after dates, place and time were scheduled with the respondents.

3.6 RESEARCH DESIGN

The ultimate reason behind this study was to get a higher degree of understanding of the internal communication strategies employed by African Concrete Products Limited and how these strategies contributed to achievement of organisational goals and objectives. Since qualitative

research, as pointed out by Merriam (1998:6), "can reveal how all parts work together and form a whole" this approach was the most appropriate for serving the purpose of the study.

Further, since internal communication is a very vague concept that is difficult, if not impossible to quantify, I chose the qualitative approach. The reason for this was that when studying a vague concept such as internal communication, it is preferable to use a method that makes it possible to understand, describe, and discover meaning at the same time, and it is a flexible and evolving method.

Another reason for choosing a qualitative strategy over a quantitative strategy was that the goal of my study corresponded well with the goals of a qualitative research investigation, which was to create an understanding, description, discovery, and meaning (Merriam, 1998).

The qualitative method was useful for interpreting and understanding, as in-depth interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals' personal histories, perspectives and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being explored (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 145) define qualitative data analysis as "working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others". Qualitative researchers tend to use inductive analysis of data, meaning that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990). Qualitative analysis requires some creativity, for the challenge is to place the raw data into logical, meaningful categories; to examine them in a holistic fashion; and to find a way to communicate this interpretation to others. The data may

include verbatim notes or transcribed recordings of interviews or focus groups, jotted notes and more detailed "field notes" of observational research, a diary or chronological account, and the researcher's reflective notes made during the research (Pope, Ziebland & Mays 2000). After collecting the recorded data from the respondents, the recorded pieces were transcribed and analysed according to themes based on the research objectives set.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND REPRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the results of the interviews conducted, with responses and findings discussed. From the answers received from the managers and staff, findings were grouped under

themes, presented and discussed with reference to the research questions.

The themes included the major objectives set for the research which were: understanding internal communication, how internal communication occurred in ACP Ltd, specific strategies that promoted effective internal communication in ACP Ltd, effective internal communication and the achievement of organisational goals and objectives, knowledge on company policies and goals, and the importance of internal communication to the industry.

Other themes emerged from the interview such as employees' preference for receiving information, appraisal of strategies and sustainability of strategies over time among others. Responses drawn under these themes are discussed below.

4.2   WHAT INTERNAL COMMUNICATION PRACTICES EXIST WITHIN ACP LTD AND HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THEY?

It was quite clear that generally the informants understood what internal communication entailed. Although different definitions for internal communication were presented, the idea of internal communication being the communication within the organisation was brought forth. It was basically passing of information to employees within the company from management to staff, and among the workers in the organisation who make up the internal public. It was realised from the responses of senior managers (as shown below) that internal communication was seen to be key to every living organisation that without it workers would not be well informed to perform effectively.

> *Oh absolutely! Not just ACP alone, every company. Internal communication is key because at management level when decisions are taken then it behoves on the manager to effectively communicate that so that nobody misses it* [manager]

Employee communications meant the provision and exchange of information and instructions which enabled an organisation to function efficiently and employees to be properly informed about developments. Respondents saw internal communication to be the communication amongst people in the company, within different departments in the company. It is simply the communication that is kept in the company and not assessed by the outside world.

The practice of internal communication manifested itself mainly in two ways within ACP Ltd. the formal – which was documented, occurred mainly between managers while the informal which was by word of mouth was usually top-down; thus from managers to staff. Formal communications also occurred from managers to staff by means of memos on notice boards. The quotations below are some of the responses:

> *What I understand by internal communication is the way we are able to communicate or carry info from one department to the other, it's mainly about interdepartmental communication [manager]*

> *It occurs on, I'll say, two fronts, one – formal and informal, formal by way of memo writing, documents being sent across to be signed off and for people to know what therein, we use a lot of emails too, informal is by word of mouth communicating various activities to other members of the team both within and outside of the department. [manager]*

Internal communication also occurred by way of the face-to-face interpersonal and group communication such as durbars in-house and bonding sessions (where managers go out to a

restaurant or pub to socialize and discuss pertinent issues) outside the company. These were however irregular. These meetings usually lasted about 45 minutes and this channel of communication was very appreciated among the employees because of its clear and simple structure. Also, this was a good way of transmitting general information and most of the employees considered the meetings to give enough information about the general situation. The intent with such meetings was to present the direction of the company as well as discuss other critical issues, and this could be described as formalisation as asserted by the theoretical framework. Also it is a kind of socialisation as it was an informal and relaxed meeting, which contributed to a feeling of togetherness. During these durbars, employees were assembled in the yard or conference room and addressed by the Chief Executive Officer met and the general manager. Employees were also encouraged to ask questions about a wide variety of issues bothering them.

With regard to the effectiveness of these practices, responses varied. While non-managers were of the conviction that the existing internal communication practices were effective, managers didn't. Some asserted that they were well informed through these practices but others were of the opinion that there was more to be done as shown from some responses below.

> *…oh yes, it is effective and I am well informed through these means* [non-manager]
>
> *erm, I must say yes as far as it make the work tick, as far as it makes the work go on I will say I'm well informed through these means.* [manager]
>
> *erm. I would say yes and no. yes, because the key things that is supposed to come to your attention, yes but there are times that you go on inspection for example, and there are*

things that you find that you get surprise that they hadn't come to your attention and you

begin to wonder... [manager]

It was also evident that communications between non-managers were almost always informal as this was the most effective way for them. The urgency attached to certain messages sometimes influenced the type of communication method adopted so as to make it effective.

As I said previously, there may be instances that there may be some emergency, a machine has broken down, production may not be able produce these products that they had indicated to immediately the salesman needs to know.[manager]

Seen as effective internal communications is about enabling people to do their jobs to the best of their ability and ensuring that all employees are working together towards the same organisational goals, it can mean anything from encouraging one to talk to and exchange ideas with people from other departments to explaining the direction that the company is headed (in terms of its vision) and how to get there. The latter doesn't seem to happen in ACP Ltd.

4.3 WHAT CHALLENGES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE WITHIN ACP LTD?

The choice of communication channel used for transmitting a message plays a significant role in maintaining the quality of the original message in its passage from the sender to receiver. The sender, given the opportunity to weigh the merits of using an oral or written communication, or a combination of the two, selects the most effective for the situation. Regardless of the communication channel selected, the sender will encounter obstacle.

One of the challenges that hinder effective internal communication was the surprise element encountered sometimes. Colleagues and employees don't take responsibility for ensuring that information gets to intended audience by following through with communication. They do not always communicate what is happening on the 'floor' to their superiors.

> *…like I have said before, the challenge is the surprises that you get sometimes that certain things have not come to your attention…there are things that you expect that you should be in the know and you are no.*[manager]

Technology was another major hindrance to communication. This was because respondents used emails a lot but this sometimes wasn't effective because of the inconsistent nature of the internet, so when the server was down and mails could not be assessed and as such urgent information could not get to one on time.

Bureaucracy was also a major challenge in achieving effective internal communication. There was always the tendency for information or meaning to be lost in transit. Top managers, not surprisingly, believe they receive sufficient information and were satisfied with the information flow. Of course, they have constant access to the General Manager and the CEO as well as access to privileged sources of information. However, while they acknowledge their position at the top of the information system, they are aware that others in the organisation may not be as well-informed.

The grapevine was also a major challenge when it came to communicating within ACP Ltd. Rumours and speculations abound especially when it came to non-managers, these create

distortions. This could however be attributed to the fact that top managers always thought certain information wasn't meant for employees. The employees at the lower tier therefore were always willing to accept any information from staff and supervisors who are seen as close to managers.

4.4 WHAT SPECIFIC STRATEGIES ENABLED EFFECTIVE INTERNAL COMMUNICSTIONS WITHIN ACP LTD?

When asked about the specific strategies employed by ACP Ltd to enhance their internal communication, it became clear that there wasn't a conscious effort to put together a simple and clear communication strategy. An effective communication strategy should first of all, incorporate clear goals for what the internal communication is to achieve in order to engage and align the employees with the organisation's business goals. Further, the communication strategy should be flexible so as to give space for maneuvers (Larsson, 1997).

It was evident that there wasn't a strategy that took its source from the overall vision of the company, and then "broken down" to the level of employees. This would have indicated where the company was, where they wished to go and how to get there in terms of communication. It would have then been backed by a detailed action plan among which the key stakeholders, key messages, the channels to be used and the resources available would have been outlined. However, though there wasn't a documented strategy, different managers employed different approaches to promote effective internal communication within ACP Ltd. These largely depended on how soon the recipient had to get the information and also who the recipient was as well as what kind of work they did. One senior manager's response was as follows.

> *…oh we have regular management meetings where each department brings its report to be discussed so that's one sure way to do this, I also have a weekly interaction with all*

the managers to know their plans and complaints so by so doing you get to know this...

every morning I have the habit of going round the various departments and offices to see

how people are doing and what is affecting their work... [manager]

Another manager also had this to say in answering the question about strategies:

...to ensure that information gets to the right person, when I send a mail, I follow up with

a call to ensure it was received. [manager]

Also, media such us Short Messaging Service (SMS) and cell phone communication was encouraged as part of the channels used. The strategy is to utilise a combination of communications simultaneously, whether formal and informal, written and non-written or verbal and non-verbal. This means a combination of any of the following: face-to-face interpersonal communication (meetings and durbars), telephone conversations, emails, memos etc. are used together depending what is being communicated, the target audience, the urgency attached and the feedback required. Through the strategies, they believed staff would be good ambassadors of the organisation as well maximize productivity since they were at the centre of the communications strategy.

4.5 DOES EFFECTIVE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN MEMBERS OF ACP HELP IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES?

Informants were unanimous in their agreement that effective internal communication contributed greatly to the achievement of the organisational goals and objectives. The response by one manager was as quoted below.

Certainly because if you need some information from someone or has to do a certain job and you don't communicate properly, the person will do the wrong thing or not do it at all. [manager]

Clear, concise and consistent communication educated employees, enabled them to appreciate the value of their organisation's vision, programs or projects and was a significant element in engaging the employees keeping them focused, productive and committed. The contribution that clear and effective channels of communication provides to an organisation is substantial, not least in enlisting employees' support for business objectives, aligning everyone's activities and providing some motivation to raise performance levels. Employees of ACP, especially those in the production department were told clearly what the standards and targets were (in terms of product specifications, quantities and durations) and the associated rewards. Armed with this information, employees coordinated and encouraged each other to work towards the achievement of these targets so as to partake in the rewards. Work was done in an organised and orderly manner so that there was hardly any delay. A conducive work environment, an informed workforce that was motivated and passionate about what they did, inevitably contributed to performance and productivity at the ACP to a very large extent. The notion held by the workers is that ACP is synonymous to quality. The company recognised the role of staff in growing the company or otherwise and as such managers as much as possible kept staff informed. Thus the consequence of uniformed workers was appreciated. These included the difficulty for workers to be conversant with their job description and as such became less knowledgeable, not knowing what they were supposed to do, and in turn worked poorly. This would not promote the achievement of the cooperate objective.

4.6 GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS - THE ACP APPROACH

There was no doubt that how knowledgeable the staff was in terms of their job determined how efficient their output was. The employees of ACP Ltd was no exception, respondents believed that keeping staff well informed of their job description impacted greatly on performance. They were satisfied with the means of communication though there asserted there was room for improvement. The communication methods employed by ACP Ltd such as the emails, the intercom, the notice boards as well as the verbal were working effectively for the company since respondents believed that they were well informed through the means because, information intended for them reached them on time with enough explanations describing exactly what was expected of them. This is evidenced from these responses:

…oh yes I'm well informed, I'm well informed. [non-manager]

…yes I mean they are ok. [non-manager]

…hmm with the verbal, it comes on time because the moment your other colleague hears of it , he tells you but when its supposed to come by typing and other things it takes a day day or two. [non-manager]

One interesting outcome was that while majority of managers preferred email because of their evidential nature, most of the non-managers preferred verbal communication because it was quick and understandable. This could however be because of the differences in their level of education.

It also became quite evident that although non-managers insisted they were well informed, they had little to no idea what the broader vision of the company was. What they were informed about

had to do with targets and projects as well disciplinary issues. Surprisingly, even managers' idea of what the company's vision was varied.

On company policies, although mention was made of the ACP Handbook which should spell out all these, not many employees had copies. Judging from the literacy level of many of the production non-managers it was unlikely they would even have read the book if they had copies. There was the effort to communicate these verbally however during the durbars and meetings, but as mentioned earlier these are irregular and inconsistent. The Human Resource and Administration department which had the responsibility for achieving this existed literally in name only. There was no substantive manager at the time and as the General Manager had oversight responsibility. The various channels employed including notice boards however helped in informing employees albeit insufficient.

4.7 EMPLOYEES' PREFERENCE FOR RECEIVING INFORMATION

Effective coordination is one of the major functions of the communication process in an organisation. Information available within the various functional groups is normally routed to key decision centers. Information must be complete, accurate, and timely. When decisions were made, they had to be transmitted to all concerned groups within the organisation on time. The messages containing the decisions had to be clear and concise. The success of the response to each message is dependent upon the preciseness of the original message, the communication channel used for transmitting it, the interpretation and understanding of the receiver, and the channel selected for transmitting the message.

Various communication channels are utilised in the internal communication process within ACP Ltd. The company has established various channels, verbal, written, as well as electronic means

to facilitate the transmission of information throughout the organisation. Employees had the opportunity to utilise a variety of methods but managers had the affinity for emails and memos while non-managers preferred verbal communication. Managers were the most satisfied with internal communication because they received information from a variety of sources, including privileged documents. Despite the convenience of e-mails, a high value was placed on face-to-face communication because of the interactive nature, and also because it instilled some kind of trust and confidence in the workers. It was also found that, email communication afforded the workers a chance to refer to the information given over and over again.

Group communication was also encouraged because it allowed workers to share and learn new ideas from other workers. The combination of various channels meant that information was likely to reach its audience through one of them. The recipients were also likely to identify one channel which the associated most with.

4.8 APPRAISAL OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES.

African Concrete Products had no way of evaluating the communication strategy by way of a periodic audit as quoted below. One senior manager actually did not think it was necessary because of the kind work they did.

> *…ACP, no I don't we've done anything like that before.* [manager]
>
> *…when you communicate an idea or policy or something, the measurement of it is tangible, its something that you can see so by the results you are able know whether they've gotten it or not but maybe in some organisations an audit is required but in the special circumstances of ours nothing like that.* [manager]

This meant that they focused only on production and engineering where the outcome was tangible, the "soft issues" in an organisation which referred to issues about communication relationship with their bosses, how employees felt about the work environment, their colleagues among others hardly came up. The workers therefore did not have the opportunity to voice out feelings and emotions.

4.9 SENDING MESSAGES AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Communication is a dialogic and one only communicates when the message sent out is received and feedback received, to determine whether the message has been properly understood. This applies in all forms of communication whether you are at work, communicating with employees, suppliers or customers, or at home, communicating with your family and friends. Communication takes place when both parties understand each other. Thus, for communication to be termed effective both the sender and the receiver must be clear and understand each other. Communication cannot be said to have taken place when there is no feedback and it is for this reason that respondents were asked whether they were allowed to send feedback or not and whether the feedback was received with much urgency or attention. It was found out that the channel of feedbacks largely depended on the medium through which the message was sent in the first place. These included emails and verbal face-to-face methods. The content and the urgency associated with the message also affected this. Feedbacks were however not treated with much urgency except when it had to do with production or engineering, where outputs were tangible.

Also instant feedback was received from the durbars, as well as during performance appraisals, where a manager had to give his feedback on what had been written on the form or what was

going on. So before everything was finalised, the manager had to give his feedback based on a dead line thus making feedback treatment very urgent and effective.

Furthermore one could walk to a manager, tell him what was bothering them and the manager would take it up from there to management meetings where they were tackled but with little urgency according to non-managers.

4.10 SUSTAINABILITY OF STRATEGIES OVER TIME

The communications strategies employed by ACP Ltd changed over time depending on factors such as, the urgency associated with message and the project being worked on and the tangible outcome of production. So a particular strategy was not sustained over time.

> *Oh I mean we are a dynamic organisation so as time goes on if we find means to change it and that will help in our work fine, we are not conservative so we are open to ideas, so as new ways come and we learn about them we introduce them to make our work effective.* [manager]

The study also found out that although ACP had tried to differentiate itself as producing quality products and undertaking projects to specifications, and as a result of this strategy communicated this message internally so as to generate a "buy-in" from the employees, messaging was not static. ACP used to communicate the fact that they were pioneers in the industry, this had however changed over time to "Quality concrete you can trust" to differentiate itself from competition.

Again, ACP had its departments in different offices on the same compound except for the Estates so the strategies encouraged a lot of interpersonal face-to-face methods such as meetings in addition to notice board usage and emails. It was quite easy to get all the workers under one roof,

so focus group discussions and durbars were sometimes used. One could not stick to one particular strategy throughout the working period without changing the strategy because as time goes on, new ideas might come and the old ways may not be effective. So over time new strategies are developed and the old ones changed. The strategies were therefore not sustained but changed as the company moved forward although there wasn't a proactive approach to go out of their way to do this.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study, draws conclusions and offers recommendations for the study. The various issues analysed in the foregoing chapters have provided critical insights into the internal communication practcises and strategies of African Concrete Products limited and how these promote the achievement of their goals and objectives. This insight has informed the recommendations of the study.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The study established that generally workers of ACP have an understanding as to what Internal Communication is. According to the respondents internal communication is how information is

transmitted and circulated in the company.

A variety of practices (written and verbal) exist for communicating internally but the choice utilised depends on the position and level of education of the sender. From the responses, whether an employee of ACP preferred written or verbal communication largely depended on whether he was a manager or not. Managers who are well educated were bias towards written forms like emails and memos while non-managers and other skilled workers preferred verbal communication.

The internal communication practices that exist however are not effective enough. This is because the message communicated is focused mainly on production and engineering issues only. The practice is to send messages on targets such quantities of products to produce within a specific time frame and their specifications, project duration, equipment functioning etc. the "soft issues" which has to do with attitudes, emotions, welfare, working relations etc are relegated to the background. The paradox here however was the general consensus that the different internal communication practices within ACP Ltd were effective. Most managers were of the opinion that the practices in place enabled them to communicate targets, rewards, policies and disciplinary issues to subordinates clearly and on time, while non-managers concurred because information got to them on time and they could ask follow up questions to get further clarification. They believed without effective internal communication work will not get done efficiently and on time.

It was also established that although there are a number of challenges associated with effective internal communication, the "grapevine" was the major challenge that militated against effective

internal communication and information exchange. More often than not there is little communication on issues other than those associated with production, projects and engineering. Workers at the lower ends of the organisational structure of ACP Ltd therefore tend to seek information from workers who are considered to be close to some senior managers and very often what they get are half-truths at best and wild speculations and lies at worst. This fuels suspicion and antagonism which can be counterproductive.

Findings from the study again revealed that there wasn't a documented strategy with its source from the overall vision of the company. The value of creating a formal communications plan to outline the company's overall internal communication objectives and to provide a framework of activities that measures whether the tactics used are really making a difference are overlooked. The focus of management was mostly on production, projects and engineering issues where tangible output is obtainable. Managers of ACP communicate the targets required to enable their idea of the vision to be achieved to the staff in their own way. This meant that the short-term objectives of the company were what influenced their internal communication strategy.

Effective internal communication between members of an organisation contributes enormously in the achievement of the company's goals and objectives. When communication friendly envi ronment was created, it was evident that work was coordinated in a way that encouraged productivity and reduced delays. Prior to finalising an order/contract, the sales team would communicate the requirement of the customer/prospect to the production team who would give a feedback on available standards and duration. Upon securing the order, the sales team communicates this to the production team. The carpenters will begin with their formwork and

immediately after that the masons come in to cast concrete. Messages on these processes are sent and feedback received continuously till contract is executed. When the needed information was given to workers on time, set objectives and goals of the company were achieved.

Interpersonal communication is the preferred choice for sending and receiving information because it provides interaction and immediate feedback and is more trustworthy. Hearing information first-hand from top management gave employees a sense of importance. Inter management communication usually employed the use of emails due to its evidential nature while non-managers preferred verbal communication because it was simple, understandable and offered them an instant means of providing feedback.

Finally, it was realized that the internal communication strategies employed are varied with time. Being a dynamic organisation, managers did not lose sight of the fact that the world is a fast changing place and that to develop, one needs to be in tune with the times. This was done albeit with a reactionary approach.

5.3 CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn.

For communication to have taken place both the sender and the receiver must understand what is said and the appropriate feedback received; thus information is not the same as communication. There was the tendency for managers to confuse effective internal communication with one-way information overload.

The preference for face-to-face communication however was consistent with the findings of Stein, (2006). Both her study and this study found that communication-rich channels effectively

foster a sense of community and that employees sought a sense of community at some level in the organisation

Also existing Internal Communication Strategies were myopic in the sense that they considered only short-term objectives. There was the propensity to only concentrate on the tangible production and engineering objectives and overlook the intangibles although this is also very critical.

Finally, on the whole, effective internal communication contributed greatly to the achievement of organisational goals and objectives, as it created a conducive work environment and generated "buy-in" from employees to work towards a common goal. Workers however were of the view that, although every aspect of internal communication seemed to be working perfectly for them, there was always room for improvement as new ideas sprung.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations as a way of developing effective internal communications strategies and generating "buy-in" from employees so as to achieve organisational goals and objectives.

There is the need for a strong focus on the internal stakeholders because to a very large extent if people will understand the organisation, and appreciate the kind of values that the organisation stands for, a lot depends on what the internal audience communicate outside of the work environment. This is not just what they say about the organisation but also how they comport themselves outside. Again, their understanding of the industry also comes to play and so internal stakeholders are very critical in managing an organisation's image and reputation. Internal stakeholders are also important because they can also become ambassadors of the corporate

brand.

Management should monitor the grapevine it is a major challenge to effective internal communication but cannot be wished away. Rather it can be utilised in promoting effective internal communication. There can be a system in place where management can consciously feed certain information and policies that affect the workforce through the grapevine. So long as this is consistent with the actual communication from other formal channels within the company, it will foster trust and togetherness to work towards set objectives.

Reward systems should be implemented where employees can communicate ideas with the management and if their idea is implemented as a business model, they may receive a sum of money or some of the company's products. Such systems of internal communication that form a link between the grass root level employee and the tie-suit clad executive are vital to the success of any company or business.

All communication strategies should originate from the overall vision of the company. Where the company is, where it hopes to be and how it intends to get there should be very clear to all employees. The stakeholders, key messages and media as well as resources should be outlined and communicated to all.

Goals and actions of the organisation and its senior leadership should be made very clear to workers by communicating key activities, issues and developments to employees and developing policies that facilitate transparency and openness. This will promote productivity and minimize

the antagonism that is common in the industry.

Management should have a mechanism in place that constantly monitors and audits the internal communication practices and strategies. Proactive surveys should be conducted regularly to solicit employees' feedback on these strategies. While companies may be tempted to communicate to their employees their massive growth figures, profitability and other business jargon, the management should understand that the masses are probably more interested in communication that affects them, directly. This may include things like changes in policies that affect all employees directly, critical changes in company rules that employees are expected to follow, important announcements that affect the entire workforce, etc. The invaluable information obtained from these employees can then be incorporated into future strategies.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE - Managers

1. What is your name?

2. What department are you in?

3. What position do you hold in the company?

4. How do you understand Internal Communication?

5. Do you think effective Internal Communication is important to ACP Ltd? Why?

6. How does communication (information exchange) occur between you and other managers / management members?

7. How does communication occur between managers / management and employees?

8. How does communication occur between your department and other departments?

9. How well are you informed through these Means?

10. How do you prefer to Receive Information?

11. Are you allowed to send feedbacks? And if you are, through what means?

12. How effective are these means of communication and information exchange within ACP?

13. Do other people (friends, colleagues) ask you about what is going on in the company?

14. What challenges are encountered during communication and information exchange within ACP?

15. What Specific Strategies are put are in place to promote effective Internal Communication?

16. How does the company communicate its policies, goals and objectives to you?

17. Does effective internal communication help in the achievement of these goals and objectives, if so how?

18. Is there an audit carried out to find out how workers feel about the communication strategies in place? How?

19. Are the strategies maintained or changed over the Time?

Appendix 2

INTERVIEW GUIDE – Non-managers

1. What is your name?

2. What department are you in?

3. What position do you hold in the company?

4. How does communication (information exchange) occur between you and other employees?

5. How does communication occur between employees and managers / management?

6. How does communication occur between your department and other departments?

7. How well are you informed through these Means?

8. How do you prefer to Receive Information?

9. Are you allowed to send feedbacks? And if you are, through what means

10. How effective are these means of communication and information exchange within ACP?

11. Do other people (friends, colleagues) ask you about what is going on in the company?

12. What challenges are encountered during communication and information exchange within

    ACP?

13. How does the company communicate its policies, goals and objectives to you?

14. How does the communication affect the achievement of your targets and work in general?