LAPIN AMK

Lapland University of Applied Sciences

INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AS A TOOL FOR SUCCESS

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Abstract of Thesis

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The given thesis was aimed to study the phenomenon of internal communication within a company, since it is nowadays becoming quite an irreplaceable element of any business development. Moreover, nowadays there is more and more research and other scientific work related to that, what makes the topic of the thesis project even more in demand. The objective was based on the overall goal of the paper, which is to suggest innovative improvements of the internal communication within an organization. The thesis project is to become a background for future research in the field and practical handbook for the case company X, defining the direction of working process.

First, a literature review regarding internal communication and all the related aspects, such as models, functions of internal communication and other characteristics of IC is done. Moreover, characteristics of effective internal communication are presented, followed by its potential challenges and psychological aspects. The theoretical part covers the introduction of business visualization as a qualitatively new trend in the society and a potential innovation tool for IC development. Then a case company is presented, including the background and other basic information. The practical part of the thesis studies the current situation concerning communication processes among employees, utilizing a qualitative method of research, which is a semi-structured interview. The final part is a climax of merging theory and practice, covering particular suggestions for the improvement of internal communication within company X, leading to an innovative development of the organization itself. The plan of a meeting is a visual example of how suggestions can be used in reality.

The thesis discovers the significance of internal communication within a company and the need for its constant improvement regardless of the situation, as well as indicates social trends' implementation into IC processes as an opportunity for its development.

Key words   internal communication, innovative development, business development, visualization

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

The author would like to sincerely thank everyone who supported her along the way of work on the thesis project: parents, other family members, the closest friends.

SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

IC – Internal Communication
ICM – Internal Communication Marketing
BV – Business Visualization

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the study

Business nowadays appears to be quite a significant part of people's life. Hence, every aspect of business development and improvement should be carefully studied and implemented in the working processes of firms. Internal communication, in its turn, appears to be a part of business that needs to be a constant consideration independently from the area that the business specializes in. Many authors nowadays indicate that internal communication is a core element of a successful business development. According to some authors, 'effective internal communication is the start and base for the whole company and its prosperity, it is the base of knowledge management which increases the competitive advantage in the severe market environment' (Hola 2007). Forssberg & Malm (2001) have truly named internal communication ' the lifeblood of the organization', while others noted that 'internal communication has been recognized as a strategic focus for business communication, second only to leadership concerns' (Barnfield 2003). There are other studies proving significance of IC by involving firms into efforts in internal communication, such as FedEx, Accenture, Dell, Johnson & Johnson, Sears (Foreman & Argenti 2005). Thus, significance of internal communication is nowadays only being realized.

However, there was never enough attention paid to the issue according to Grunig et al. (1992): 'In spite of all of this research, however, we emerge from this section with little theoretical understanding of how internal communication makes organizations more effective'. Therefore, most organizations have not yet been aware of the internal communication's importance. Moreover, the opinion that there is a low level of internal communication awareness is nowadays being proved by the increasing number of scientific work regarding the topic.

1.2   Research question and objective

The objective of the thesis is to get a better understanding of the significance of internal communication in organizations and how companies are irrespective of

the size of personnel ensure communication processes. An overall goal of the thesis is to draw people's attention towards IC, since nowadays there is not enough academic research about the issue, which makes the thesis topic challenging and innovative. After analysis of the existing strategies, certain suggestions for an improvement of internal communication are provided.

The area in which the thesis project is focused appears to be quite significant nowadays, since the efficiency of an organization, its potential to bloom and get a better position among competitors now depend on the quality of internal communication in organization. Thus, there is a shift of attention towards the ways of internal communication happening to allow companies to expand their businesses and develop.

The research will be conducted in a case company X with the name not mentioned in order to protect confidentiality. A brief introduction is done in Chapter 4 'Case Company Presentation', so that the reader will be able to become familiar with the organization and thus get a clear picture of the current situation in the organization from the aspect of communication.

However, there is a number of possible research problems mostly due to the fact that the topic itself is quite broad and, therefore, will require a time-consuming approach. Another important limitation appears to be related to the case company, in which, because of an intense working life of the employees, it may be challenging to implement research methods as thoroughly as planned. Nevertheless, so far those problems are the only ones at the start of writing the given thesis.

The sources used in the thesis project included academic journals and articles, textbooks, ebooks, library services, statistics extracted from respected researches. The qualitative method – semi-structured interview – is used as the main research tool.

2   INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

2.1   Defining internal communication

While defining internal communication, numerous factors should be taken into account, since this is not just a simple part of the business – it integrates many areas and aspects, being a complex term. It becomes obvious when comparing the existing definitions. For instance, Hayase (2009) describes it as 'the exchange of information both informal and formal between management and employees within the organization'. This definition overlaps the following, made by Dolphin (2005), who claims that internal communication "can be described as the transaction between individuals and groups at different levels and specialized in different areas with the purpose to organize daily activities or redesign organizations. Communication within an organization is often reflected by the organizations norms, values and cultures". In other words, internal communication technically represents the exchange of information among employees of different levels. However, the definition clearly does not point out the significance of the phenomenon. It is being stated that, depending on the way the information is transmitted, business performance may be affected either in a positive or negative way (Shonubi, Abdullah, Hashim, Hamid 2016). Consequently, the way the process goes reflects directly on a business development overall, since it affects employee performance. Therefore, the essence of the process is important for understanding.

There are, nonetheless, some challenges when it comes to the internal communication itself. One of the pitfalls appears when finding alternatives in the literature reflecting internal communication, such as: internal relations, employee communication, internal communication, employee relations, internal public relations, staff communication etc. (Welch & Jackson, 2007). The lack of theoretical background about the phenomenon explains the existence of the term's alternatives and, thus, reveals the need for studying internal communication in details.

2.2   Models of communication

2.2.1   Mathematical theory of communication

The mathematical model was developed already in the last century by Shannon & Weaver (1949).
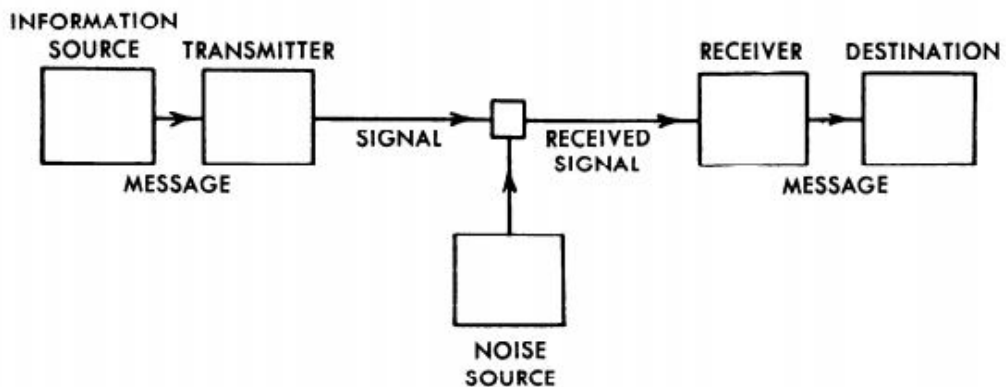
Figure 1. Schematic diagram of a general communication system (Shannon & Weaver 1949)

The authors have highlighted five parts of a general communication system within a diagram presented above, which are:

1. An information source, producing a message

2. A transmitter, producing a signal to transfer the message over the channel of communication

3. The channel – a tool for transferring the message from one side to the other

4. The receiver, reconstructing the message from the signal

5. The destination – the person or object, to whom (which) the message is supposed to come

Therefore, we can see communication (including internal one) as a complex of interacting parts. It appears to be practically useful, mathematically logical and, perhaps, more understandable for the society, since we are used to intuitively measuring things by linear comparison. (Shannon & Weaver 1949.)

Nonetheless, some critics can be applied to the model:

- The model is quite simple and can better be applied to person-to-person communication instead of group or mass ones

- The model lacks such aspect as feedback – it is impossible to figure out the reaction of the destination received the message

- Communication appears to be a one-way process, whereas modern communication in a company is clearly not the case

2.2.2 The Schramm model

Wilbut Schramm (1961) has developed a Circular model, which represents the on-going communication process between encoder (the one sending the message) and decoder (the one who receives it). The interpreter appears to be a person who tries to perceive and interpret the message in a way that the decoder receives the right meaning. The last element is needed to avoid a so-called semantic noise – a concept within which sender and receiver apply different meaning to the same message. The arrows represent the feedback between two interlocutors.
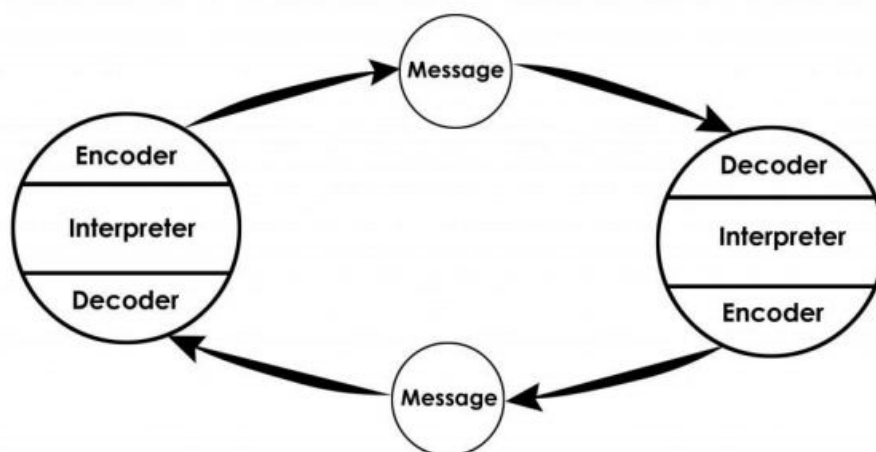

Figure 2. Schramm's model of communication (Schramm 1961)

The model is dynamic and includes the process of reactions on the message sent and received. Notwithstanding, it does not really talk about the semantic noise, hence, does not study the communication process in-depth, therefore,

the complexity of the communication as a process is lost, its essence is not made understandable, but simplified.

2.2.3 Downward, upward, horizontal communication

There were numerous scientific works focused on types of communication existing. One of the most detailed studies was presented by Harris & Nelson (2007). The authors circumstantially described each type.

Downward communication appears to point out the hierarchical nature of communication, whereas the information goes from the upper levels of the organization to the lower ones, therefore realizing five functions (Canary 2011):

1. Implementation of goals, strategies, and objectives

2. Job instructions and rationale

3. Procedures and practices – the process of transmitting the information about company's policy, values etc. to the employees

4. Performance feedback - the procedure within which the top management tells employees how their work is valued and appreciated, especially in cases when the job has brought productive results

5. Socialization

Upward communication is the process within which the employees inform the managers about the situation in the organization. Ideally, both aforementioned types (upward and downward ones) should be implemented in a company.

Horizontal type, logically, appears to be going on among employees of one level, either lower or higher one (Zając 2013). Nonetheless, every type should be at some extent implemented into the company communication processes, since none of them can be the only tool for effective information flow within an organization.

There are also other types of communication studies, such as crosswise (diagonal) communication that stands for interaction between people from

different departments or levels of organization who do not have any direct reporting relationships. (Canary 2011, Zając 2013.)

The models of this kind are highly useful, their existence reveals versatility of possible ways to communicate. Nonetheless, using only one particular way might not be enough.

2.2.4 Internal communication matrix

The idea of the internal communication matrix was originally to integrate all the aspects covered in different models of communication. While every model was focusing only on a particular detail (the direction of information flow primarily), the matrix explains the phenomenon in four dimensions. Visually the internal communication matrix is given below.

Dimension	Level	Direction	Participants	Content
1. Internal line management communication	Line managers/ supervisors	Predominantly two-way	Line managers-employees	Employees' roles Personal impact, e.g. appraisal discussions, team briefings
2. Internal team peer communication	Team colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Team information, e.g. team task discussions
3. Internal project peer communication	Project group colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Project information, e.g. project issues
4. Internal corporate communication	Strategic managers/top management	Predominantly one-way	Strategic managers-all employees	Organisational/corporate issues, e.g. goals, objectives, new developments, activities and achievements

Figure 3. Internal communication matrix (Welsh & Jackson 2007)

Within the matrix, line management applies to every level of organizations, relating to such aspects as employee roles, the impact of their personal communication etc. Second dimension, team communication, describes the 'team situations' (Welsh & Jackson 2007), whereas employees should work as a unit. Furthermore, it involves task discussions within a team.

Third aspect goes for project communication, which describes the situation when the communication among colleagues exists due to their work on a

particular project. In the given case the communication is most likely to be two-ways. The last aspect was studied thoroughly by Forman & Argenti (2005), who pointed out the need for research about 'whether and how companies can focus on all employees, an approach that becomes increasingly difficult as firms expand' (Forman & Argenti 2005). The authors also stated that a 'corporate communication function' – organization of communication with core constituencies - is directly linked to implementation of corporate strategy and building of corporate reputation and brand. The internal corporate communication itself can be defined as the one between strategic managers and internal stakeholders within a company, which is focused on maintenance of employee engagement through a sense of belonging, awareness and readiness of the changing environment of any company and the sense of commitment to the company, especially while pursuing corporate goals. On account of that, the fourth dimension is the best one paying attention to psychological well-being of employees within a company in comparison with others.

2.2.5 Employee communication model

Recent developments have been made in the field of internal communication. Sher Holtz introduced a new term 'employee communication' after Peter Vogt to replace IC, as well as revealed the new model of communication within a company at the IABC World Conference in Washington, D.C., in 2017.

This theoretical background is quite new, meaning that these developments were in demand and thus require the companies' attention to gain the competitive advantage in the market.

Holtz (2017) pointed 5 elements of the internal communication. Alignment stands for harmonization between company's values, goals, vision and mission and employees' ones. Listening refers to the ability of top management to monitor employee sentiment, issues and interests and vice versa. Consultation is about ensuring leaders (and employees) to be authentic, candid and transparent with one another. Branding, in turn, is integrating the customer, the employee and the values brand, thus reflecting what customer or employee

feels and thinks when he sees the logo, as well as how competitive the company can be with the existing values. Channels stand for distribution of the crafted content.

The new model is visually presented below:
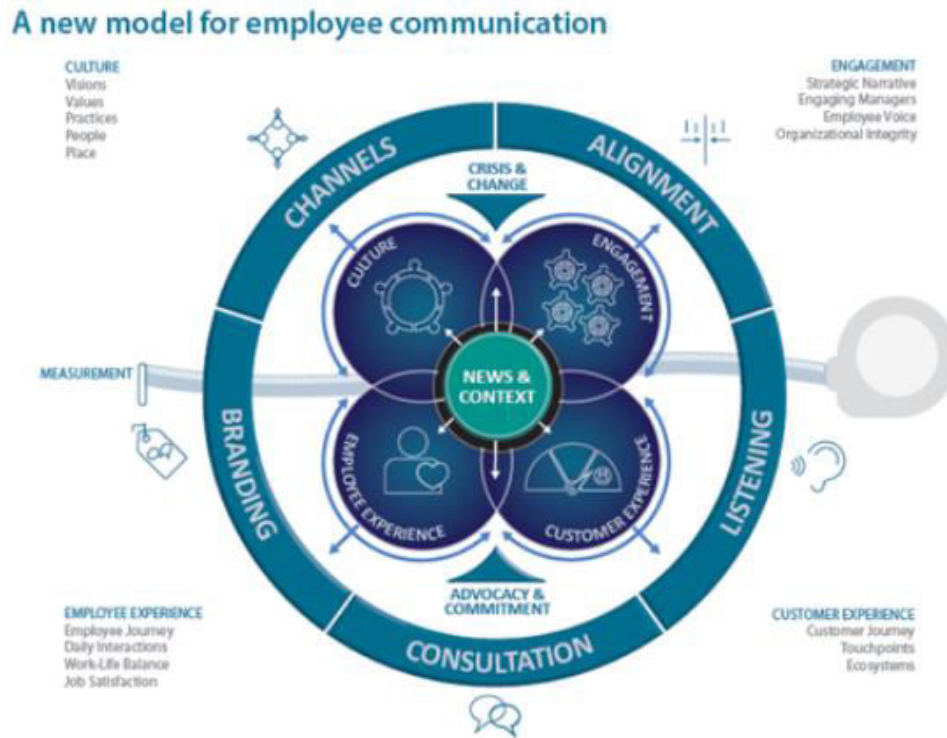
Figure 4. A new model for employee communication (Holtz 2017)

Since communication cannot be changed by itself, such factors as culture, engagement, employee and customer experience can develop the conditions under which employees will be driven for development.

All in all, the given model represents a qualitatively new approach towards communication process generally – the process here appears to be employee-centric by perceiving them as people, not just people who accomplish a certain amount of work.

This theory can be applied in the modern companies, however, the model should be worked through beforehand, since it is not that well-known yet, so modifications to become applicable for a certain company are possible. Nevertheless, the model, along with the internal communication matrix, appears to be the most successful attempt to describe the phenomenon of internal

communication, not putting information flow as a priority factor, but also taking employees and managers as personalities into consideration.

2.3   Functions and Channels of Internal Communication

There is a vast number of approaches towards what internal communication is managed for, what functions it accomplishes etc. So far, Erikson (1992) suggests to divide all the functions into five sections according to different kinds of communication: work communication goes for accomplishment of day-to-day tasks by the employees. News communication stands for the information flow among employees to keep them updated. Control communication is for monitoring working operations in order to steer the company towards the goal. Change communication refers to the change management in terms of successful development of the company, while culture communication is dealing with such ethical and cultural aspects as leadership, equality etc.

Bruhn (2009) also emphasizes other purposes of communication processes within a company: apart from informational, control functions, he also promotes persuasion as stimuli for the employees to take responsibility and get involved into communication activities. Two other functions are about motivation of the personnel and increasing in the level of awareness among employees about what are their roles in the organization (educational purpose). It is also important to point out the functions related to the emotional state of employees, since IC is to promote unity among workers, delegation and one direction of work towards common goals (Erikson 1992). All the functions appear to be active, requiring constant and dynamic effort from each level of the company in order to realize all the functions at their best.

Usually internal communication is not efficient if only one way of communication is done – it would not promote a form of dialog in among employees and top management. Therefore, several channels of internal communication are developed, each of them is valuable and cannot work on its own independently.

The main classification suggests verbal and written communication channels, while each of them have further classifications as shown below.
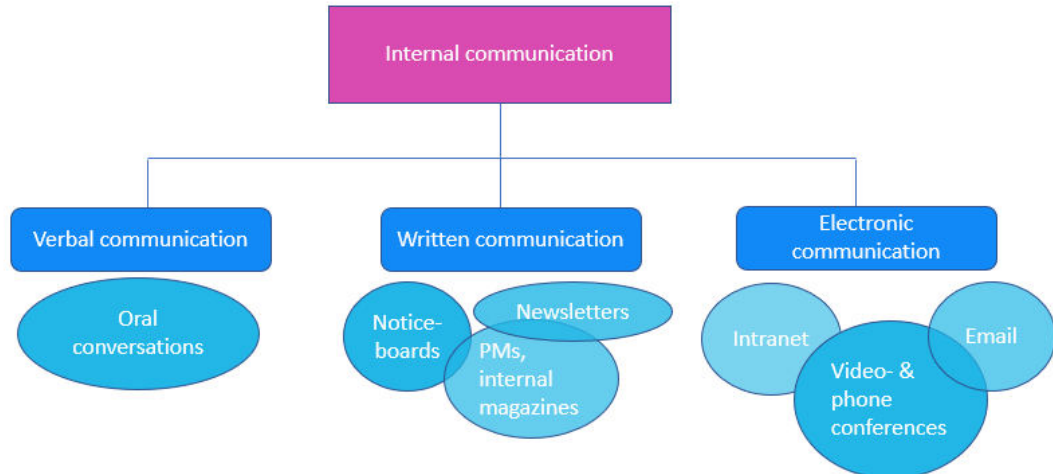
Figure 5. Channels of internal communication (Stuart & Sarow 2007, Forssberg, Malm 2001)

Another interesting channel, gestural communication, was not chosen for the figure above, since it is not a widespread and effective tool for conversation within organizations nowadays – instead, there is a gradual shift towards electronic communication, so that employees and top management are able to save time and ensure dialog in via Intranet or by other electronic means.

So far, verbal communication appears to be quite informative, since such aspects as intonation, words used, facial expressions are powerful sources of information. However, due to the busy professional life and variety of working schedules, it is not always possible to gather all the employees on a frequent regular basis. Therefore, the two remaining ways of communication are the most popular nowadays. The authors pointed out efficiency of electronic means of communication, since in this way the interaction among workers is quite time-saving and precise – email topics are quite concrete, provoking discussion with potential outcomes, not mere reasoning.

2.4 Factors affecting internal communication

Since internal communication appears to be a complex of features, there are many factors existing that have an influence on internal communication, thus making it follow either a constructive or destructive direction. There are nowadays many classifications of these factors. For instance, Blazenaite (2011) divides them into three categories, such as: micro, mezzo and macro levels,

whereas the responsible people for communication are individual communicator, the management and the organization as a whole accordingly. She emphasizes the next factors:

1. Micro level.

   a. Employee (and every member's) communications competence

   b. Personal communication style of all organization members

   c. Relevant message or information perception, an adequate categorization of information, feedback

Chmielecki (2015) has identified other factors after his own study, revealing the following ones:

1. Information sharing

2. Insufficient amount of information

3. Not valuing communication

4. Time

5. Hierarchy

6. Lack of feedback

7. Too much information

Bernsson & Maric (2016) have come to the next factors after their study:

1. Organization change. Indeed, a successful change management includes the ability of managers to always keep the employees updated about the current advances in the working process (Smeltzer 1991.)

2. Multicultural organizations

3. Globalization. Internal communication should go on among employees from different cities or countries, with different cultural and other

backgrounds, time zones and so on. That is why, in terms of globalization, internal communication should be done under monitoring

4. Power structures. According to the power structures, the communication within a company is going either in an upward, downward (or two-ways), horizontal or another way

5. Organization culture. The way employees communicate relies directly on the atmosphere inside the company, which, in turn, depends on how the top management succeeds in sharing the company values and spreading corporate culture among the employees

2.5 Effective internal communication

2.5.1 Characteristics of effective internal communication

In order to define the direction of internal communication development, approximate goals should be formulated. In the given case, desirable aims would be represented by characteristics of effective internal communication as a system within which every process is working at its maximum. Consequently, the establishment of the effective internal communication in the case company will achieve one of the thesis project's goals, since, when operating at its best, internal communication will become an engine of progress for the employees themselves.

Truly effective internal communication appears to be an irreplaceable element of any company's working process. As stated by Ruck & Welch (2012), companies nowadays represent environments that focus on management rather than employees. Obviously, every organization aims to achieve the effectiveness of its internal communication. Therefore, it is essential to go deeper in analysis of effective internal communication characteristics, since, doubtlessly, organizations nowadays do not realize the essence of effective internal communication as it is.

DeMaria (2016) has stated the following characteristics of effective internal communication based on her research:

1. Reaction – it is important to provide an opportunity for both top management and employees to give feedback, since it helps to keep the company developing steadily in one direction, not turning against its culture and positioning strategy

2. Audience engagement – it was stated that it can be achieved by 'more interpersonal interactions, like face-to-face meetings and impromptu conversations' (DeMaria 2016)

3. A thoroughly chosen location to transfer the message to employees from top management or vice versa – it was mentioned that the location itself may either encourage or prevent from getting involved into conversation. Another interesting aspect was also covered – an opportunity to choose extraordinary places for communication may also get people attracted by the process itself, since they will be excited about the something yet unknown

The last characteristic somehow reveals a need for changes, on-going transformation of every process in a company to keep employees engagement at a high level.

There is also a statement that, no matter which theory is being implemented into an organization, the communication should be a two-ways one – all levels of a company should both receive and provide information.

Another important issue is that it is necessary to always measure communication processes – in this way the control over the information flow will be monitored and destructive consequences of bad communication process management – prevented.

2.5.2 Potential challenges for effective internal communication

Before getting to a state of effective internal communication, all the possible challenges should be analyzed and thought through. There are barriers existing that, depending on management strategies, can either be considered as obstacles which are easy to get over, or become factors that are unbearable for further development.

Meanwhile, Ludlow and Panton (1992) try to classify those barriers in a way that there are ones referring to: receiver's side, including his needs and expectations; language challenges preventing the receiver from understanding the information coming; psychological aspects of communication, standing for the relationships between sender and receiver generally.

Such aspects as psychological ones were described in a number of researches. Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin (2003) analyzed such barrier as unwillingness of employees to share information between each other and with the top management for several reasons: 1) they suppose that the discussion with bosses will be perceived as risky and futile, considering dissent as something unwelcome in their organizations; 2) they feel fear (to damage relationships and lose relational currency, destroy one's image and reputation, to get punished or sexually harassed); 3) they disbelieve in any effect of their words, trying to be conformist and support the group which is silent etc.

There are other numerous reasons why any internal commuication may become ineffective. The main of them lies in the top management's image among employees: if management is not involved into communication processes, is not open-minded and helpful in case of change or for those who need consultation and support, does not recognize or admit employees' achievements etc., this provides an opportunity to consider IC in the company as unsatisfactory. Moreover, it leads to the opinion among employees that they are not involved into decision-making process. (Gray, Robertson 2005.)

Among other potential challenges distance and time as a physical barrier can be mentioned: it inables both employees and top management to exchange information fast or to have face-to-face conversations and discuss professional issues. Other challenges can be language ones, such as use of jargon or technical and professional terms that are not understandable cross-departmentally. Physical disabilities, such as hearing, vision or speech difficulties, may also appear to be one of the biggest barriers, since in this way information should be presented by different methods simultaneously, which is time-consuming. Cultural aspect turns out to challenge effective internal communication, because perception and worldviews differ from one culture to

another, while such aspects as the concept of personal space are essential in IC processes. (Odine 2015.)

Interesting theory was brought by Bruhn (2009) and modified by Zajkowaska (2012), whereas communication deficits were thought through as obstacles for powerful internal communication. These deficits were identified in different kinds. Firstly, it goes for the lack of consistency between internal and external communication – it happens when employees are unaware of company's life in the global context – media campaigns, press releases etc. Another type is the deficit within horizontal communication. It appears when departments are not motivated to share their work specifics and quality standards to others, therefore, employees do not communicate cross-departmentally. Third kind of communication deficit is related to vertical information flow, in other words, to up- or downward communication. The next kind of challenge appears is dealing with the situation, when there are inconsistencies between instruments in a single stage or product or service development. The lack in proper information flow about product or service characteristics along the distribution channel is the following type of communication deficit. The inconsistencies between vertical and horizontal communication, when information flow is working either one or another way, but not both at the same time. (Zajkowska 2012, Bruhn 2009.)

While some kinds of communication deficit are not related to internal communication, this theory appears to be useful, since it reveals the importance to monitor IC processes not within themselves, but also in relation to external environment of the company. Hence, there are numerous factors that influence the success of IC from different perspectives, which is why their continuous monitoring is also essential in order to establish and maintain an effective IC.

2.5.3   Psychological aspects of internal communication

IC nowadays is being perceived more as a management term with the lack of research about internal communication as a human-centric phenomenon. Indeed, person-oriented approach is crucial in order to manage communication between people as personalities, not as workers.

A vast amount of studies are focused on the correlation between communication processes and psychological well-being of the employees. For instance, Hayase (2009) points out a direct proportion between utilization of both traditional and new media channels for communication purposes and employee engagement. It seems that personnel is most likely to align its own goals with those of the organization when there is a positive attitude towards IC, especially from the point of innovations and new media channels. (Debussy, Ewing, Pitt 2003.)

Moreover, Debussy also stated 'ethical work climate, mutual trust, attitude to innovation, and employee/organization goal alignment' as the person-oriented constructs of IC (Debussy, Ewing, Pitt 2003, 152). Therefore, IC appears to be a psychological side, since it moves people as personalities, not as mere objects of interaction.

IC indeed has a significant impact on personalities. First of all, it shapes their self-esteem, formulates work attitude and perception. Moreover, it has a direct proportionality with job satisfaction and perceived external prestige. It also has a significant influence of employee commitment, since, when there is a dialog in between them and top management, both receive some sort of a feedback that helps to motivate, build and strengthen trustworthy relationships, encourages to share feelings and express thoughts, and, obviously, decreases the likeliness of that the person would leave the company. (Olurotimi, Shonubi, Abdullah, Hashim, Hamid 2016.)

Therefore, principles of effective communication were formulated, by following which the risk of problems is minimized and interaction between both employees and management is maintained.

Mutual understanding stands for the first principle, claiming that the same information flow should be implemented by all communication channels. Truthfulness refers to the next principle, saying that it is important to share thoughts and feelings that are actually real, without disagreeing to someone because of some principles or trying to be conformist and emulate common ideas. The next principle is related to emotional intelligence (EQ) that is: 1) an ability to observe and identify own feelings; 2) an ability to observe and identify

someone else's feelings; 3) change your behaviour according to the perceived information (Goleman 1995). With regard to internal communication, this principle is simply an ability to perceive information from someone along with observing his emotional state. This ability may also go for empathy as a whole. Another principle is about willingness to respect others as personalities with their unique life experience, problems and intentions. This principle also stands for acknowledgement of interlocutor's right to have his own feelings and thoughts. Perspective thinking as intention to look into future is another essential principle of communication, while fairness refers to the last principle. (Plamínek 2008.)

In conclusion, true internal communication is not about just information flow and exchange, but about interaction between personalities. This aspect is unfairly underestimated in modern companies, as can be seen in corporations with huge amount of employees – top management does not have enough resources to encourage personal communication as well. The aforementioned omission is an unbearable pitfall for an effective internal communication, therefore, the understanding of this would ensure beneficial communication processes and promote company development.

3   TOOLS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

3.1   Business visualization

3.1.1   Visual communication as a trend

Visualization stands for presentation and perception of information in a visual way. More and more attention nowadays is being paid towards it, since, as the previous chapters point out, the society suffers from information overload. This fact, in turn, interferes communication between people in general, as well as one in companies. Hence, traditional methods of communication have played out, which is why visual communication has indeed become a trend in the modern society. Hence, Machin (2014) argues that we live in a "visual society" that includes an array of artefacts and communicative activities in visual communication. Moreover, in times of a so-called clip thinking, there is a tendency of people to perceive information by photographing it, but not

understanding – therefore, there is a need to pay attention towards visual communication, so that people will start perceiving information while analysing the visual images.

So far, the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass et al. 2017) reaffirms the trend towards visual communication, what visually can be seen below.
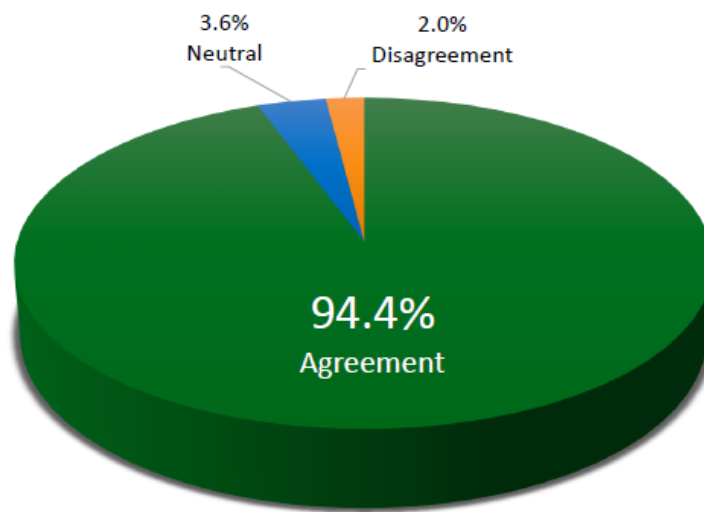
Figure 6. Visual communication will clearly gain in importance for European organisations (Zerfass et al. 2017)

Therefore, it is obvious that visual communication should be developed within organizations so that they, firstly, meet and adapt the on-going trends, and secondly, use clip thinking in a constructive way.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that visual communication requires the employees to develop specific skills, otherwise the system will not work and bring results.

Thus, the European Communication Monitor suggests the following ways of visual communication:

- Art (e.g., paintings, abstract photos)

- Space design (for events and rooms)

- Professional movies (e.g., image films, commercials)

- Professional photos (pre-arranged/ edited, stock)

- Online animations (e.g., flash, web banners)

- Signs and symbols (e.g., logos, icons, pictograms)

- Business graphics (e.g., tables, figures)

- Instant photos (spontaneous, unedited)

- Infographics (e.g., explanatory content)

- Online videos (e.g., web clips)

There is a number of other works drawing attention towards visualization. A Business Guide to Visual Communication, developed by Visage (visage.co). The e-books points out the area of visualization's value:
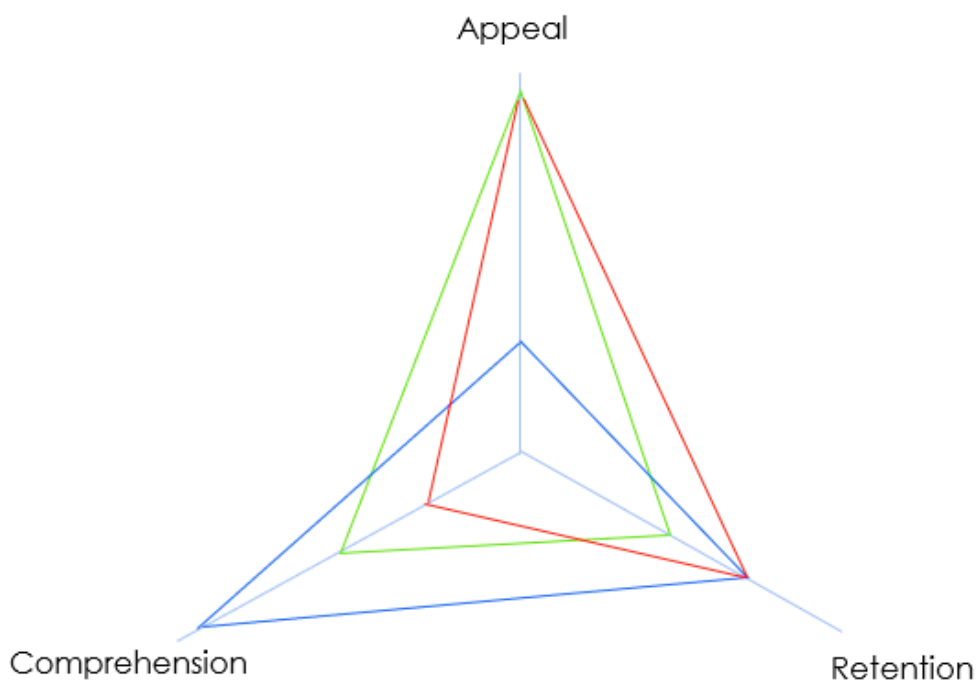
Figure 7. The value of visualization (Adopted from 'A Business Guide To Visual Communication', Visage)

As emphasized, visualization has three values that make it in demand today:

- Appeal stands for how to get people's attention – in this case the material interests people even before the information is being explained. Thus, visualization is attractive for perception

- Comprehension refers to the ability of the brain to make neural pathways based on the relationships between objects. Therefore, visualization allows to visually present the relationships between different types of information, so it will be easier to understand and remember

- Retention is a feature of visualization making it possible to easily and fast recall the information stored

Surprisingly, visual communication as a modern trend is quite applicable to the theory of Triune brain which was formulated decades ago (MacLean 1973). There have been new publication regarding the issue (MacLean 2002), nevertheless, the theory still claims that, in evolution, the primate human brain develops along three kinds: reptilian, paleomammalian and neomammalian. Therefore, it is possible nowadays to analyze our brain operations in the hierarchy of these three kinds, all combined in one – a triune brain. The first type, in evolutionary context, refers to species-typical instinctual behaviours, involved in defending territory, hunting, homing, formation of social hierarchies, along with imitative, deceptive, compulsing forms of behavior. In other words, reptilian brain stands for instincts as the main defensive mechanism. Mammalian brain refers to limbic system and indicates emotional part of life that is originally developed for self-preservation, preservation of species (reproductive behavior). The last (newest) type of brain, the neomammalian one, allowing humans to acquire the ability for linguistic skills, abstraction, writing, reading, arithmetic.

In the matter of information perception, the reptilian brain stands for establishment of trust that would allow the person to calm the instinctive

mechanisms down and start perceiving information. It also goes for establishment of information worthiness. The mammalian one is related to emotions, which indicates the need to create a pleasant atmosphere for the person to establish a positive emotional association with the information he gets. The neomammalian brain is about making the information understandable for people by presenting it in the language and terms common for the audience. Regarding visual communication, it appears to have characteristics that would be applicable for each type of brain – visual information presentation is compact and does not include any long definitions or difficult explanations that encourages the person to start perceiving. Moreover, it is attractive and beautiful (emotional area), formulated in notes, images and sketches that are understandable (perception area). As follows, visual communication enables the information to be perceived at its maximum if reaching each level of a triune brain. All in all, visual communication is quite a useful tool not just because of clip thinking etc., but also due to different areas and mechanisms allowing the brain to perceive information at its best.

There are numerous researches done to define the benefits of visualization in real life:

1. Increase of a human's input channel capacity (Miller 1956)

2. Visual methods enable reframing and perspective switching (De Bono 1973)

3. Facilitation of inference processes (Larkin and Simon 1987)

4. Facilitation of decision-making process (McKim 1972; Foil and Huff 1992)

5. Expansion of working memory (Norman 1993) etc.

Eppler & Platts (2009) have not only summarized the benefits, but also divided them into three categories: cognitive, emotional and social. The aspects given above are related to cognitive benefits of visualization, while the next two are covered below:

Emotional benefits:

1. Visualization involves and engages people's imagination (Buzan 1995; Huff 1990)

2. It can lead to a more productive way of dealing with conflicts (Mengis & Eppler 2006)

3. It may become a tool for inspiration, motivation, release of positive emotions and energy (Buzan 2003)

Social benefits:

1. Metaphors provide a visual means to assure mutual understanding (Morgan 1986)

2. Visual artefacts provide explicit reference points for mutual coordination and alignment (Bechky 2003)

3. It encourages workshops and teamwork via the Internet (Mengis and Eppler 2006)

Still, all of the research described above is focused on visualization in a broad sense, while it is essential to have a thorough look into different types of visualization in order to understand the phenomenon and, what may be even more crucial, the opportunities to use it in real life.

However, the author has succeeded to define one more tool of visual communication that can improve the internal one within an organization – business visualization.

The term of visualization can also be considered as one of the on-going trends, since it reflects all the characteristics of trends (Duin 2016):

1. It is about change, bringing innovation to the company

2. It can be both a qualitative or quantitative method

3. It has a certain degree of uncertainty, as well as a long-term potential for development in the future

4. Visualization may be considered as a counter-trend, occurring side by side to increase in academic research (meaning, textual presentation of information)

5. It may be linked to certain 'events' as weak signals for development of the trend. In case of visualization, the appearance of clip thinking might be the case

Thus, there is a proof that visualization is truly a trend, escalating the need for further research in the field.

The significance of visual communication is also proved by the following research:

1. A larger and larger percentage of print advertising is purely image-oriented (McQuarrie chapter; Pollay 1985; Stephens 1998)

2. The video component of an advertising through TVs is much more effective than audio one (Bryce & Olney 1988)

3. Visual merchandising is gaining an impact on retail sales (Turley & Milliman 2007)

4. Visualizing motivation with certain service design tools, methods and processes, provides a chance 'to better understand, and more sustainably 'energise and direct' human behaviour' (deep service design thinking; this is service design thinking)

C. Janiszewski (2007), suggests the approaches making visual communication more effective, such as: 1) attention – attention activity stimulates an awareness of interest, perplexity or unease; 2) perception – in this case, perceptual production is to let the person experience the information and assess the intent of the environment; 3) comprehension – the aim of the process is to let the person interact with the environment at its best and most beneficial manner.

It can also be said that visualization is a sign of regress, since people would start perceiving pictures like prehistorical human beings did. However, the author believes that visual information presentation is, on the contrary, a

stimulus for intellectual activity. By perceiving icons and pictures, a person would use analytical thinking, as well as start making associative links, which leads to the new neuron connections and intellectual activity in general, thus indicating progress.

In conclusion, the statement of Ruskin (1856) can be brought up:

"the greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see".

3.1.2 Phenomenon of business visualization

The term of business visualization is not yet that spread in the business world, being most of the time used as a part of 'data visualization'. However, it is now becoming an independent field, since there are ways and tools being created that are the best for business uses.

Overall, the term stands for the use of visualization for business purposes. The advantage of this activity is that it can be implemented at any stage of the business lifecycle: start-up, growth, expansion etc.

So far, the author managed to find only one existing official course of business visualization in Russia that provides an opportunity to get an international certification – 'viz4biz' by Elena Litvinova (http://viz4biz.club/).

There are few ways of completing the course, though each one of them follows the next structure:

- Learning about the basis of business visualization (how to draw objects)

- Understanding the structure of making outlines (how to make an hierarchy, the relationships between topics etc.)

- Developing a visual dictionary (how to make objects visually understandable)

- Practicing (completing tasks + making outlines)

The author has completed this course (Appendix 3) in order to get a full understanding of the phenomenon and, furthermore, to become competent when providing suggestions for improvement of internal communication in the case company.

It should also be noted that the author has not managed to find a number of scientific or academic works regarding business visualization – the fact that the term is not yet deeply studied yet reveals the need for further research and development of such field.

Business visualization appears to be an innovative tool of presenting information, a new word after existing PowerPoint and Prezi presentations, which are becoming too common and, while not being used imprudently, do not positively affect the person to perceive the information. On that account, the core idea of visual presentation is being misunderstood. As a result, we believe that business visualization as a modern phenomenon would help the society to use visualization methods at their best.

3.2   Internal communication marketing

While there is clearly a need for shift from approach towards IC as a technical process to person-oriented one, another definition came to play. Even though there was quite a misunderstanding about what internal communication marketing actually is, what it is up to and who is responsible for its activities, Rafiq & Ahmed (2000) have systematized the evolution of the term from employee motivation and satisfaction as the core element of the process to highly motivated and customer-oriented personnel as the main goal. Recently, ICM has found its roots in the definition by Rafiq & Ahmed (1993): 'planned effort to overcome organizational resistance to change and to align, motivate and integrate employees towards the effective implementation of corporate and functional strategies'. Therefore, ICM stands for a complex objective, which includes the willingness of employees to work, attract new customers and thus develop towards organizational goals. The given study reveals the lack of researches of IM from the aspect of practical use – the research done before was more of a theoretical use. As a result, few managerial implications were provided:

Figure 8. Managerial implications for internal marketing (Rafiq & Ahmed 2000)

Consequently, internal marketing turns out to be not only a powerful tool for going through each step of customer journey (attracting new customers, turning them into leads etc.), but also playing a starring role for internal environment in a company, since it allows employees to coordinate their own and organizational goals and put effort into what they are doing from under the angle of coordination with others and awareness of their motives to work, as well as teamwork elements.

The developers of Beekeeper (a digital workplace app integrating communication channels and operational systems) claim that internal communication is the new marketing, since employees have the same value as customers, communication with customer is marketing activity already (as well as employees willingness to share some information about the employer). Moreover, employees are a powerful tool to intensify work towards company goals – top management itself cannot accomplish everything on its own. Therefore, employees are the core element for a successful company development. (blog.beekeeper.io.)

4 CASE COMPANY PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction of the case company

The chapter introduces the case company, which, in terms of confidentiality, will hereinafter be called company X. The author has done a pre-diploma practical training there, so was able to analyze the interaction between employees in-depth. Moreover, the company has approximately 250 people, which is was communication state and improvement turn out to be crucial aspects of company development. Those are the reasons why X was chosen to be the case company for the thesis project.

The company specializes in oil and petroleum product transshipment in the Baltic States. It has operations for more than 50 years with the head office located in Latvia.

The main processes that the company carries are receiving and storing petroleum products from Commonwealth of Independent States members (CIS countries), loading them onto tankers for international destinations. So far, the operations of the case company are being realized according to fair business practice and anti-corruption environment.

The positioning of the company X is well-developed: the brand itself appears to be a state of mind, but not just a logo or name. Furthermore, its vision and mission emphasize a stable position in the market with a positive direction of a working process in future, while the values are concrete and cooperating - therefore, the positioning of the company is highly structured.

In terms of internal communication as the main topic of the present thesis project, it is crucial to cover the management system of the company X.

X is a limited company that has two shareholders, who respectively have 49% and 51% of the company's shares. The top management is represented by the Shareholders Meeting, the Supervisory Council and the Management Board, the sole member of which is also the Managing Director of the company.

4.2 Internal communication within the case company

Internal communication represents an essential part of X's operating environment, since nowadays the number of employees is approximately 250, including the following fields:

- operations

- technical services

- fire-safety and security services

- information and communication technologies, automation

- finance management, accounting

- human resources management

- translation

- administration

- environmental management and labour protection

- customer service

The values of the case company in respect to employees are: safety, development and loyal employees.

Indeed, the number of workers is high, considering the fact that the territory of the company is about 100 ha. The given fact reveals a necessity to ensure effective communication within the organization.

Nowadays the author has managed to reveal the following ways of communication among employees:

1. Direct meetings (planned and unannounced ones) – both types are being realized through the direct transportation of the employee to one place

2. Telephone calls – it ensures the continuous exchange of departments between departments

3. Unofficial meetings – types of meetings for employees to get distracted from work and enjoy routine conversations during working hours. One example of such a meeting is 'Off-the-Record' meetings that are being held once a month

4. Events organized on weekends to gather everyone outside the working places and get to know each other

All these measures prove that top management considers X to be not just a company, but first and foremost, a team of people. Events organized include some teambuilding activities that are to get employees closer to each other and work together not because of the need, but because of a high motivation to cooperate.

5 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH

5.1 Research methods

The case company analysis provides an opportunity to use various research methods. The author has opted for interview as the main research method for the thesis project because of that it enables to get much information for qualitative analysis. This chapter presents the research approaches existing nowadays, as well as introduces the objectives of the interview, describes every step of the research process, in other words, the planning and organization of the research itself.

Creswell (2009) has managed to differentiate three main research methods:

1. Quantitative research – it is usually used to define the relationships among variables that are measurable and can be analyzed in a statistical manner. Therefore, the final report follows a particular structure

2. Qualitative research – the method is for analyzing and understanding the meaning certain person or a group of people towards a certain phenomenon or problem

3. Mixed research – this is the way combining both aforementioned types of research at a certain extent. The author emphasized that the overall strength of a study like that is more powerful than either first or second type of research methods. Thus, the deeper description of what the first two methods are would clarify the essence of mixed research (Creswell, 2009; 3-5, 11-21, 49-61, 66-71)

Qualitative methods represent multimethod, getting interpretation, subjectivity and naturalistic approach involved into research. It embraces different philosophical orientations by making sense of personal stories people share. This method does not deal with numerical or statistical measurements – instead it is focused on defining how and why people act in a certain way, particular phenomenon occurs and fades etc. Qualitative research makes it possible to study psychological aspects, such as behavior, motivation, personality traits and so on. The method may be realized through description of a person or his

actions (case studies), studying and understanding the structure or inner environment of a chosen study group (ethnographies), formulating the narratives about certain events that have had the biggest impact of a person (experience narratives). Therefore, it is not about quantities, which leaves the method without a unique algorithm of steps or a standard classification system. The main distinctive feature of qualitative method is that, within a method, qualitative researchers aim to develop a complex picture, holistic perception of the problem or issue that is being studied – it fits a holistic account as one of the principles of qualitative methods. (Thomas 2003, 1-3, 33-40; Creswell, 3-5, 61-66.)

Quantitative method stands for study of numbers and statistics, thus trying to give explanations and predictions that are to be used for a certain group's description. The research may be conducted in one of the three techniques existing – survey, correlation analysis, experiment. Survey refers to gathering information about a specific characteristic (target variables) within a group of people. The group of people or collectivity as a set of both tangible and intangible things should be defined beforehand based on certain characteristics that unite the items. Surveys are useful when there is a necessity for revealing the current status of a target group and delivering the results in numerical forms that can mostly be presented graphically. The main result is usually the researcher's generalization or claim about the population. Correlation analysis are used when there is a need to define the pattern of one variable's change when another one is altered and, if such pattern is found, then to define the way of changes occurred. The correlations found may be both positive (when the variables have a direct proportion) or negative (when the proportion is inverse). Experiments is used when an object should be studied in a specific environment. The aim of experiments is usually to identify the changes of one characteristic of an object that may occur when another variable is altered, in other words, the relationships between specific variable (whether certain conditions are responsible for certain patterns of an objects' behavior etc.). A standard form is applied to experimental method, being presented by participants, materials, procedures and measures. (Thomas, 2003; 1-3, 41-56; Creswell, 2009; 3-5, 49-61.)

In terms of the present thesis project, qualitative research appears to be the only method, since the research itself is focused on non-measurable issues.

The selection of a research design allows to decide on a type of study within the described options. So far, the strategies of inquiry of qualitative research includes:

1. Ethnography – study of an intact cultural group in a natural setting

2. Grounded theory – the researcher derives an abstract theory grounded in a views of participants

3. Case studies – the researcher explores an activity, person, a group of people etc. in-depth

4. Phenomenological research – stands for an identification of the human experiences' essence about a phenomenon described by participants

5. Narrative research – the researcher studies the life stories of a certain person or group of people

The case studies turns out to be the most appropriate strategy in terms of the internal communication development' analysis, since it deeply studies the phenomenon and analyzes the data received.

Among different qualitative research methods, such as observations, documents, audio-visual methods etc., interview represents the researcher's choice due to the following reasons:

1. It allows to control the line of questioning, collect participants' meanings

2. Bring personal values into the study

3. Includes collaboration with the participants, which allows to consequently implement the interpretation of the data received, not just mere facts

Thomas (2003) contributes more in the definition of interview, classifying them by strategies used:

Loose-question approach. These types of questions include respondents' interpretation on quite a general level.

Tight-question approach – this strategy allows participants to answer within a limited number of options, which are mentioned in the question already.

Converging-question approach. This approach stands for combination of first open-ended, then sharply pointed questions.

Response-guided approach, which refers to the situation when an interviewer asks a question prepared beforehand and, depending on the first answer, asks just-now-formulated questions.

There are different kinds of interview, thus providing an opportunity to implement this kind of research in different cases. The classification given below stands for both spreading and collecting interview materials.

First one introduces the focused interview – these are focused on getting the responses of a person exposed to a stimulus presented by the investigator. It can be a situation that the last one has put the interview before the interview, or something presented to the person (movie, video etc.), after which the questions are asked in order to figure out the reaction of the interviewee. This type of interview is needed in order to receive subjective viewpoints in different social groups.

The next type is The Semi-Standardized interview – it refers to the subjective theory, according to which the interviewees have a complex knowledge about the topic, which is a combination of explicit and implicit assumptions. Therefore, different kinds of questions are needed for getting a full understanding of the person's viewpoint. Moreover, the interviewer does not follow a strict structure: depending of the person's answers, there are follow-up questions possible to analyze the interviewee's point of view more in-depth.

The Problem-Centric interview is characterized by the following features: problem centering, meaning the focus on a relevant social problem; object orientation, which includes methods that are developed with respect to a problem as the research's object), process orientation. It is usually used to

neutralize the contradiction that the person has (problem), so that there is a contribution to increase of the user's knowledge.

The Expert interview. This is the interview that has either one of the next aims: to develop an orientation in a new field, collect context information that is additional to the one coming from applying other methods, develop a theory by reconstructing the knowledge of various experts.

The Ethnographic interview – this kind of interviews combines personal observation and face-to-face interview in a form of informal communication. In this case, the interview is unstructured. Its contextual inquiry is to gather qualitative data about the interviewee. (Flick 2009.)

5.2   Study implementation

The present chapter is to describe the process of interview implementation and interview questions used in the research. The interview was decided to be semi-structured, since this way it would, on one hand, limit the data collection and prevent from non-stop analysis and discussion, on the other hand, allow to get in-depth details from participants who would have thoughts to share beyond structured questions.

All the questions were based on the theoretical background described in the paper, the interviews were conducted between December 2017 and January 2018.

The participants were interviewed in written form, because of the lack of opportunity for face-to-face meetings primarily. This way appeared to be more convenient for participants themselves, since they all had different working schedule, which would make the interview process quite challenging for the author in terms of agreeing upon the time of the conversation with each of the interviewee.

However, not all the questions were dedicated to the theory of the thesis project – some of them became an evidence for the need of suggestions the author promoted beforehand.

Interview questions were the following:

1) Do you now have a clearly structured organization in your company?

The opening question refers to the model of IC that is being used in the company, the majority of which have been described in Chapter 2.2. Models of communication. Orientation in this area will help to analyze the potential challenges and perspectives of the company.

2) Is internal communication essential for the company development?

Any process will be effective when its value is realized. Therefore, there is a need to define whether employees appreciate IC generally or consider it a part of theoretical framework without any practical applications. The Chapter about psychological aspects of internal communication (Chapter 2.5.3) has described the significance of IC in general, however, it is important to figure employees' attitudes towards the phenomena. The negative answer would also reveal a possibility to increase employees' and top management's awareness of the IC's importance.

3) Would you consider internal communication in the company successful at the moment? Why / why not?

The question studies the environment in the company overall, the psychological climate of IC, which is as well explained in the Chapter 2.5.3.

4) Which channels of internal communication do you use?

It is essential to understand which channels of internal communication are already implemented in working processes (Chapter 2.3. Functions and Channels of Internal Communication). The information of the previous questions would bring an understanding of whether the used channels and tools of IC prove to be efficient or ineffective.

5) Which of them, from your point of view, are the most / least effective? Why?

Personal approach is essential in a semi-structured interview, thus the attitude from participants towards IC generally might also turn out to be the reason why IC in the company should be improved.

6) What are the current challenges of internal communication in your organization? How do you handle them?

Chapter 2.7.2. Potential challenges (barriers) for effective internal communication explains which obstacles might appear for the company on the way, this question narrows all the existing barriers to the ones applicable for the case company, as well as describes strategies to handle them.

7) Should trends be implemented in internal communication processes?

The question brings together IC and future development by combining trends as drivers of progress and IC and a key to success. It is crucial not only to realize the modern trends, but also adapt to the changing environment.

8) How do you see communication within your company in future?

Understanding of the spirit of participants and their plans for the future working operations is essential. Have they already shaped and visualized the communication in the future or they are struggling in front of unknown perspectives? Would suggestions brought by the author of the thesis project fit their image of the company's future? The question that is being asked would also point out the aforementioned aspects.

9) Would you consider such a trend as business visualization one of the drivers for internal communication?

The question refers directly to defining whether implementation of such trends as business visualization would be a beneficial one, thus referencing to Chapter 3.1. Business visualization.

In order to be able to ask this question, the author familiarized employees from company X with the phenomenon by showing examples of the tool's use concerning particular topics (Appendixes 1 & 2). Employees were told about the essence of this trend, its coming demand in a society, significance in

communication processes and business area generally. Moreover, the author received a positive feedback about the business visualization straightaway, which inspired her to include such questions into the interviews..

10) What would be your suggestions for improving internal communication generally?

IC – a human-centric phenomenon, therefore, it is important to find out what people themselves think about improvements of IC within the organization. The questions might also be beneficial in a way that it might bring fresh ideas to the author, as well as analyze participants' understanding of IC in-depth.

The study had certain limitations. First of all, it appeared impossible to get all the interviewees at the same time and place for the interview so that they would be in the same environment while answering the questions, which would clarify the answers received. This situation was caused by the working schedule of the participants – all of them were pursuing different working paths. Therefore, the participants managed to answer the questions in their own time. The second limitation refers to the number of participants – not all of the potential participants agreed to answer the questions. It happened due to the lack of time that employees had due to the intense working day and unwillingness to analyze the interview questions at home.

No pilot study was needed, since the author has agreed on the interview questions with the management of the case company beforehand in order to exclude any potential misunderstandings.

5.3   Information Collection

Interview questions were spread via social media platforms among employees of the case company. This way appeared to be the most convenient for the interviewees to go through. The process of spreading the interview questions was monitored by the author and communication projects manager in the case company. The written interview answers provided an opportunity for the author for a thorough analysis of the information more in-depth, as well as encouraged participants to take time and formulate their answers the way that expressed their true thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the author has been in contact

with the majority of the interviewees before the interviews were conducted, therefore, the interviewees felt free to contact the author in case of any misunderstandings.

The interview questions were analyzed by the author and communication projects manager collectively, so that formulations of the questions would be clear and precise.

The number of potential interviewees was higher and included at least 7 participants. However, the actual amount of participants appeared to be 5. The main explanation for that was the intensive working days that the employees have, causing lack of time for going through the interview questions. Moreover, a significant part of the employees is focused on different activities than computer work (work on reservoirs etc.) – they could not take part in the interview. However, the actual participants of the research represent different departments – therefore, an objective viewpoint on the IC within the company is still received. The communication projects manager, who was responsible for transmitting the answers for the interview, has indicated that the opinions expressed fit the common point of view within the X overall, which gives grounds to consider the answers received as the common belief of the case company. To sum up, the usability of the information collection is well-developed.

5.4 Findings

First of all, it should be noted that every interviewee has admitted having a clearly structured organization in the company, which reflects a high level of employees awareness.

All the participants have stated a significance of internal communication in the company. In particular, it was said that '*Any company needs both internal and external communication regardless the number of employees, structure or industry. Internal communication has a great impact on the organizational culture, it helps colleagues to get along, departments to work together, and ensures efficient info flow inside the company*' by one of the interviewee. Another participant of the research expressed an opinion stating that there is a

direct correlation between the communication within a company and its development.

4 out of 5 participants have mentioned a space for potential improvement of internal communication within the company, even though evaluating it as a sufficient one at the moment.

Regarding channels of IC used, the company X is taking advantage of a numerous amount of them, including the ones presented below.

The ones that were used with the upmost frequency are put to the foundation of the pyramid, while the ones mentioned briefly – in the upper levels.
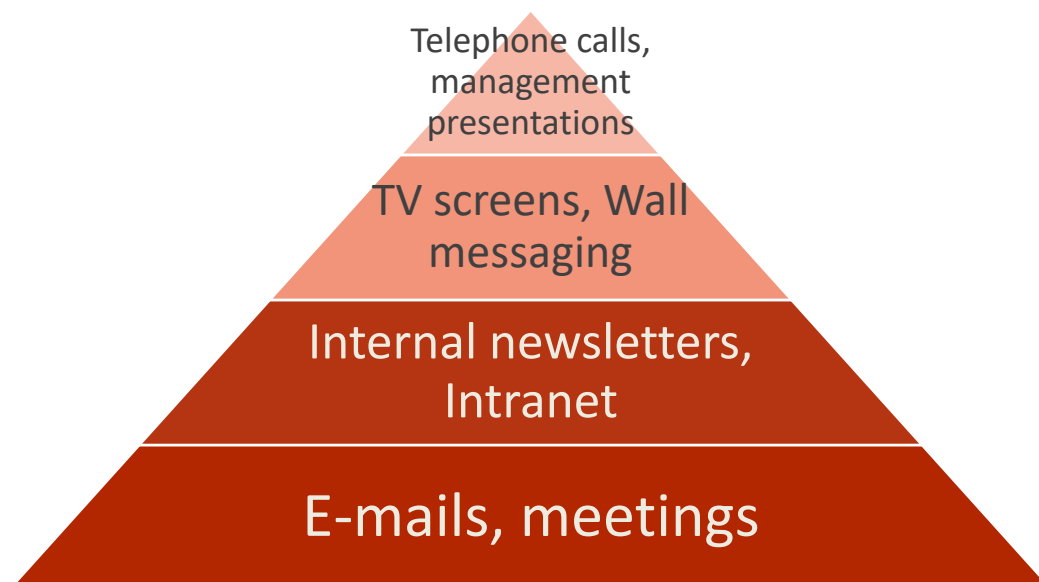

Telephone calls, management presentations

TV screens, Wall messaging

Internal newsletters, Intranet

E-mails, meetings

Figure 9. Channels of internal communication used in the company X

E-mails and such type of face-to-face communication as meetings were considered to be the most efficient channels of communication overall. The first ones were chosen due to the technological progress, allowing employees to ensure time-saving information flow. However, personal meetings appear to be quite significant as well, since, as was said by one of the interviewee, *"it is more direct, can get feedback at once, see and control others emotions and reactions. Helps to create more friendly atmosphere, etc. As to company and due to our specifics clear instructions and procedures are important. Part of our employees are "old-fashioned" and will act just after signed orders and instructions. This is our challenge: Communication – trust – reliance".*

5.4.1   Challenges of internal communication

As for challenges, there is a need to note a struggle among interviewee, since not all of them managed to clearly formulate the obstacles preventing successful IC, even though no one denied the existence of them. Nevertheless, it became possible to create the list of challenges nowadays existing within the company:

1. Cross-departmental information flow

2. Insufficient verbal communication – people do not deliver precise information to each other

3. Unsatisfactory level of awareness among employees about the specificity of each department and the responsibilities of the last one

4. Low level of time management – there is a lack of time for proper face-to-face communication, therefore, this aspect requires a better organization

5. Lack of trust

6. Hidden agenda

7. Poor employees awareness about the company goals and corporate culture

8. High level of dependence – employees are not initiative, waiting for someone else to take the first step and act, while they can become the first ones themselves

When asked about the ways to handle the aforementioned challenges, the next solutions were suggested: team-building and joint training sessions, joint meetings, key people training, implementation of time management techniques, clarification of the company culture. Another interesting aspect was presented by personal development of the employees, such as development of honesty, open-mindedness, positive attitude towards working life and life in general.

Thus, an impressive amount of milestones can be found even within a efficient internal communication, which brings the need of constant monitoring and development.

5.4.2 Trends and business visualization implementation

A significant part of the questions was dedicated to implementation of trends in communication processes. The questions were supposed to define whether employees nowadays recognize trends as a driver for development and progress or not.

Surprisingly, the opinions were not the same, even though there is an obvious preponderance of ones upon the other.
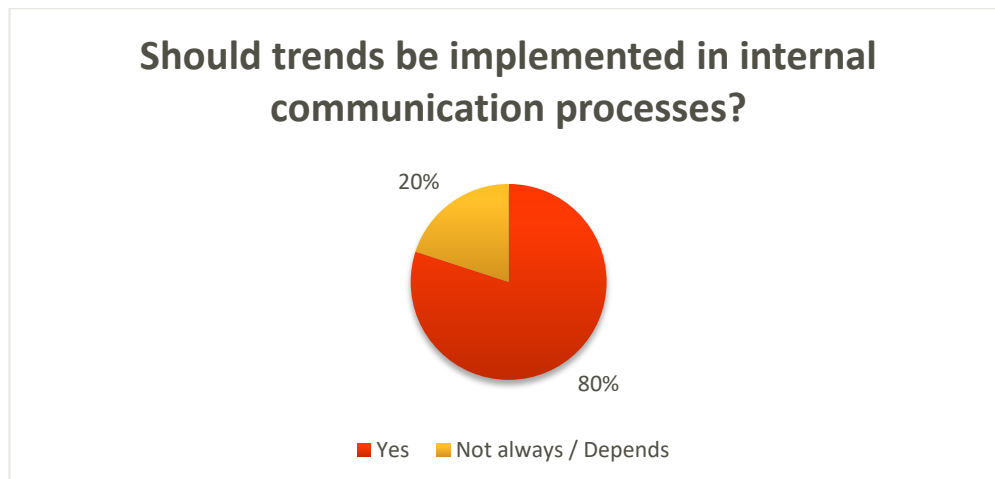

Should trends be implemented in internal communication processes?

20%

80%

■ Yes ■ Not always / Depends

Figure 10. Should trends be implemented in internal communication processes?

The statistics above reveal the need to pay attention on informing employees about the significance of on-going trends in terms of company development, since top tendencies in the modern society become ones for a reason and cannot be ignored if there is a willingness for progress.

One of the questions referred to whether business visualization might be useful in communication processes. As was mentioned above, employees had an opportunity to become familiar with the phenomenon before the interviews in order to get a full understanding of its core idea. No negative reply was received – almost every interviewee outlined that business visualization may indeed become one of the useful and powerful tools for IC. The main reason for that

was the convenience of structuring and perceiving information by different age groups (since employees age varies from 20 to 62 years).

5.4.3   Vision of the company X's future

The last question was dedicated to the suggestions that might improve IC generally. The author has received the following ideas by one of the participants: "*Speak and communicate to each other, check in with employees on regular basis, provide feedback, praise employees, be positive, respect your colleagues and subordinates, create open door policy, be honest, pleasant person to yourself and your colleagues*". Other interviewees have mentioned such ways of improvement as "Be a listener, try to understand other part's opinion, suggest, offer a solution and express your opinion", "make sure that the recipient receives info, understands it as it was sent", as well as triggering of correct emotions so that information is objectively perceived without any misunderstanding that leads to negative emotions. Initiative was also mentioned by the majority as more active communication among departments and between employees and top management, meaning a willingness of staff to step up and express their opinions.

5.4.4   Essence of internal communication

By analyzing the interview answers, several characteristics of IC were defined.

First of all, it ensures any organization to be a purpose-driven one, thus motivating employees to collaborate towards the common goals and objectives.

IC also stands for a clear information flow from top management to employees and back, preventing staff to be updated by any external source. Moreover, it appears to be an opportunity to understand the workforce of the company better and, hence, train well-prepared managers.

Another aspect is "Clear promises" – as was mentioned by one of the interviewee. This statement reveals that by promoting crystallized goals, it ensures well-trained staff, improves customer's encounter with the brand and increases revenue. In other words, a well-developed internal communication directly correlates with a well-developed external one.

Internal communication turns out to be a key for success in crisis times and change management field: "By putting organizational structure, plans, and channels in place before a crisis hits, internal communication will allow you to handle crisis situations, no matter the size, reputation, or industry of your company". Furthermore, it contributes into working environment and climate overall by at least two ways: avoiding high turnover rates and attracting new employees as people having yet unrevealed talents.

Nonetheless, it is always a space for monitoring, since IC can easily become a reason for rumors formation that would distort the meaning of information, introduce wrong interpretations and, hence, bad organization of staff overall. Thus, it is necessary to pay a continuous attention towards IC so that the information flow is fast, frequent and precise, which would decrease the probability to rumors spreading.

6   SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CASE COMPANY

6.1   Potential implementations in internal communication processes

The thesis represents itself an example of positive thinking, meaning that, it is focused not only on analysis of the current situation, but also on suggestion of ways to improve the situation and solve the problems.

Consequently, the author has developed a few methods which can contribute to IC of the company X and to organizations in general.

I.   *Business visualization.* It appears to be the coming trend of the modern society, therefore, it is essential to adapt the internal environment of the company to that in order to promote growth and blossom. Business visualization turns out to be a powerful tool of presenting information in visual ways. It can become a part of numerous strategies:

   a.   As a push for inspiration – information presented in colourful, bright and positive pictures, textual points etc.

   b.   As an explanatory method – visual images may help to describe difficult procedures and issues that are hard to be perceived by words heard

   c.   Time-saving method – visual announcements can, firstly, draw employees' attention and, secondly, save their time while going through the material

II.   *Cultural mentoring.* The psychological aspects of IC have already been discussed earlier in the thesis – there is a need to help employees to realize the importance of communication, since they can contribute to the development of something only when they know its value. Cultural mentoring, in turn, stands for a set of sessions during which company's values and philosophy is spread among employees. That would also encourage people to feel united and intensify interaction

III.   *Cross-departmental communication.* Company X is already familiar with this kind of communication, however, there is always a space for

innovations. Therefore, we suggest the following ways of cross-departmental communication:

   a. Cross-departmental teambuilding events – head of one department would hold a teambuilding events with another department and vice versa. Such projects would help both sides to realize which communication and leadership strategies are workable generally and which – only on a particular department etc. Moreover, it would help both the team and the leader to formulate the ways of improving employer-employees information flow

   b. Experience exchange – we suggest to implement such events, so that head of departments will be able to describe past and on-going situations within their department with others in order to promote IC overall. Moreover, such information flow is crucial to exchange how the mistakes were made and, by common discussion, to find ways of preventing negative consequences of any kind

IV. *Diary* – this innovation refers to the once-a-month note from each employee to either the head of their department or communication projects manager, in which he shares his feelings about the working process, reveals any problems that seem to exist from his point of view with potential solutions. The analysis of such notes would ensure the communication process, as well as ICM.

V. *Coaching* – implementation of coaching sessions might also help to evolve customer orientation of the employees as part of the ICM, as well as motivation to achieve their professional goals and self-develop. Such meetings would also set up a positive psychological climate for employees within their working ecosystem. There is a big difference between coaching and mentoring highlighted above: coaching stands for short-term sessions focused on precise development issues that are most likely focused on achieving goals at work. Meanwhile, mentoring is about guidance and support of the person, whereas the focus of on-

going relationships between mentor and mentee is more on personal development. Therefore, mentoring sessions are supposed to be long-lasting. (Connor & Pokora 2007.)

VI. *Long-term communication plan* – by that we mean the need to implement long-term strategies, since communication processes take time to be implemented and developed. Such a plan should include certain aspects:

   a. Few channels of communication simultaneously to ensure that the information reaches every employee

   b. Relevant information flow, so that employees receive information that is essential exactly to them and no one else

All the aforementioned suggestions are person-oriented, hence shifting a traditional approach towards IC as a technical information flow towards a qualitatively innovative one. That being the case, employees and top management itself are going to play a starring role in communication plans, treated as personalities but not as receivers anymore. Another innovation refers to the implementation of trends into on-going working processes. The main implementation is of business visualization as a tool of presenting information.

Even though the aforementioned are the main suggestions, there are also some additional implementations that potentially may contribute to IC development. Firstly, it is about the *360 degree feedback*. The theory of 360-degree feedback was originally formulated by Ward (1997) and can be described as the feedback that is received and rated from different sources and in numerous ways by employee from various stakeholders like colleagues, management etc. The tool is nowadays used in personnel management and has the objective to provide a stimuli for the employees to self-develop depending on the feedback received. This feedback comes from all the participants at the same time, so the employee is able to compare the information at the given moment of time. Even though this system might be sometimes challenging (for example, in a case when too broad answers are given, so that no constructive conclusion can be formulated), a thorough study through the process and continuous monitoring of

its implementation would lead to objective results and employees' awareness of own strengths and weaknesses. Once more, internal communication is going to be intensified. (Sonnentag 2003.)

Since there is a discussion about implementation of the modern trends into IC operations, trying to adapt the theory of Web 2.0 that is the existence of websites promoting usability, user-generated content, interoperability for end users (O'Reilly 2005) to the matter of internal communication - establishment of IC 2.0. There has already been a quite significant amount of work covering the *Internal Communication 2.0* version. One of such theories equals internal communication 2.0 and culture 2.0 that stands for collaboration, person-oriented approach, dialogue as the main information flow, work-smarter approach instead of work-hard one, creation and recreation as well as openness to challenging oneself and the others (Formanchuk 2010). Formanchuk stands for cultural challenge as the most important driver to IC development, since he sees in it the shift from techno-oriented approach towards work to person-oriented interaction. To implement 2.0 version of Internal Communication, some authors also emphasize promotion of social skills to IC practicioners within 360 degree internal communication campaigns. Meanwhile, they promote development of the following qualities for intensifying internal communication: influence capability, know-it-all approach, walk the talk (IC specialist is a good example of how company values are promoted by the person), multimedia speaking skills, analytical profile and big data expertise, cheerleader soul and 'a little bit geek' standing for non-stop self-development in terms of IC. (http://pridecom.es/.)

6.2   Meeting session with the business visualization tools

The present chapter introduces an approximate meeting of top management and staff using business visualization tools. The given meeting scenario is a demonstrable example of how meetings generally can be organized in the case company. It can also refer to coaching as one of the main suggestions by the author.

The project of meeting planning was initiated by the author after the research. By that time, few circumstances have already represented beneficial factors of such a campaign:

- The author has done a pre-diploma practical training in the company X, so she experienced internal communication culture already and, thus, became able to make suggestions that would fit in the company

- Part of the employees have already become familiar with the business visualization, so that suggestions provided by the author would not catch them off balance

- A majority of the interviewees have admitted significance of business visualization in communication overall, which makes such project a must

While developing the project, the author has gone through several aspects: organization of the meetings (time and venue), structure, participants etc. Obviously, the suggested version of a meeting is an ideal one, meaning that not all the requirements will be met. However, such a meeting scenario, if approved by the case company, may become a direction for improvement and development of communication area, practical handbook leading communication architecture within the company.

Meeting should be organized in the day-time during working hours and include both representatives from employees from various departments and top management, so that the inter-level and cross-departmental dialog is open. The participants should take a seat wherever they feel comfortable, nevertheless, it is recommended to organize such meetings in the auditoriums and offices with round tables, so that employees would be sitting next to each other and thus become psychologically united already.

The start of the meeting is going to be done by the communication projects manager's speech, welcoming every participant for their time and cooperation.

Then the topic is going to be introduced: 'Internal communication'. First, the significance of IC is to be emphasized, its characteristics and benefits formulated with the help of participants as well. All the characteristics and

defined benefits are to be written by the communication projects manager in the place everyone can see it. In this way, participants are going to be perceiving this information during the whole meeting. After that, the discussion about the current situation observations based on the thesis project are to be told to the employees and top management. Then the following picture is to be shown:
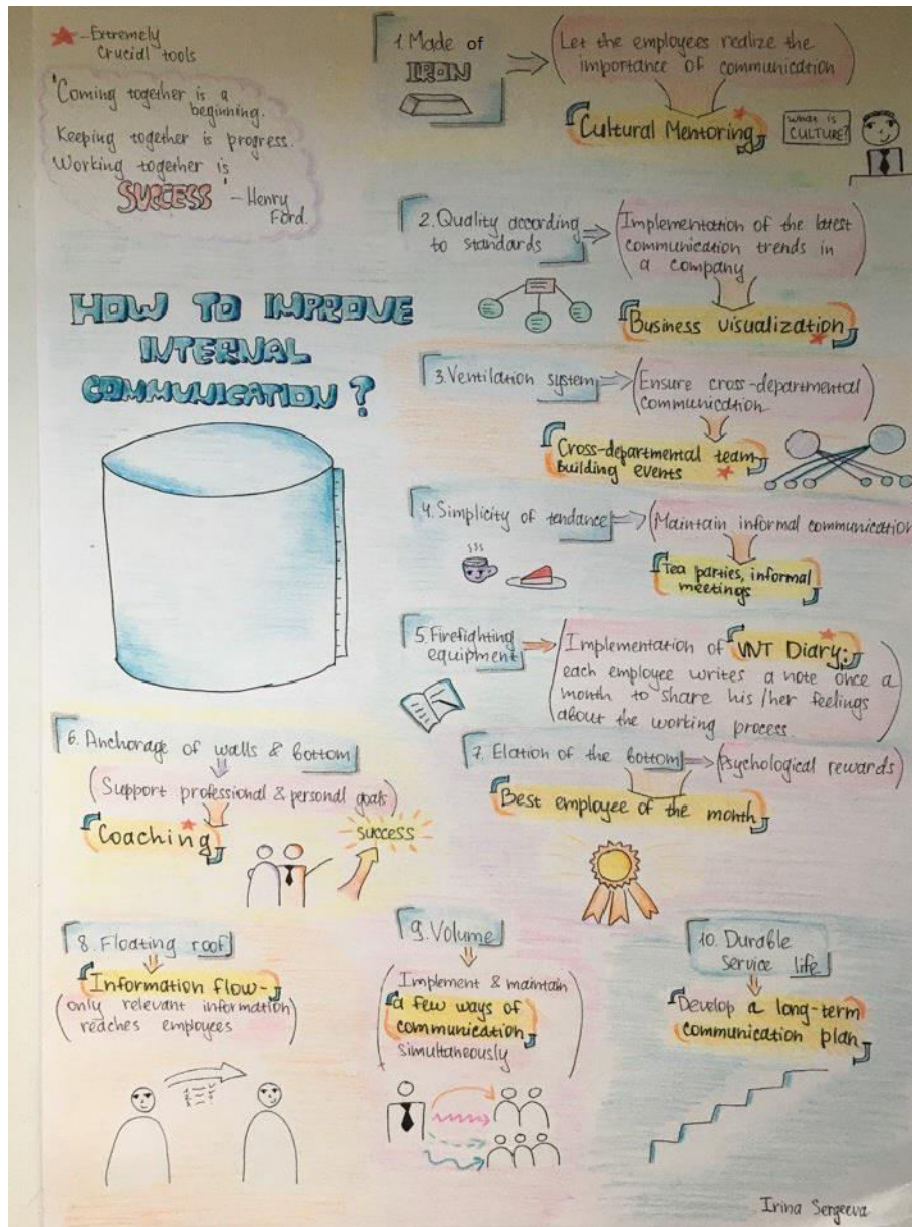

Figure 11. How to improve internal communication?

Explanation of the given slide is to start with underlining the connection between IC's main characteristics and the field that any organization specializes in: internal communication is not universal and should reflect the core idea of the corporate culture, its main features. Reservoir appears to be one of the most important elements for the working processes, since it is responsible for

preservation and transportation of the oil products, which are the main operations in the organization. Therefore, the author suggests to look for potential ways of IC improvement on the analogy of main characteristics of reservoir that keeps it sustainable and safe. To do that, such business visualization tool as RandomPic was used.

The first feature is that reservoirs are made of iron, so that the surface is quite reliable. Corporate culture appears to be a so-called 'surface' of any company, embracing every single element of it. Likewise, the analogy is made here – maintenance of corporate culture is what keeps the 'surface' safe. In order to strengthen it, cultural mentoring should be implemented.

There are a few reasons why mentoring and not anything else is the solution for maintenance of company's culture. Mentoring refers to the long-term relationship between mentor and employees and has perceived value as its main focus of work (Richards 2015). Mentoring is focused on individual, while mentor is trying to promote personal growth without any specific performance goals. Therefore, promotion of the organization's values is best to be done through cultural mentoring. This type of mentoring can also stand for cross-cultural communication within a company.

Another issue is that any reservoir has a quality according to certain standards, otherwise it would not be included into the working processes. Every standard correlates with the on-going state of progress in any field, so do trends in the modern society. Implementation of business visualization as a time-consuming trend is a must if the company X is willing to adapt to the dynamic environment. For this reason the topic of the meeting is going to be presented visually, not by lecturing. Business visualization also has quite many tools, while some combinations of them are possible, which brings an opportunity to present any kind of information by business visualization means.

Ventilation system in reservoirs prevents overheating and other negative consequences of reservoirs' work. Such 'ventilation' mechanism appears to be represented by cross-departmental communication, allowing to 'ventilate' information so that it does not get stuck in a particular department and decrease

the level of employee awareness. Chapter 7 describes the potential ways of how to increase cross-departmental communication level.

Reservoirs are simple to maintain at some extent. This fact brings an idea of that simple attitudes at work are sometimes enough to maintain a good psychological climate among employees. Therefore, promotion of informal communication is needed, which can be done by 'off the record' meetings etc. This type of interaction is a powerful way of ensuring IC, since people would perceive each other not just as colleagues, but also as personalities. Moreover, that would establish a good psychological climate and promote personal and professional self-revelation of employees.

Implementation of 'X Diary' is an idea coming from the need to monitor such things of reservoir as firelighting equipment non-stop. By running the project, top management would be able to monitor well-being of employees and note any deviation in time to prevent negative consequences (conflicts, low level of employee performance etc.) by taking particular measures. Moreover, such thing would also be beneficial for employees themselves in a way that they would be able to follow their 'mood path' and see whether there are any significant changes happening and why. 'X Diary' can be done once in a month or on any other regular basis, when communication projects manager would be receiving notes from employees about their attitude towards working process, their suggestions for improvement or complaints about something yet unrevealed by the top management. That project would also let employees realize that their opinion matters all the time.

Such characteristic as elation of the reservoir's bottom brings us to the need of 'elating people'. One of the ways to do so is psychological rewards ('best employee of the month' and so on), which would motivate employees to do their best at work, and also encourage them to use their full potential. On the other hand, top management would be able to discover which representatives of personnel are highly motivated and which need help with the issue.

Anchoring walls and the bottom of the reservoir is needed to get a stable position. Sustainable status is also a need for employees which can be achieved by coaching, referring to the process of helping people to accomplish

their professional goals by a specialist. Coaching can be done on a regular basis also, while each session or set of them would be focused on particular performance objectives.

Reservoir has a floating roof, which brings an association with information flow that should be ensured at both cross-departmental and inter-level stages. It also claims that only relevant information should reach people, without any 'information noise', so that employees would value materials coming to them.

Even the smallest reservoirs are quite huge, therefore, volume appears to be one of the main features of the last one as well. Volume of IC can also be increased by using several ways or, more precisely, channels of communication at the same time. This would ensure an eclectic approach towards IC generally. The suggestion thus also stands for strengthening channels of IC that are not quite popular at the moment, such as wall-messaging etc. Meanwhile, popular channels should be maintained (personal meetings, intranet, e-mails and so on). Hence, eclectic approach may be realized by: attaching extracts from management presentations in e-mails before the meetings, so that employees can be prepared for the topic that is to be discussed; implementing QR-code in wall-messaging, which would ensure virtual communication between employees and let them have certain information on devices etc.

The last but not the least, reservoirs are durable in terms of a life-time. This is the association with a long-term communication plan that should be implemented on a regular basis. Short-term plans appear to be not that efficient, since they pursue specific goals, while long-term projects establish overall objective, direction of work, promotes a unique system of working process. Communication plan should be formulated and approved by top management with the consideration of employees' opinions. The plan would include channels of IC that are to be developed or implemented, any modifications of IC system that are considered necessary etc.

The visual syllabus presented above is to present all the information as fast and as understandable as possible. By keeping it at information boards employees will be able to perceive and analyze the information non-stop, without spending much time on reading etc.

After the presentation of the topic, discussion should be started, during which top management would listen and react to the employees' thoughts about the topic and suggestions for IC's improvement. Notes are going to be taken by the communication projects manager so that significant points of the meeting are to be saved.

Overall, the meeting is going to last for approximately 20 minutes, while presenting the same amount of information in a textual way would require more time for people to perceive and analyze.

7 CONCLUSION

On the basis of literature review and qualitative research, it is possible to conclude that internal communication represents a foundation of communication architecture overall. In regard to its wide scope, there are numerous aspects to be taken into account in order to get a full understanding of what IC actually is: models, channels, functions, as well as potential barriers that may cause discrepancies in company development generally. Thus, theoretical framework has embraced all the knowledge about IC existing.

The objective of the thesis was to study what internal communication and its role in an organization actually is and how to develop it in the case company. Analysis of the existing materials about the issue has brought an idea that development of IC in a company would be realized at its best if implementing on-going trends and, thus, making it innovative, as well as adapting for the tendency to shift attention from communication as a technical process towards interaction between employees as personalities.

The research was conducted on 5 interviews from representative of the company X, belonging to both employees and top management. Interview questions have covered several topics: employee awareness of the IC itself (knowledge of its importance, channels being used in the company), evaluation of IC at the moment, attitude towards trends and their implementation in the company, opinions about business visualization as a method of visual presentation of information, suggestions for IC improvement. The difference between the answers received was not essential, which made it possible to bring solid conclusions.

To sum up, the main barriers of IC in a company are insufficient verbal communication and unsatisfactory level of information flow. Lack of verbal (personal) communication was also named, partly due to the poor time management. There were, however, no problems regarding employee motivation to communicate revealed, which made it possible to bring suggestions to improve IC straightaway.

In order to achieve the objective of the thesis project, suggestions were formulated by the author. The main idea of the suggested innovations was to eliminate the existing challenges and implement on-going trends into company development. Most essential ones appeared to be use of business visualization tools in communication processes and non-stop monitoring of employees' progress towards their professional and personal goals by implementation of coaching and mentoring sessions embraced by long-term orientation. Among the next, but not least, suggestions were cross-departmental communication, use of a few channels of communication simultaneously, psychological rewards, ensured relevant information flow, informal communication, 'X Diary', 360 degree feedback, establishment of Innovation Communication 2.0.

In conclusion, the literature review and the research done allowed to recognize the versatility of internal communication, its core idea, as well as revealed its significance in the modern companies. Suggestions made, if used thoroughly, can overcome the potential challenges for IC in general, while implementation of social trends into IC processes would lead to the innovative development. Hence, the results meet the objectives of the thesis project completely.

The given thesis project can become a background for further research. Indeed, there are several ways of improving the present project. First of all, more participants can be attracted to the research, which would enable an analysis of a broader scope. On the other hand, narrower research could be done when speaking of focus on one particular aspect of IC. Internal communication is indeed a broad field, therefore, narrowing the research would allow to go more in-depth. Moreover, such aspects as implementation of innovative ideas into IC processes, influence of the modern lifestyle on IC etc. might also be the areas of interest for the research in future. Still, the present thesis project can become a practical guide to IC improvement not only in the case company – it can be modified and applied to any organization existing nowadays. In conclusion, it can be said that the thesis project is a universal combination of theoretical background and pragmatic, eclectic approach that is implementation of social trends into existing business structures.

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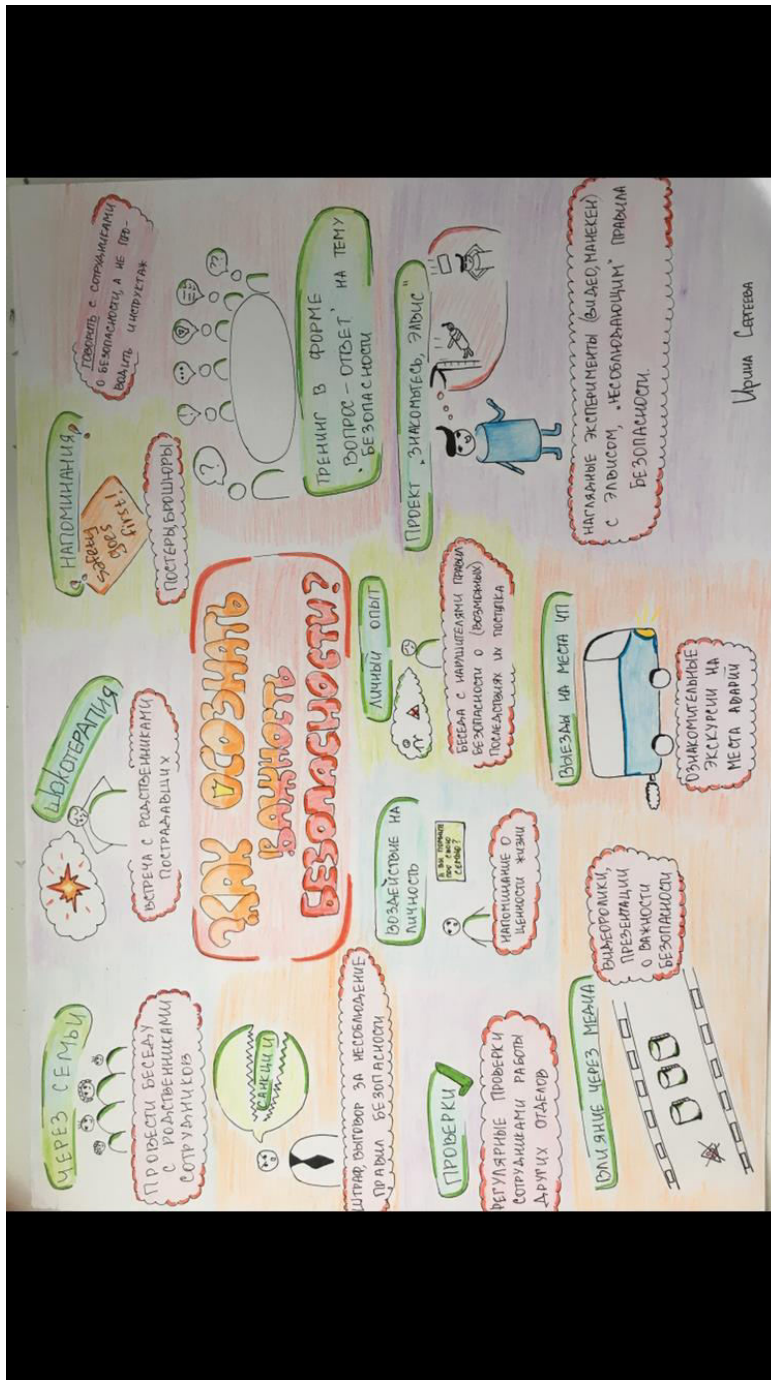
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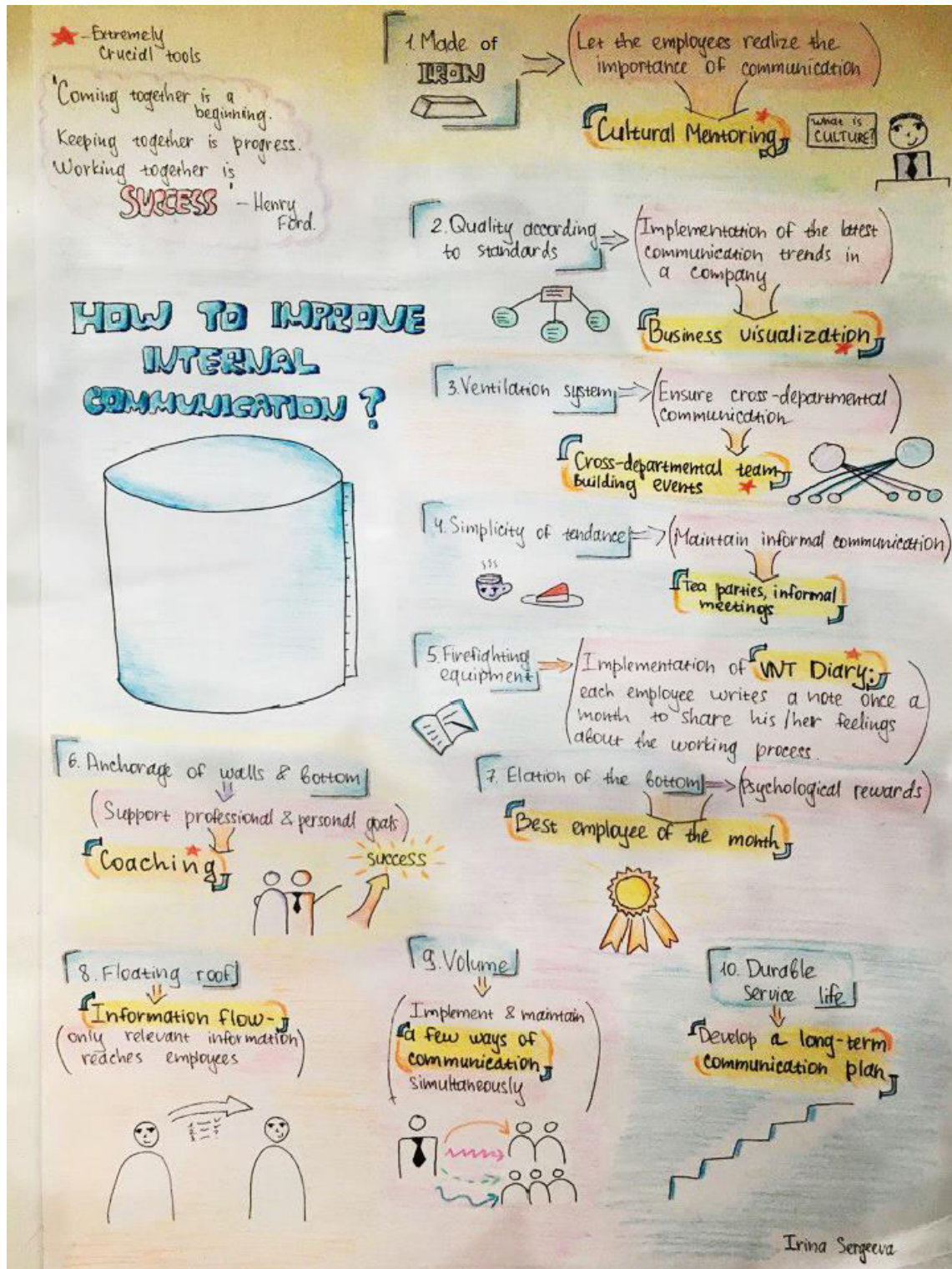
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9   APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Visual abstract 'How to realize the importance of safety?'
(translation from Russian)

Appendix 2. 'How to improve internal communication?' (business visualization tool RandomPic)

Appendix 3. Certificate of Business Visualization Practice