

Employee Engagement and Internal Communication: A United Arab Emirates Study

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1. Introduction

Chapter 1 of this research paper provides an overview of the study, explains the purpose of the study, presents the methods of data collection and analysis, states the areas reviewed from existing literature, and describes the remaining chapters of this research paper.

Study Overview

The study explored which internal communication channels contribute to an employees' sense of engagement and how these channels serve to promote engagement in 16 Emirati employees in a federal organization in the United Arab Emirates. Findings indicated the participants felt most engaged at work when face-to-face communication was used. When the participants wanted to engage colleagues, they also employed face-to-face communication channels. Cultural influences were pivotal in the participants' communication channel selection.

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of this exploratory study was to further understanding of, and contribute to, the scant research on the United Arab Emirates (Bristol-Rhys, 2010) employee engagement and internal communication in the United Arab Emirates. The study aimed to determine which internal communication channels contribute to an employees' sense of engagement and how these channels do this.

Design, Methods, and Analysis. Data were collected via a one-hour interview with each participant over a four-week period. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. Open-ended questions were administered in a semi-structured format to acquire participants' point-of-views and experiences.

The interview method was selected because (a) it has been noted to be ideal for qualitative research (Cachia & Millward, 2011) and (b) it has been successfully used with Emirati participants (e.g., Al Jenaibi, 2010; O'Neill, 2011).

Two interview questions anchored this study: (a) Which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement? and (b) How these channels facilitate this.

Data were analyzed for thematic content. The goal of the analysis was to identify themes and patterns in the communication channels selected by the participants and the reasons for selecting these channels.

Implications for Practice. Findings from this study may be used to promote Emirati employee engagement. It may also be beneficial for expatriates in leadership roles in Emirati organizations as communication channels that engage Emiratis may be completely different than those that engage expatriates.

Document Overview. Chapter 2 examines concepts relevant to the study in order to ground it academically. Chapter 3 explains the data collection methods used in this study. It also describes the participant population and the method of data analysis. At the end of chapter 3, ethical considerations are presented. The data is presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents interpretation of the findings and limitations of the study.?

2: Literature Review

The purpose of this exploratory study was to further understanding of, and contribute to, the scant research on employee engagement and internal communication in the United Arab Emirates. The study aimed to determine which internal communication channels contribute to employees' sense of engagement and how these channels do this.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement (EE) is a business management concept that is gaining popularity as only recently has employee engagement been recognized as an essential element of org-

organizational success (Gallup, 2012). Researchers have posited, "Employee engagement is, arguably, the most critical concern for organizations in the 21st century" (Leadership Insights, 2011, p. 7). This assertion was supported by a 2012 Confederation of British Industry (CBI) study showing that 60% of employers planned to prioritize employee engagement in the upcoming year.

Over the years, employee engagement has existed under different names such as 'employee behavior', 'employee satisfaction' and 'job satisfaction' (Mumford, 1972).

Definition. Kevin Kruse, author of *Employee Engagement 2.0*, defined employee engagement (EE) as "the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals" (Kruse, 2012, p. 1). According to Towers Watson (2010), a leading international professional services company, employee engagement is the amount of "discretionary effort" (p. 2) employees put into their work. The Gallup Organization, a research-based performance management consulting company, has conducted more than 30 years of research on employee engagement and it defines employee engagement as "the individual's involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for, work" (Balain & Sparrow, 2009, p.8).

In 2010, Shuck and Wollard studied 140 articles published between 1990 and 2008 to determine consistencies and differences in EE definitions. Their research confirmed a 2006 Conference Board report concluding that employee engagement lacks a consistent definition. This was underscored by Doherty (2010) who asserted, "[E]mployee engagement is one of those often talked about but rarely understood concepts" (p. 32).

However, researchers do concur that "employee engagement is not just about having enthusiastic, happy workers" (Richman, 2006, p. 36); EE entails "an emotional connection to the organization, a passion for work and feelings of hope about the future within the organization" (Gross, 2007, p. 3). Other characteristics of employee engagement that researchers seem to agree on include: loyalty, advocacy, trust, and job satisfaction (Ames, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, employee engagement is defined as "the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals" (Kruse, 2012, p.1).

Importance of Employee Engagement. Research indicates there is a positive relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance (Aon Hewitt, 2012). Research also suggests that engaged employees are (a) more productive (Clampitt & Downs, 1993), (b) innovative (Linke & Zerfass, 2011) and (c) have increased psychological wellbeing (Robertson & Cooper, 2010) and EE is linked to (a) employee retention, (b) employee performance, and (c) organizational profitability (Balain & Sparrow, 2009; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Furthermore, research has shown there is a mutually beneficial relationship between EE and organizational profitability (Towers Watson, 2010). The Hay Group noted, "[I]n good times engagement is bolstered by high profits, in difficult times, engagement drives up profits" (2012, n.p.). A study conducted by Gallup in 2012 on a large number of international organizations and their employees from various industries established "that employee engagement strongly relates to key organizational outcomes in any economic climate" (Gallup, 2012, n.p.). The effects of employee engagement on outcomes have been found to include:

- 25% lower turnover (in high-turnover organizations)
- 65% lower turnover (in low-turnover organizations)
- 48% fewer safety incidents
- 41% fewer quality incidents (defects)
- 21% higher productivity
- 22% higher profitability

Drivers. A survey study⁽¹⁾ by MSW Research and Dale Carnegie Training involving 1,500 employees in the United States explored the key drivers of employee engagement. The researchers concluded there are three main drivers of employee engagement: (a) "relationship with immediate supervisor, (b) belief in leadership, and (c) pride in working for the company" (Dale Carnegie & Associates, 2012, p. 2). Additional studies by Gallup (2008, 2010, 2012) found the following to be key drivers to employee engagement

- Encouragement from superiors
- Work-life balance
- Belief in the mission and vision of the organization
- Praise and recognition
- Sense of concern for well-being
- Adequate pay and benefits
- Well-defined job expectations
- Resource sufficiency
- Opportunities to use skills

A 2013 analysis of 28 consultancy-conducted research studies indicated the main non-financial drivers of employee engagement most frequently mentioned included meaningful work, manager support, and recognition and appreciation (Table 1).

Although there may be areas of concordance, researchers have stated there is "no definitive all-purpose list of engagement drivers" (CIPD, 2007, p. 2).

While pay and benefits motivate employees, researchers state that they are not effective employee engagement drivers (Branham, 2005; Devi, 2009; Campbell & Smith, 2010). Maslow (1954) emphasized the importance of individuals having a sense of belonging (i.e., engagement).

Table 1 - Meta-analysis of key engagement drivers

	Number of references	Percentage
Meaningful work	21	75%
Manager /leadership supportive	18	64%
Recognition and appreciation	12	43%
Training and development	11	39%
Internal communications	8	28%
Reputation of organization	8	28%

(Pascoe, 2013)

According to a study by the Kenexa Research Institute (2012) that surveyed employees in 40 countries, employees are engaged in a similar manner. While the ways of engagement may be different to better suit cultural sensitivities, an employee's needs and psychological motivations remain constant (Hofstede Centre, 2013).

History. A look into the history of employee engagement reveals that in the 1940s employee engagement was associated with entertaining employees. In the 1950s employee engagement was correlated with informing employees, which then became persuading employees in the 1960s. EE shifted to employee satisfaction in the 1970s and in the 1980s employee engagement was likened to open communication and commitment. In the 1990s and 2000s, the relationship between employee engagement and effectiveness emerged (HayGroup, 2012).

The employee-employer relationship first emerged in 1911 when Frederick Taylor published his theory of Scientific Management. Taylor's theory linked employee motivation with organizational profit and monetary rewards: when employees produce more, they increase the organization's profits and, in return, make more money (Taylor, 1911).

In 1959, Erving Goffman, a sociologist and writer, was the first to describe the act of engaging in the workplace in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Shanmugan & Krishnaveni, 2012). He used the word "embracement" to describe people's attachment and investment in their jobs. Goffman (1959) defined employee engagement (embracement) as the "spontaneous involvement in the role and visible investment of attention and muscular effort" (p. 90).

William Kahn, a pioneering researcher, was the first to use the term "employee engagement" in his 1990 Academy of Management Journal article, *Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work*. The interview-based study explored situations at work when people personally engaged or "express and employ their personal selves" and disengaged or "withdraw and defend their personal selves" (Kahn, 1990, p. 693). Kahn (1990) defined engagement as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances" (p. 700).

A decade later, Maslach and Schaufeli (2001) asserted that factors that lead to employee engagement include a feasible workload, rewards and recognition, a sense of control, supportive colleagues, meaningful values, and justice.

Although employee engagement has been identified as one of the greatest concerns for organizations in the coming century (Leadership Insights, 2011), recent research has indicated that only 30% to 60% of employees are actively engaged, making disengaged employees "one of the biggest threats facing businesses" (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011, p. 7).

Employee Engagement in the United Arab Emirates. Towers Watson's 2012 Global Workforce study uncovered that 65% of employees in 28 countries are not fully engaged in their work and that 54% of employees in the Gulf Cooperation Council are not engaged. In this study which aimed to help companies understand the factors that affect employee performance by measuring engagement, retention and productivity, the 1,000 employee respondents from UAE organizations revealed the top five drivers of engagement in the UAE are communication, leadership, benefits, image, and empowerment. These findings were corroborated by the Kenexa Research Institute (2010) which stated that "strengthening leadership with messages of inspiring and promising futures" (p. 1) is a priority when it comes to engaging UAE nationals (Khaleej Times, 2009).

Organizations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are taking notice of employee engagement. In 2007, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank collaborated with Zarca Interactive, a leading provider of research solutions, to create an employee engagement survey that was specifically designed for the UAE (Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, 2007)(2). The increasing interest in employee engagement in the UAE is also evident in the Dubai Airports employee engagement program that began in 2012. Dubai Airports hired Start JudgeGill, one of the United Kingdom's top design agencies, to undertake an employee engagement program to inspire and engage their 3,400 employees from 51 different nationalities (Start JudgeGill, 2012). This attention on employee engagement is not unique to the UAE as evidenced that the MENA HR Excellence Awards has a category for Best Employee Engagement.

Employee Disengagement. Kahn (1990) defined employee disengagement as "the uncoupling of selves from work roles"

(p. 694). According to Gallup (2013), there are two types of disengaged employees: "not engaged" and "actively disengaged" (p. 4). "Not engaged employees are essentially 'checked out'. They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time - but not energy or passion - into their work. Actively disengaged employees are not just unhappy at work; they are busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish" (Gallup, 2013 p.17). Unengaged employees and actively disengaged employees are emotionally disconnected from their work and are less likely to be productive (Ford, 2013).

A study by Dale Carnegie & Associates (2012) stated that the number one factor prompting disengagement is "relationship with immediate supervisor" (p. 2). Research also found that lack of trust in management is a key factor in employee disengagement (Peoplemetrics, 2011). A study by Right Management/Manpower reported that 94% of employees who indicated that organizational change was poorly handled by management were disengaged; good communication with employees was a major factor in whether employees felt the change was handled well (Peoplemetrics, 2011). A disconnection between the employee and the organizational vision and purpose can also cause employee disengagement (Peoplemetrics, 2011). According to a report by Blessing White (2011), lack of opportunities to grow or advance is also a major cause of employee disengagement.

Although organizations recognize that employee disengagement is one of their biggest threats, only a few companies address the problem (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011). Employee disengagement impacts employee retention (Branham, 2005), absence rates (CBI, 2012), and decreases productivity (Gallup, 2006).

Internal Communication

Internal communication (IC) is a powerful tool. Bill Gates (2000) once said, "[L]ike a human being, a company has to have an internal communication mechanism, a 'nervous system,' to coordinate its actions" (p. 22). The study of IC is one of the fastest growing areas in the communication field (Donaldson & Eyre, 2000) and is part of the wider field of corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Communication. Clutterbuck and Hirst (2003) defined communication as "meaningful interaction between two or more people" (p. xxi). Barrett (2006) stated, "The basis of any relationship is communication. Without communication - be it sign language, body language, e-mail, or face-to-face conversation - there is no connection and hence no relationship" (p. 175). According to O'Neill (2011),

Leaders use communication to establish, build, and strengthen relationships (or to negate or weaken them) (Collins, 2001; Denning, 2007; Rowe, 1990) and from this to influence follower feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and practice. Flanagin and Waldeck (2004) positioned communication as essential for affiliation building in organizations. (p. 38)

Lauring (2011) wrote,

[C]ommunication is a mechanism through which groups are created, maintained and modified (Scott, 1997)...In other words, not only the level of comprehension but also the intentions and positions of groups and individuals affect the sharing of information and the building of relationships that could be the outcome of a communicative encounter (see Battilana, 2006). Accordingly, effective communication depends not only on the skills of organization members but also on group and intergroup dynamics (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). (p. 235)

Researchers posit communication happens on two-levels: the content/cognitive and the relational/affective (Hall & Lord, 1995; Madlock, 2008). The content levels of a message communicate information while its relational levels communicate feelings (Adler & Elmhorst, 2008). The relational aspects of a message are often conveyed non-verbally. The content aspects of a message are most frequently conveyed verbally.

Definition. In the business context, IC is defined as "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organization" (Kalla, 2005, p. 304). Kevin Ruck (2012), founding director of PR Academy, defined internal communication as "corporate level information provided to all employees and the concurrent provision of opportunities for all employees to have a say about important matters that is taken seriously by line managers and senior managers" (para. 4).

Development. The concept of internal communication has been around for more than a century. The earliest documented evidence of internal communication in an organization dates back to the 1840s when employees developed and distributed internal newsletters (Ruck, 2012). The introduction of the telegraph in the 1830s and the telephone in the 1870s changed the pace of internal communication by supplanting slower channels of communication (Luther, 2009) such as post-by-sea, horse, and carrier pigeon (Luther, 2009). From the 1840s to the 1940s, internal communication was predominated by internal newsletters and magazines with articles by top management (Ruck, 2013). A top-to-bottom, one-way communication model prevailed, where information cascaded down to employees, and the upward movement of ideas from junior employees was stymied.

In 1942, the first book on internal communication, *Sharing Information with Employees* by Heron, was published (CiprinsideUK, 2012). Heron (1942) wrote,

the first element [in sharing information]... is the understanding by employees that facts about the enterprise are not being concealed from them. The knowledge that they can get the information they want is more important than any actual information that can be given to them...the program should be a continuous one, a method of conduct rather than a campaign... it must not become an institution apart from the actual work or operation of the enterprise. (p. 75)

The idea of two-way communication between employees and their employer proposed by Heron is applicable and encouraged today.

In the 1990s, new tools for internal communications emerged. Senior executives started using town hall meetings, voicemail and e-mail to communicate with stakeholders (Luther, 2009). Organizations are now using instant messaging for departmental and informal internal communication (Vanover, 2008); recent advancements in technologies have resulted in the rise of new internal communication channels (Horomia, 2007). The Internet facilitates a two-way communication model (Luther, 2009).

Recently, Internal Communications in many organizations have moved from being part of the Human Resources department to directly reporting to top management (Luther, 2009). This is evidence of a change in perception of the importance of internal communication. David Ferrabee, the Managing Director of Change and Internal Communications at Hill & Knowlton, recognized this shift in the role of internal communications: "15-20 years ago very few businesses had someone in the company with 'Internal Communications' in their title. Today almost all FTSE 100 (Financial Times Stock Exchange Index) firms do. And Fortune 500, too" (Luther, 2009, Recent Past section, para. 1).

Channels. The channel is the medium used by the sender to send the message. Media richness theory (MRT) implies that channels can be ranked according to their degree of richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Channel richness is the medium's capability to carry "multiple communication cues, provide instant feedback, and offer a personal focus to the communication" (Sullivan, 1995, p. 49). Flatley (1999) stated, "Media richness theory ranks communication channels along a continuum of richness, defining highly rich channels as those handling multiple inherent cues simultaneously, such as using feedback, nonverbal cues, and several senses simultaneously" (p. 1).

Social presence theory (SPT) builds on the richness concept of the MRT. It adds "the perception of the people who use the media and their evaluations of the "social presence" of each channel" (Sullivan, 1995, p. 50). Researchers note social presence is the ability of a channel to support the social relationship between interactants (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). Social presence theory assumes that interactants value a channel according to its 'psychological closeness'. According to Kurpitz and Cowell (2011),

[S]ocial presence refers to the degree to which a medium conveys the psychological perception that other people are physically present and suggests that media that are capable of providing a greater sense of intimacy and immediacy will be perceived as having a greater degree of social presence (Short et al., 1976). (p. 58)

According to Rice (1993), Media Appropriateness integrates channel richness and social presence. The purpose of this theory is to predict channel use. Rice (1993) ranked media appropriateness from most to least to be face-to-face, telephone, video, letter and email.

Researchers have concurred that channel features are not objective but subjective and are shaped through the interactants' experience with the channel, the topic, the context, and other interactants (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). D'Urso and Rains (2008) stated that these four areas impact user's views of channel richness. O'Neill (2011) noted that choosing the channel of communication depends on the message, the sender, and the target audience.

Channels of communication include face-to-face, telephone, voice mail, email, letters, presentations, reports, and intranet.

Face-to-face. This communication channel is considered the richest information channel "because a person can perceive verbal and nonverbal communication, including posture, gestures, tone of voice, and eye contact, which can aid the perceiver in understanding the message being sent" (Waltman, 2011, n.p.). This channel conveys the greatest quantity of communication data.

A study by Dewhirst in 1971 found that face-to-face communication was preferred over written communication. This channel is considered effective for reducing communication breakdown because "in face-to-face conversation, feedback is more easily perceived" (Debashish & Das, 2009, p. 38). O'Neill (2011) stated that Emirati females have a preference for face-to-face communication because it was the fastest medium and decreases communication breakdown. A study by Pascoe (2013) in Qatar explored the link between internal communication and employee engagement; it stated that face-to-face communication was the most preferred way of personal business communication.

Telephone. The telephone is an oral channel. The telephone is a communication channel that is widely used and considered an information rich channel. It provides similar benefits of face-to-face but not the visual cues.

A study by Morley and Stephenson in 1969 concluded that arguments were more successfully presented over the telephone than face-to-face. This channel shares the same benefits as face-to-face and "reduces time-space constraints" (O'Neill, 2011, p. 47). Researchers noticed "fewer interruptions, shorter pauses, shorter utterances, less filled pauses, and a greater amount of speech in telephone than in the face-to-face channel" (Housel & Davis, 1977, p. 51). Participants in O'Neill's 2011 study of Emirati females stated that this channel provided instantaneous feedback.

Voice mail. Voice mail is considered suitable for sending short messages that do not require instant feedback (Reinsch & Beswick, 1990). This channel is also useful when the sender wants to avoid contact with the receiver (Hiemstra, 1982).

Email. Email is the most common written communication channel in the workplace and the second most frequently used channel (Barrett, 2006). This channel's main advantage is its speed of transmission (Berry, 2011); email can "carry more

information faster, at a lower cost, and to more people while also offering increased data communality" (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004, p. 142). Berry (2011) asserted that email enables documentation because of its archiving features.

A study in 1984 by Trauth, Kwan and Barber concluded that "a major reason to employ electronic messaging systems is to increase productivity among knowledge workers by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of internal communications" as it enhances the flow of communication (p. 124). On the other hand, email lacks non-verbal cues. Non-verbal cues are a key way to determine the affective aspects of a message (Alder & Elmhorst, 2008). Stevens and McElhill (2000) stated, "written communication is not the best medium for transmitting messages in every situation and it is often not the best way to motivate employees. Yet email is often employed as if it was the most effective medium for every occasion as though it should automatically motivate and engage employees" (n.p). According to O'Neill (2011), Emiratis females reported that email is the most frequently used communication channel. The participants in O'Neill's study stated that email communication could be used for (a) archiving meetings or as a reference for employees who may not recall accurately, (b) archiving for organizational documents such as performance evaluations, (c) archiving for defensive mechanisms when the participants were accused of wrongdoing, (d) providing detailed information, (e) increasing transparency, (f) creating an esprit de corps by increasing awareness of team member's tasks, and (g) enhancing productivity by creating awareness of all activities so that employees are aware if there are areas of overlap. Pascoe (2013) stated that email was the most preferred communication channel.

Summary. A study by Newsweaver stated that face-to-face, intranet, and email are the most used internal communications channels (2013). The study reported that the use of print publication has decreased.

Choosing the appropriate communication channel is essential as it impacts the effectiveness of communication. Barry and Fulmer (2004) asserted congruence between the communication goal (e.g., relationship building, information exchange, sender ease) and the channel employed is key to effective communication. Short et al (1976) indicated different tasks (e.g., information exchange, conflict resolution, decision making) need different channels. Sullivan (1995) observed that preferences were related to the type of task and in some situations email was preferred over oral communication channels. Jones and Pittman (1982) indicated the nature of the task impacts channel selection. For example, motivating an employee may require an inspirational appeal to induce the employee's emotion; this will need a channel that is rich in non-verbal cues like face-to-face. Reinsch and Beswick (1990) asserted rich channels support social relationships; therefore, when a relationship is important, richer channels should be used. In line with MRT and SPT, Berk and Clampitt (1991) supported the use of oral channels for relational messages and written channels for content-orient messages. Berk and Clampitt (1991) asserted, "Because communication channels have certain attributes, senders must be sure that their intentions are congruent with

the dynamics of the channel" (p. 3). In agreement, Kurpitz and Cowell (2011) noted, "some media (e.g., videoconferencing or telephone) have greater social presence than others (e.g., e-mail), and the use of media higher in social presence should be important for social tasks such as building relationships (Robert & Dennis, 2005)" (p. 58). In Kurpitz and Cowell's 2011 study, subordinates identified specific types of messages require specific channels. For example, participants believed confidential information should be communicated face-to-face (Kurpitz & Cowell, 2011).

Channel selection is important because media choice has been shown to impact organizational performance (Markus, 1994). Reinsch and Beswick (1990) remarked, "Decisions about channel are important since they help determine the impact of specific messages and the effectiveness of message initiators. In the aggregate, such decisions help shape the effectiveness, efficiency, and ambience of an organization" (p. 801). The 2013 Newsweaver study also revealed that the most effective internal communication channels are intranet, email, and face-to-face communication.

Culture

Lustig and Koester (1999) have posited, "People from different cultures whenever the degree of difference between them is sufficiently large and important that it creates dissimilar interpretations and expectations about what are regarded as competent communication behaviours (p. 58). Research also confirmed that when interactants have "different paradigms, norms, standards, and values"; they have different cultures (Phan, Siegel, & Wright, 2009; p. 331). Jameson (2007) asserted that culture should include culture groups such as vocation and generation.

According to Edward Hall (1959), "Culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 169), where differences in communication styles represent different cultural frameworks (Adler & Elmhorst, 2008). Research indicated that cultural values influence communication behaviors (Morand, 2003). This notion is supported by the link between individualist/collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1980) and high-context/low-context communication cultures (Hall, 1976). Individualist cultures have a preference for low context communication while collectivist cultures tend to prefer high-context communication. Thomas (2008) asserted, "[C]ollective cultures are 'High Context', that is, more implicitly expressed through intonation, euphemism and body language than in the coded explicit part of the message (Hall 1976; Hofstede 1997; Loosemore 1999)" (p. 86).

Limaye and Victor (1991) noted,

Japan, which has access to the latest communication technologies, relies more on face-to-face or oral communication than the written mode. We think that the determining factor is not the degree of industrialization, but whether the country falls into low-context or high context cultures as Edward Hall defines the categories (Hall, 1959). (p. 286)

O'Neill (2011) stated, "Culture also shapes perceptions of channels and channel features and consequently selection and use" (p. 75). Following this, it is safe to assume that national-level culture norms will influence channel selection. For instance, groups from collectivist cultures demonstrate a greater preference for rich and high social presence channels than groups from individualist cultures (Hara, Shachaf, & Hew, 2007).

Generation. It is widely known that people from the same generation often share the same cultural value, beliefs and expectations (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Walker (2009) asserted, "Gen Y prefer to communicate synchronously" (p. 3). Research stated that Generation Y employees prefer more direct communication (Johnson Controls, 2010). Limaye and Victor (1991) asserted different perceptions of time influence perceptions of immediacy of feedback.

Gender. Researchers have postulated the difference between males and females can be so great that males and females can be belonging to different cultures (Maltz & Borker, 1982; O'Neill, 2011). Research indicated that men and women communicate differently (Tannen, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1996) because, as children, they are socialized to do so (Maltz & Borker, 1982). Several researchers proved that men and women are culturally different (Borisoff & Merrill, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Lakoff, 1975; O'Neill, 2011). Studies on gender and channel use have been scant (O'Neill, 2011). However, a study by Lind in 2001 established, "Communication channel richness does appear to have cultural/gender differences which in turn lead to differences in channel usage" (p. 238). Gefen and Straub's (1997) study of three nations (Japan, USA, and Switzerland) found that female and male perceptions of email varied but not their use.

United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), formerly known as the Trucial States, is a federation that consists of seven Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Um al-Qaiwain, Ras al-Khaima, and Fujairah. Abu Dhabi is the largest emirate, covering 87% of the total area of the UAE (Abu Dhabi Government, n.d). The UAE was formed in 1971 after gaining independence from Britain.

Oil and gas are major drivers of the UAE's economy. Nearly 25% of the country's GDP is based on oil and gas output (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013). Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, controls approximately 90% of the country's oil and gas reserves (Ministry of Finance and Industry, n.d).

The population of the UAE in 2010 was 8.264 million with only 11.4% being Emirati (UAEInteract, 2011). In mid-2012, the population of Abu Dhabi was 2.33 million; only 476,722 (20.4%) people were Emiratis (UAE Interact, 2013).

Hofstede (1980) categorized the UAE's culture as a collectivist one. Thomas (2008) noted,

Within the United Arab Emirates, it is claimed that legitimacy of a ruler derives from consensus and consent, and the principal of consultation or shura is an essential part of that system

(Ministry of Information and Culture, 2000). The operationalization of consensus and consent has traditionally taken place in the 'majlis' (meeting place, council or sitting room) common in Arab cultures (Ministry of Information and Culture 2000; Winslow, Honein, and Elzubeir 2002). In the 'majlis' leaders may hold an 'openhouse' discussion forum where individuals may forward views for discussion and consideration (Ministry of Information and Culture 2000). This process has also been observed more broadly in collective cultures whereby opinion on new issues is formed in family conferences (Hofstede 1997, 59). (p. 85)

This demonstrates that Emiratis expect to be a part of the decision making process. This notion has been reinforced by researchers from the region such as Abdalla and Al-Humoud (2001), who asserted, "Gulf societies endorse typical collective values and practices such as preference for personalised relationships, broad and profound influence of in-group on its members, and limited cooperation with other groups" (p. 511).

According to Edward Hall (1976), the United Arab Emirates can be considered a high-context communication culture. Thomas (2008) posited,

Firstly, it is claimed that an oral tradition exists in the UAE (Winslow, Honein, and Elzubeir 2002) over a written tradition and that an informal, communal, 'majlis setting may best support such a tradition. Secondly, it has been noted that collective cultures are 'High Context', that is, more implicitly expressed through intonation, euphemism and body language than in the coded explicit part of the message (Hall 1976; Hofstede 1997; Loosemore 1999). Communications are therefore 'integrally linked to the context of relationships within which they occur, including the history of the interactants, their common ground of shared understandings and the setting of the interaction' (Smith, Bond, and Kagitcibasi 2006, 153). (p. 86)

Internal Communication in the United Arab Emirates. A study conducted by a leading communications consultancy, Hill & Knowlton, and published in Middle East Corporate Reputation Watch 2008 surveyed more than 500 managers and employees in the Gulf Cooperation Council. CEO of Hill & Knowlton Middle East, Dave Robinson, commented on the study indicating that organizations in the UAE need to work better on effectively structuring their internal communication departments in order to improve employee morale and productivity (AMEinfo, 2008). The study revealed the following key findings about communication in organizations in the UAE:

- 54% of employees feel that their organization's business objectives are clearly explained to them
- 49% of employees feel that they do not receive the information they need to do their job
- 25% of managers believe that it is not necessary for employees to fully understand how their job relates to the organization's objectives

- 47% of employees rely on external sources for information about their job
- 7% of managers are not aware who is responsible for internal communication in their organization

The UAE government has recently started concentrating on internal communication. In 2008, the Government Communication Office in the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs launched its Internal Communications Manual to promote consistent and clear communication in UAE Federal Government entities (UAE Interact, 2008). The manual included guidelines on strategy development, key messages, policies and procedures, email templates, and communication channels and tactics. The Minister of Cabinet Affairs, His Excellency Mohammad Al Gergawi, said, "[T]he Internal Communications Manual will generate positive results in raising the overall performance standards of the government" (UAE Interact, 2008). The Secretary General of the Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, Najla Al Awar, announced the UAE is particularly enthusiastic about increasing employees' involvement through timely internal communications that update them on organizational developments (UAE Interact, 2008). Al Awar indicated that the Internal Communications Manual will serve as a catalyst for effective engagement and interaction between all employees (UAE Interact, 2008).

Employee Engagement and Internal Communication

Research has shown internal communication is a key driver of employee engagement (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; CIPD, 2012; Ruck, 2012). According to Towers Watson (2010), internal communication is one way to connect an organization to its employees and also to connect employees who are generationally and culturally different. Bleeker and Hill (2013) asserted that good internal communication in an organization can motivate and engage employees because IC delivers a 'clear line of sight', creates employee engagement, effects the external reputation of the organization, allows employees to understand what changes are happening and how they should respond, and provides regulation and compliance because employees will be aware of all the rules and regulations.

It is important for organizations to be aware of the factors and tools that engage employees (Accor Services, 2008). Gallup (2008, 2010, 2012) found the following communicative activities to be key drivers to employee engagement

- Encouragement from superiors
- Praise and recognition
- Well-defined job expectations

Powis (2012) affirmed that employee engagement is the result of several financial and non-financial factors, one being internal communication in the form of recognition. The top drivers of employee engagement acknowledged by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) emphasize the importance of internal communication in employee engagement. According to CIPD (2012), the two top

drivers of employee engagement are having opportunities to communicate upwards and feeling well informed about organizational developments. Managers' abilities to communicate internally are considered key predictors of employee engagement (Barrett, 2006; McKinsey, 2010; Welch, 2011; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2011; Xu & Thomas, 2011; CIPD, 2012). Multiple research has proven that a manager's ability to effectively communicate with employees along with encouraging two-way communication is more important than pay and benefits to create employee engagement (Hertzberg, 1959; Clutterbuck & Hirst, 2002; Barrett, 2006; CIPD, 2012; Jelf Group, 2013).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this exploratory study was to further understanding of, and contribute to, the scant research on employee engagement and internal communication in the United Arab Emirates. The study aimed to determine (a) which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement and (b) how these channels do this.

Data were collected via a one-hour long interview with each participant. Open-ended, semi-structured questions were used to gather participants' points-of-view.

Data were analyzed for thematic content. The goal of the analysis was to ascertain which communication channels engaged participants and the reasons they had for choosing these communication channels.

This chapter begins with discussion of methodological fit followed by a review of interview-based research methods. The chapter ends with a presentation of the methods utilized in this study including data collection, instrumentation and ethical concerns.

Methodological Fit

One-to-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection.

Cachia and Millward (2011) asserted that face-to-face interviews are "long established as the leading means of conducting qualitative research" (p. 265). Krueger and Casey (2009) indicated that interviews "can provide insight into complicated topics when opinions or attitudes are conditional or when the area of concern relates to a multifaceted behavior or motivation" (p. 19).

Advantages of the interview format used include

- researcher access to communication rich elements that provide social cues such as body language, hand gestures and voice tone (Gable, 1994; Opdenakker, 2006; Conrad & Poole, 2012)
- participant involvement on the intellectual and emotional

levels (Byres & Wilcox, 1991; Fontana & Frey, 2005; O'Neill, 2011)

- data depth (Stokes & Bergin, 2006; O'Neill, 2011)
- plasticity in questioning (O'Neill, 2011)
- discreetness that supports psychological safety for participants (O'Neill, 2011)
- flexibility of time

Krueger and Casey (2009) noted "[t]he open-ended approach allows the subject ample opportunity to comment, to explain and to share experiences and attitudes" (p. 3) and it allows "individuals to respond without setting boundaries or providing them clues for potential response categories" (p. 3). As such, interviews "contribute to the emergence of a more complete picture of the participants' working environment and their everyday practices" (Schnurr, 2009, p.18).

The disadvantages and limitations of the interview format employed include (a) the possibility of non-conformity between interviews (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000), (b) limiting relevant information from emerging due to over-structuring of the interview (Charmaz, 1994), (c) lack of generalizability (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Stokes & Bergin, 2006; O'Neill, 2011), and (d) selection bias.

The study aimed to use the participants' perceptions to develop an understanding of which internal communication channels engage employees and how these channels promote employee engagement. A review of the literature showed that interview-based methods were parallel to the aims of the study. This assertion is supported as William Kahn, who wrote the seminal article on employee engagement, used the interview method in his groundbreaking 1990 Academy of Management study.

A review of the socio-cultural context corroborated the use of the interview method. The one-to-one, face-to-face, researcher-respondent interview fits the socio-cultural needs of participants from honor-based cultures such as Emiratis. O'Neill (2011) posited, "Three aspects of the interview method salient to interview-based research conducted in honor-based cultures such as the United Arab Emirates are: psychological safety, depth, and flexibility" (p.97). Haring (2008) noted, "Qualitative methodology is especially useful in areas where there are limitations in the market knowledge base. These include small, close-knit communities". These descriptors have been applied to the UAE by a variety of noted researchers such as Bristol-Rhys (2010).

Participants

The screens for participant eligibility were (a) ability to participate in English; (b) above 18 years of age and below 60 years; (c) Emirati; (d) working in the organization for more than six months; (e) willingness to participate in one face-to-face interview; (f) willingness to have their contributions to the study publicly disseminated; (g) at least a high-school graduate; and

(h) identification as an engaged employee. Because I had an existing professional relationship with the participants, I was able to identify engaged employees.

The participant group consisted of sixteen Emiratis that are employed at a federal organization in the UAE: four females and four males; five from Generation X (people born between 1964-1978) and eleven from Generation Y (people born between 1979-1991).

Each participant was given an informed consent form, which had been approved by Zayed University's Institutional Research Review Board for ethical clearance. The form stated the topic of the study (the link between employee engagement and internal communication). It also indicated that participants were not required to participate, and, if they did participate, they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All participants of the study signed the form and participated fully.

Sampling

Although the research sample was small (N=16), Marshall (1996) indicated this does not necessarily affect validity or reliability in qualitative studies, "...an appropriate size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question" (p. 523).

The sampling method was non-random, convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is the intentional choice of an informant because of their qualities, which allows the researcher to source people who are knowledgeable and willing to provide information (Tongco, 2007). Due to the size and nature of the organization as well as socio-cultural factors that inhibit participation in research and the specificity of the screens, convenience sampling was the most appropriate option. Employees with whom the researcher had an existing relationship (that encouraged openness, honesty and disclosure) and who were identified as engaged were targeted for selection. Marshall (1996) noted,

"Qualitative researchers recognize that some informants are 'richer' than others and that these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher. Choosing someone at random to answer a qualitative question would be analogous to randomly asking a passer-by how to repair a broken down car, rather than asking a garage mechanic-the former might have a good stab, but asking the latter is likely to be more productive" (p. 523)

Tremblay (1957) affirmed that in order to acquire that best qualitative data, it is imperative to have the best 'informants'.

Research Site

The organization currently employs approximately one hundred and sixty employees. It is a government organization that is high-security. It is physically compact. It is situated in one floor but in two separate buildings. The physical location of the interview is a critical element that needed to be addressed.

Robert Merton indicated, “[P]eople revealed sensitive information when they felt they were in a safe, comfortable place with people like themselves” (as cited in Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 3). For this reason, and to maintain confidentiality, the interviews took place in a secluded but familiar meeting room within the workplace. As the findings of the study directly relate to the success of the organization and fell under the purview of the researcher’s duties at the organization, permission was given to interview the participants on the premises during working hours.

The Internal Communication function in the organization is located within the Communication Department. The organization employs the usual internal communication channels such as email, a quarterly internal newsletter, plasma screen notice boards, intranet postings, posters, and occasionally internal events. In the past, the organization had a minimum of three ‘town hall’ meetings each year. The town hall meetings still take place but are less frequent. In addition, employees used to independently organize weekly lunches for all staff; however, these no longer occur because the organization grew.

Design

Choosing a suitable research methodology took into account several factors that were highlighted by Blanche, Durrheim,

and Painter (2007). The factors included the research purpose, theoretical paradigm, context, and research techniques.

Phases

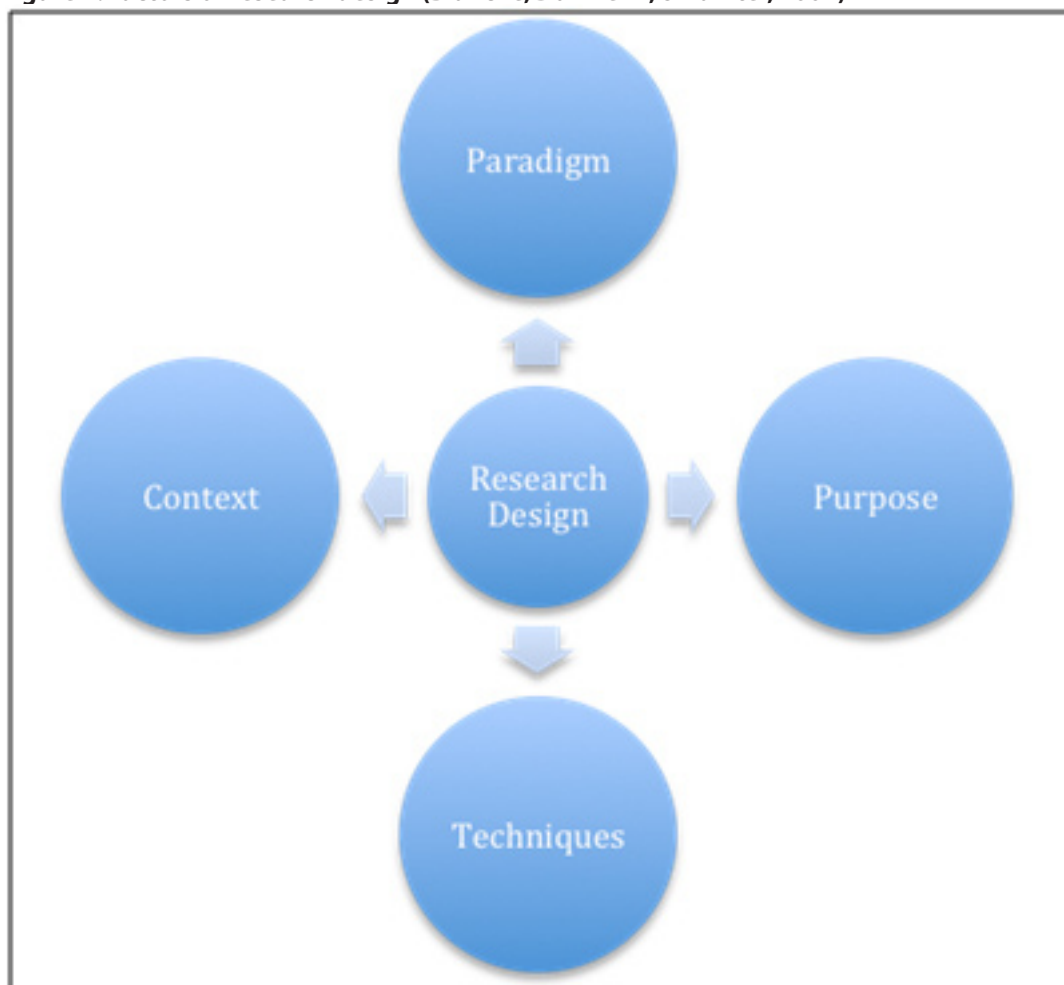
The study consisted of four phases: foregrounding, pre-interview, data collection, and member checking.

Foregrounding. To provide guidance throughout the research, the research team began researching topics related to the primary focus of this research study approximately two months before data collection.

Pre-interview. Before finalizing the interview questions, the research team reflected on question phrasing and tips on how to get the most useful information during interviews. The team also conducted three mock interviews to improve interviewing and field note taking skills.

Data Collection. The research team opted for semi-structured interviewing using open-ended questions to learn about participants’ perceptions and opinions about (a) which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees’ sense of engagement and (b) how these channels do this. Participants were sent the informed consent form one week

Figure 1: Factors of research design (Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2007)



prior to their interviews. Interviews lasted approximately one hour per participant. All interviews took place face-to-face.

Member Checking. After the data analysis was finalized, the data and analysis were provided to the participants for member checking. Gordon (1996) emphasized the importance of cooperation between the researcher and participant during the data analysis process. About one week after the participants received the data analysis, the participants were contacted by telephone for their comments and feedback on the findings.

Questions

The interview questions (Appendix A) focused on the following: (a) which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement? and (b) How these channels do this?

To generate rich data, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions that explored their use of communication channels in their day-to-day life and the workplace. Questions at the beginning of the interview were broad and general, as the interview progressed, questions began telescoping to become more focused to the research question. The interview questions can be categorized into three categories; "(a) descriptive, (b) comparative, and (c) relationship" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006 p.480). The first set of the questions was descriptive and focused on demographics such as age, gender and tenure with the organization. The second set of questions was comparative and asked participants to compare communication channels that they use in their day-to-day life and in the workplace. The final set of questions can be categorized as relationship questions. The final set asked participants about the internal communication channels that make them feel involved and connected in the workplace (and how) and which channels they use when they want others to feel involved and connected in the workplace (and why). Each interview began with an informal chat, participants who had questions regarding the study has an open opportunity to ask them then. The concluding questions of the interview were: 'Is there anything we didn't talk about that you think we should?' and 'Are there any questions that you want us to go back and revisit'. This was to ensure that all pertinent information was presented.

Answers

In line with Emirati cultural mores and to protect the participants' anonymity, the findings were associated with the group rather than identifiable to particular participant. Similar to Al Jenaibi (2010), when referring to a contribution of a participant, this was done using a code that has no relation to the participants' names. Furthermore, some data and analysis were not included in the study to protect the participants' identity.

Instrumentation

Field notes were used as a method of data collection. Audio and video recording was ruled out as an option due to socio-cultural norms and privacy preferences of the participants.

This decision was supported by others who have conducted research in the region. To encourage openness in her study of Omani female leaders, Al Lamky (2006) did not tape record interviews but she did take hand-written notes while Bristol-Rhys (2010) noted, "[T]he women I have talked with have all expressed their opinions quite openly, none wanted to be identified in the book, or indeed to be identifiable" (p. 23). In addition, Al-Jenaibi (2010) concluded, "Conducting research in the UAE is often difficult...doing interviews with many employees must be completely confidential. For example, many females will not provide their names and work places in order to be able to speak freely" (p. 72).

In addition to cultural congruence, main advantages of field notes are their cost, reliability, and simplicity: no expensive equipment to purchase and set up (O'Neill, 2011).

The disadvantages of field notes occur in the researcher such as incomplete recollection of the participants' answers and bias. As mentioned by Krueger and Casey (2009), many "don't know how to take effective field notes. They record impressions, interesting ideas, perhaps a few choice words or notes... These notes are fragmented and incomplete for analysis" (p. 94). Jasper (1994) noted the need for researchers to develop skills that enable the collection of data without "contaminating" (p. 311) it. Krueger and Casey (2009) emphasized, "The interviewer encourages comments of all types-positive and negative. The interviewer is careful not to make judgments about the responses and to control body language that might communicate approval or disapproval" (p.6). Byres and Wilcox (1991) advised interviewers to "refrain from contributing to the discussion as much as possible and monitor his or her actions carefully" (p.69). To accomplish this Gillham (2002) advised that the interviewer should be reflective and self-aware. For this reason, the researchers engaged in supervised practice before commencing actual data collection from the study participants.

There are two methods to formatting field notes: "record notes and quotes" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 94) and "capture details and rich descriptive information" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 94). In the former method, key words and quotes are recorded by the researcher on different sides of a page. Field notes for this study followed the "notes and quotes" format.

In this study, both the participants and one of the researchers were Emirati, thus eliminating the need to employ a cultural confederate.

Coding and analysis. The goal of this study was: (1) identify which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement? and (b) ascertain how these channels promote engagement. The content of participants' responses were analyzed to meet the goals of this study. As noted by Krueger and Casey (2009), during analysis, not all questions or answers are of the same value because different questions have different purposes. The amount of time and attention given to each question should be comparative to its importance to the main research goals. Questions, such

as opening questions, do not need to be analyzed (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In this study, only the two main questions were analyzed. The purpose of the other questions was to relax the participants, to allow them to 'warm-up' and to stimulate their thinking about communication channels and preferences.

Gillham (2000) indicated participant discussion can be analyzed to determine content, "Content analysis is about organizing the substantive content of the interview...there are two essential strands to the analysis: identifying those key, substantive points; putting them into categories" (p. 59). To undertake this, a "Key Concepts" framework was applied (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 125). The main purpose of this framework was "to identify a limited number of important ideas, experiences, preferences that illuminate the study" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 125). As per Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation, data were analyzed by identifying key concepts and themes by reading and re-reading of notes. Then, the main concepts were coded and put into categories.

The research team developed a rank of order of channel use for each interview question. Channel use and justifications could be compared across conditions. This was the second level of analysis.

The third level of analysis was more complex; it linked channel use and justifications with findings from research in the literature. It aimed to present theoretical explanation for channel selection.

Qualitative content analysis presented trends of channel selection; these were described qualitatively. The findings in this study are presented in narrative and statistical format organized by question and channel.

Ethical Considerations

Two main areas that were put into consideration while undertaking this study: research bias and confidentiality.

To ensure the ideas presented are the participants' and not those of the researchers, the research team self-monitored for bias. The team also compared the data to existing studies for congruence. Most importantly, the research team focused on the aim of the research "to accurately represent the range of views" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 126).

To ensure confidentiality several measures were put into place. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were not required to answer a question. Participants' answers were not audio recorded. Participants' files were labeled with a two-letter code unrelated to the respondent's name. The names of the participants were never shared. And all data are stored securely and require password access.

4: Presentation of Data

The purpose of this exploratory study was to further understanding of, and contribute to, the scant research on employee engagement and internal communication in the United

Arab Emirates. The study aimed to determine which internal communication channels contributed to engaged employees' sense of engagement and how these channels do this.

To obtain accurate data about the topic of inquiry, participants described actual internal communication channels that they use to send and receive, explained which channels make them feel most connected and involved (and how), and explained which internal communication channels they use when they want to make others feel connected and involved (and why). Questions were phrased so as not to bias participants' responses and to gather as much information as possible from the participants. The categorical descriptors used throughout the study were gender and generation.

Participants

The average participant age was 32 years. The average participant age for the female participants was 32.35 years and the average participant age for the male participants was 31.75 years. Three females were from Generation X (born between 1964-1978) and five were from Generation Y (born between 1979 and 1991). Two males were from Generation X and six were from Generation Y.

Only one of the participants attended an Arabic-medium university, the remaining 15 participants attended English-medium universities. Four of the 16 participants attended English-medium, post-graduate education (i.e., Masters).

The average number of years of work experience was 8.8 with a range between one and 18 years. The average number of work experience for the female participants was 7.8 years while the average number of work experience for the male participants was 9.8 years. The average time worked at the federal authority during the time of the study was 3.06 years, with a range of 1.4 years to 5 years. The average time worked at the federal authority for the female participants was 3.5 years while the average for the male participants was 2.5 years. Table 2 (opposite page) summarizes the participants' gender, age, professional experience, and tenure at the target organization distribution.

Interview Questions

Questions one to seven focused on demographics and tenure (3). The purpose of these questions was to develop a context. Questions eight and nine were about the communication channels that the participants used in their daily life. The purpose of these questions was to (a) stimulate the participants' thinking, (b) relax the participants, and (c) to get the participants comfortable with the interview process. Questions ten to 15 focused on the communication channels used by the participants in the workplace. The purpose of these questions was to focus the participants' responses for the following questions and to stimulate the participants' thinking by comparing their responses with what they feel are engaging communication channels. Questions 16 and 17 focused on internal communication and engagement in the workplace. The purpose of this question was to determine which channels are

Table 2: Participant Gender, Age, Years Professional Experience, and Tenure at Target Organization Distribution

Gender and Generation	Number of Participants	Average Age	Average years work experience	Average time at organization
Females - Generation X	3	35.3	8.3	4 years
Females - Generation Y	5	30.4	6.8	3.2 years
Males – Generation X	2	37.5	16	2 years
Males – Generation Y	6	29.8	7.8	2.75 years

Table 3: Frequency of Communication Channels Reported when Receiving Information at Work

	Email	Face-to-face	Phone	Handwritten notes
Total (N=16)	100% (N=16)	18.7% (N=3)	18.7% (N=3)	6.2% (N=1)
Male (N=8)	100% (N=8)	12.5% (N=1)	12.5% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Female (N=8)	100% (N=8)	25% (N=2)	25% (N=2)	12.5% (N=1)
Generation Y (N=11)	100% (N=11)	27.2% (N=3)	18.1% (N=2)	9% (N=1)
Generation X (N=5)	100% (N=5)	0% (N=0)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation Y (N=6)	100% (N=6)	16.6% (N=1)	16.6% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation X (N=2)	100% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation Y (N=5)	100% (N=5)	40% (N=2)	20% (N=1)	20% (N=1)
Females from Generation X (N=3)	100% (N=3)	0% (N=0)	33.3% (N=1)	0% (N=0)

related to the purpose of the study and were the two that were the focus of analysis. Questions 18 and 19 focused on added channels and comments. The purpose of these final questions was to ensure that the participants shared all their experiences relevant to the study.

In this section, the most frequent communication channels that are used to receive and send information in the workplace are first identified. Next, the communication channels that the participants prefer to receive and send information from in the workplace are indicated. Then, the communication channels in the workplace that make the participants feel most involved and connected are presented. This is followed by the channels the participants identified as using in the workplace when they want to make others feel involved and connected. Finally, the participants stated which communication channels they would like to see added in the workplace.

Some participants' answers included more than one communication channel per question. Hence, this will yield percentages more than 100%.

Interview question 12. What are the most frequent ways of communication you receive here at the organization?

The most frequent communication channel that the participants received information from was email. All 16 participants stated that email was the most frequent channel by which they receive information. Face-to-face was the second most frequent channel. Overall, females were twice as likely to receive information via face-to-face than males were (25% v. 12.5%). Females from Generation Y were 4 times more likely to receive information via face-to-face than females from Generation X (40% v. 0%). Overall, Generation Y respondents indicated receiving information from a wider variety of channels than Generation X respondents (4 channels v. 2 channels). In addition, males from Generation Y indicated receiving information from a wider variety of channels than males from Generation X (3 channels v. 1 channel). The top four answers in each category are displayed in Table 3 (previous page).

Interview question 13. What are the most frequent ways of communication you send here at the organization?

One hundred percent of the participants stated that email was the most frequent communication channel they used when sending information in the workplace. Males across both generations indicated the use of email only as the most frequent channel of communication in the workplace. Overall, female respondents indicated a wider variety of most frequently used communication channels than male respondents (5 channels v. 1 channel). Similarly, Generation Y respondents reported a wider variety of channels than Generation X respondents (5 channels v. 2 channels). Female respondents from Generation Y indicated more channels than female respondents from Generation X (5 channels v. 1 channel). The answers of each category are displayed in Table 4.

Interview question 14. Which ways of communication do you prefer to receive information from? Why?

The following interview question focused on the communication channel by which the participants prefer to receive information from and the reasons for this. The most common communication channel that participants stated as a preference to receive information from was e-mail. Fourteen out of the 16 (87.5%) participants indicated that their preference for email was because of its archiving features and speed of transmission. F5 stated, "Email is the easiest way of communication. I know what the requirements are and I have the space to reply when I can. I can use it for future reference and especially for record keeping. There is no time limit to access the information. I decide when to reply which is when I have enough time and space." M2 noted, "Email acts as a tracker for data, information, saves information, provides evidence." The notion of utilizing email for its documentation and archiving features was shared by M5, M6, M7, M8, F2, and F5.

Overall, male and female respondents indicated their preference to receive information by email and face-to-face equally (87.5% and 25% respectively). Female respondents across both generations showed preference to the same communication channels (email and face-to-face). Generation Y respondents indicated a preference for phone while Generation X respondents did not (9% v. 0%). Male respondents from Generation Y indicated a wider variety of preference for communication channels by which they receive information from than male respondents from Generation X (3 channels v. 1 channel). The top three answers in each category are displayed in Table 5 (page 18).

Interview question 15. Which ways of communication do you prefer to send information from? Why?

The most common channel the participants preferred to send information from was email. Their preference to email was due to its archiving features, accessibility, and speed of transmission. F6 said that using email to send information is "...precise and it is easy to keep everyone in the loop." M5, M6, M8, and F2 also stated the recordkeeping feature of the channel as justification for its use. Female and male respondents preferred to send information using the same communication channels (email, face-to-face, and phone). There was no significant difference in preferences across generation or tenure. Male respondents from Generation Y indicated their preference for face-to-face when sending information while respondents from Generation X did not indicate face-to-face as a preferred channel (40% v. 0%). Respondents who had professional experience of more than 8.8 years showed a higher preference to face-to-face communication than those with professional experience less than 8.8 years (30% v. 16.6%). Female respondents from Generation X indicated preference to using phones when sending information, while female respondents from Generation Y did not (33.3% v. 0%). The top three answers in each category are displayed in Table 6 (page 19).

Table 4: Frequency of Communication Channels Reported when Sending Information at Work

	Email	Phone	Face-to-face	Handwritten notes	Letters
Total (N=16)	100% (N=16)	18.7% (N=3)	6.25% (N=1)	6.25% (N=1)	6.25% (N=1)
Male (N=8)	100% (N=8)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Female (N=8)	100% (N=8)	37.5% (N=3)	12.5% (N=1)	12.5% (N=1)	12.5% (N=1)
Generation Y (N=11)	100% (N=11)	18.1% (N=2)	9% (N=1)	9% (N=1)	9% (N=1)
Generation X (N=5)	100% (N=5)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation Y (N=6)	100% (N=6)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation X (N=2)	100% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation Y (N=5)	100% (N=5)	40% (N=2)	20% (N=1)	20% (N=1)	20% (N=1)
Females from Generation X (N=3)	100% (N=3)	33.3% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)

Interview question 16. Of all the internal communications you use, which ones make you feel the most involved and connected to the organization? Why?

Approximately, 87% of the participants stated that face-to-face communication makes them feel the most involved and connected to the organization. Male respondents from Generation Y showed higher preference to face-to-face than male respondents from Generation X (100% v. 50%). Female and male respondents indicated face-to-face and email as the top two channels that make them feel the most involved and connected to the organization (87.5% face-to-face and 25% email). Overall, Generation X reported that the intranet makes them feel involved and connected to the organization, but Generation Y did not (20% v. 0%). Overall, female respondents from Generation Y indicated a wider variety of most involving communication channels than female respondents from Generation X (3 channels v. 1 channel).

Participants primarily stated emotional connectivity as the reason for preferring face-to-face communication. M2 noted face-to-face communication "builds and connects you to people". While F6 noted face-to-face communication, specifically meetings, "Build bridges between employees". F4 also advocated meetings because this mode of face-to-communication addresses the emotional as well as the knowledge and information aspects of engagement, "Everyone on the same page, everyone involved". Table 7 (page 20) shows the results of question 16.

Interview question 17. When you want to make others feel involved and connected, which communication channel do you use? Why?

Fourteen out of the 16 (87.5%) participants stated that they use face-to-face communication channels when they want

Table 5: Most Preferred Communication Channels by which to Receive Information From at Work

	Email	Face-to-face	Phone
Total (N=16)	87.5% (N=14)	25% (N=4)	6.2% (N=1)
Male (N=8)	87.5% (N=7)	25% (N=2)	12.5% (N=1)
Female (N=8)	87.5% (N=7)	25% (N=2)	0% (N=0)
Generation Y (N=11)	81.8% (N=9)	27.2% (N=3)	9% (N=1)
Generation X (N=5)	100% (N=5)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation Y (N=6)	83.3% (N=5)	33.3% (N=2)	16.6% (N=1)
Males from Generation X (N=2)	2% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation Y (N=5)	80% (N=4)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation X (N=3)	100% (N=3)	33.3% (N=1)	0% (N=0)

others to feel involved and connected. Male respondents showed preference to using email when they wanted to make others feel involved and connect, while female respondents did not (37.5% v. 0%). Respondents from Generation X showed higher preference to email usage than Generation Y (40% v. 9%). Similarly, male respondents from Generation X showed a greater preference to email than Generation Y (100% v. 16.6%). Females from Generation X preferred to use a wider variety of communication channels when they wanted to make others feel involved and connected than female respondents from Generation Y (3 channels v. 1 channel). The top three answers in each category are presented in Table 8 (page 21).

The participants in the study explained their preference for using face-to-face communication when they wish to engage others in the organization. M6 noted face-to-face communication is "friendly" and it "show[s] people I care". While M7 noted face-to-face communication provides "a chance to share a friendly conversation with employees not jump quickly into business". Similarly, M3 observed this channel allows employees to "feel closer". F2 observed face-to-face communication provides for "direct interaction" which "give[s] the other person my time which shows them they are important". The participants showed an overall preference for face-to-face communication to take place via meetings. M2 stated

that meetings "Allows you to understand the pulse of the organization". F7 noted meetings "Enhances team spirit to have everyone in the same room discussing the same issue" and F5 asserted, "More commitment happens during meetings".

Interview question 18. At work, which channels would you like to see added? Why? For what purpose, to send or receive information?

Participants' answers varied but the face-to-face channel was the top choice. In general, the participants' responses were variations on "more all staff meetings" (for example, M2, M5, M6, M7, M8, and F7). The answers were as follows:

- More face-to-face informal social gatherings
- More visible digital screens
- More email to all staff
- Office allocation that eases communication
- Feedback channels such as surveys
- Social Media
- Face-to-face all staff meetings every month
- Face-to-face knowledge hour

Table 6: Most Preferred Communication Channels by which to Send Information at Work

	Email	Face-to-face	Phone
Total (N=16)	93.75% (N=15)	25% (N=4)	12.5 (N=2)
Male (N=8)	87.5% (N=7)	25% (N=2)	12.5% (N=1)
Female (N=8)	100% (N=8)	25% (N=2)	12.5% (N=1)
Generation Y (N=11)	99.9% (N=10)	27.2% (N=3)	9% (N=1)
Generation X (N=5)	100% (N=5)	20% (N=1)	20% (N=1)
Males from Generation Y (N=6)	83.3% (N=5)	40% (N=2)	20% (N=1)
Males from Generation X (N=2)	100% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation Y (N=5)	100% (N=5)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation X (N=3)	100% (N=3)	33.3% (N=1)	33.3% (N=1)

Summary

The top communication channel that made respondents feel engaged was face-to-face. The channel that respondents employed to make others in the organization feel engaged was also face-to-face. However, the choice was split in the male respondents from Generation X: 50% chose face-to-face and 50% chose email. The most preferred communication channel across all variables to send and receive information was email.

5: Interpretation of Findings

This chapter starts with a review of data collection and analysis used to obtain findings from the data. Next in the chapter is a descriptive analysis of the data. The chapter concludes with limitations of this study.

Methodology and Data Collection Review

The 16 Emirati participants who were concurrently employed at a federal authority in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates were the primary source of data collected. The data collected from the interview conducted with each participant were supported by (a) foregrounding, (b) member checking of data for accuracy, (c) review of findings by the diverse members of the research team including expertise in management, intercultural communication, Emirati culture, and Human Resource Management, and (d) reference to relevant literature on the areas of employee engagement and internal communication.

The primary data consisted of the participants' perceptions and experiences related to the two questions that anchored this study: (a) which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement and (b) how these channels facilitate this. The goal of the interview questions was to identify which communication channels engage employees, which communication channels employees use when they want others to feel involved and connected, and how these channels do this. In particular, the study aimed

Table 7: Channels Perceived as Most Involving and Connecting

	Face-to-face	Email	Digital Branding ⁴	Intranet
Total (N=16)	87.5% (N=14)	25% (N=4)	6.25% (N=1)	6.25% (N=1)
Male (N=8)	87.5% (N=7)	25% (N=2)	0% (N=0)	12.5% (N=1)
Female (N=8)	87.5% (N=7)	25% (N=2)	12.5% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Generation Y (N=11)	99.9% (N=10)	27.2% (N=3)	9% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Generation X (N=5)	80% (N=4)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	20% (N=1)
Males from Generation Y (N=6)	100% (N=6)	16.6% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation X (N=2)	50% (N=1)	50% (N=1)	0% (N=0)	50% (N=1)
Females from Generation Y (N=5)	80% (N=4)	40% (N=2)	20% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation X (N=3)	100% (N=3)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)

to determine the reasons for the selection of communication channels that made the participants feel most involved and connected to the organization (i.e., engaged).

In order to elicit the greatest degree possible accuracy, breadth, and depth of understanding regarding the topic of the study (despite of the socio-cultural constraints on data collection), the participants described actual communication channels that were being used in the organization and explained the aspects of these channels that contribute to their sense of engagement. Participants were asked to recall (1) communication channels that made them feel involved and connected and (2) communication channels they used when they wanted others to feel involved and connected. The research team employed one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews over four-weeks to collect the data. During the interviews, the

research team listened for words and phrases that described how each channel contributed to the participants' sense of engagement.

For the purpose of this study, employee engagement was defined as "the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and its goals" (Kruse, 2012, p. 1). It is this frame that guided the analysis of data.

Analysis

This study aimed to determine which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement and how these channels do this. Participants found face-to-face and email to be the primary channels that contribute to their sense of engagement in the organization. However,

Table 8: Communication Channels Employed by Respondents to Engage Employees

	Face-to-face	Email	Phone
Total (N=16)	87.5% (N=14)	18.7% (N=3)	6.2% (N=1)
Male (N=8)	75% (N=6)	37.5% (N=3)	0% (N=0)
Female (N=8)	100% (N=8)	0% (N=0)	12.5% (N=1)
Generation Y (N=11)	90.9% (N=10)	9% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Generation X (N=5)	80% (N=4)	40% (N=2)	20% (N=1)
Males from Generation Y (N=6)	83.3% (N=5)	16.6% (N=1)	0% (N=0)
Males from Generation X (N=2)	50% (N=1)	100% (N=2)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation Y (N=5)	100% (N=5)	0% (N=0)	0% (N=0)
Females from Generation X (N=3)	100% (N=3)	0% (N=0)	33.3% (N=1)

these contribute to the participants' sense of engagement in different ways: face-to-face communication was found to support emotional connection to the organization whereas written channels (specifically email) were found to support organizational knowledge and information. Both emotional connection and organizational knowledge have been determined to be essential drivers of employee engagement (e.g., CIPD, 2012; Gallup 2008, 2010, 2012).

Emotional connection. The participants in the study indicated that face-to-face communication promoted emotional connection (engagement) with the organization (N=87.5%). The perception that face-to-face communication promotes connection and relationship-building amongst interactants is congruent with Media Richness Theory (MRT) and in agreement with Reinsch and Beswick (1990) who posited rich channels support social relationships. Similarly, the data from this study are supportive of Social Presence Theory (SPT). SPT states that some channels better support social relationships between interactants better than others (Short, William, & Christie, 1976) and that interactants value a channel according to the psychological closeness it affords the interactants,

as such, when a relationship is important, richer channels should be used. Berk and Clampitt (1991) supported the use of oral channels for relational messages and written channels for content-oriented messages. Kupritz and Cowell (2011) noted media higher in social presence are vital to social tasks such as building relationships.

Overall, 87.5% of the respondents indicated that face-to-face communication channels make them feel most involved and connected to the organization. For example, M2 stated face-to-face communication: builds and connects you to people" while F6 noted meetings "[b]uild bridges between employees". Similarly, 87.5% indicated that they employed face-to-face channels when they wanted to make others feel involved and connected. The rationale for this phenomenon was succinctly explained by F2 who noted that "[d]irect interaction" gives "the other person my time which shows them they are important".

Organizational knowledge and information. The participants in the study indicated written channels (specifically email) supported the organizational knowledge and informa-

tion aspect of engagement (Hara, Shachaf, & Hew, 2007). Overall, 87.5% of the respondents stated that email was their preferred communication channel when receiving information at work and 93.75% of the respondents stated that email was their preferred communication channel when sending information at work. M3 said, "Receiving email makes me feel I am a part of the loop and organization. Even if I'm not physically there, information reaches me." This is congruent with both Media Richness Theory and Social Presence Theory.

Culture. O'Neill (2011) stated that culture "shapes perceptions of channels and channel features and consequently selection and use" (p. 75). A study by Lind in 2001 concluded, "Communication channel richness does appear to have cultural/gender differences which in turn lead to differences in channel usage" (p. 238). The data in this study supported these assertions.

Generation. Walker (2009) asserted, "Gen Y prefer to communicate synchronously and interactively" (p. 3) and as such have a preference for face-to-face communication. Research stated that Generation Y employees prefer more direct communication (Johnson Controls, 2010).

The data from this study support these findings. The data from this study showed differences between Generation X and Generation Y with regard to channel preferences. 80% of Generation X felt face-to-face was the channel that made them feel most involved and connected with the organization whereas 99.9% of Generation Y felt this way about face-to-face communication. Similarly, when participants send communications with the intent of making others in the organization feel connected and involved 90.9% of Generation Y but only 80% Generation X felt face-to-face was the most appropriate channel. When receiving organizational information 81.8% of Generation Y and 100% of Generation X indicated a preference for email. These figures support previous research that Generation Y demonstrates a preference for interactive communication channels such as face-to-face. However, when sending organizational information these assertions breaks down: 99.9% of Generation X and 100% of Generation Y indicated a preference for sending organizational information via email. This contradicts the findings that Generation Y has unique communication channel preferences and that it prefers face-to-face communication.

Gender. The data from this study show males and females equally (87.5%) prefer to receive organizational information via email. They also concurred with their second (face-to-face) and third (telephone) channel rankings. Similarly, both male and female participants equally (87.5%) indicated face-to-face as the channel they feels most engages them followed by email (25% for both groups). This is congruent with Gefen and Straub's (1997) study of three nations (Japan, USA, and Switzerland) which found that female and male perceptions of email varied but not their use. When sending organizational information there was also a large degree of agreement between males and females. One hundred percent of males and 87.5% of females preferred to use email to accomplish the task; however, 25% of each group indicated a preference for

face-to-face and 12.5% of both groups preferred telephone. Males and females diverged in their responses to the channel they employ to make others in the organization feel involved and connected: 100% of females but only 75% of males ranked face-to-face first.

United Arab Emirates. The UAE has been noted to be a collectivist culture (Abdalla & Al-Humoud, 2001). It has also been identified as a high-context communication culture (Hall, 1959). Thomas (2008) noted these two cultural aspects are frequently linked, "[C]ollective cultures are 'High Context'" (p. 86).

The data from this study support the assertion that "groups from collectivist cultures demonstrate a greater preference for rich and high social presence channels" (O'Neill, 2011, p. 74). M3 said, "For us Arabs, face-to-face communication makes us feel closer to people and there will be no chance for misunderstandings. With phone calls, there are cultural barriers, especially with women, it makes sense and I totally respect that."

Conclusion

The link between employee engagement (EE) and internal communication (IC) has been well established. Research has shown internal communication is a key driver of employee engagement (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; CIPD, 2012; Ruck, 2012). According to Towers Watson (2010), internal communication is one way to connect an organization to its employees and also to connect employees who are generationally and culturally different. Bleeker and Hill (2013) asserted that good internal communication in an organization can motivate and engage employees because IC delivers allows employees to understand what changes are happening and how they should respond (i.e., emotional connection) and provides regulation and compliance because employees will be aware of all the rules and regulations (i.e., organizational knowledge and information). The 2012 Towers Watson's Global Workforce study corroborated international studies finding communication to be one of the top five drivers of engagement in the UAE.

Limitations and Future Research

All studies have limitations and this study was no different. The most prominent limitations of this study were (a) the use of participant recall, (b) the small sample size, (c) limited academic literature available on employee engagement and internal communications in the UAE, (d) the researchers' inability to use multiple data collection methods, (e) socio-cultural limitations regarding the presentation of some data and analysis, and (f) lack of Generation X participants. In addition, the study and findings represent experiences from Emiratis in only one organization in the UAE.

To better understand the link between employee engagement and internal communication in the UAE, future research may wish to (a) include a larger number of participants, (b) explore the topic at different levels of the organization to see if communication channels that are perceived as engaging differ, (c) include expatriate employees in the organizations, (d)

replicate the study in Arabic, and (e) include participants from different organizations.

Implications for Practice

The study aimed to determine which internal communication channels contribute to engaged employees' sense of engagement and how these channels do this. Participants found face-to-face and email to be the primary channels that contribute to their sense of engagement in the organization. However, these contributed to the participants' sense of engagement in different ways: face-to-face communication was found to support emotional connection to the organization whereas written channels (specifically email) were found to support organizational knowledge and information.

This study makes several contributions to the area of employee engagement and internal communication. First, it adds to the existing literature on employee engagement and internal communication. Secondly, it adds to the scant literature on employee engagement and internal communication in Arab contexts. And thirdly, it offers insight for expatriate employees working with Emiratis.

Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your job title? If you feel comfortable with sharing this information, what is your grade level?
2. How long have you been working at this organization?
3. What is your highest level of education? And at which institution?
4. What was the language you were educated in during your highest level of education?
5. When did you graduate (from your highest level of education)?
6. What are the total years of your professional experience?
7. How many places have you worked in?
8. What are the different ways of communication that you use to send information in your day-to-day life?
9. What are the different ways of communication that you use to receive information in your day-to-day life?
10. What are the different ways of communication that you use to send information in your job?
11. What are the different ways of communication that you use to receive information in your job?
12. What are the most frequent ways of communication you receive here at the organization?
13. What are the most frequent ways of communication you send here at the organization?
14. Which ways of communication do you prefer to receive information from? Why?
15. Which ways of communication do you prefer to send information from? Why?
16. Of all the internal communications you use, which ones make you feel the most involved or most connected to the organization? Why?
17. When you want to make other people feel involved and connected, which communication channel do you use and why?
18. At work, which channels would you like to see added? Why and for what purpose, send/receive information?
19. Is there anything we didn't talk about today that you think we should? Are there any questions that you want us to go back and revisit?

Footnotes

1. Consulting firms that specialize in employee engagement generally agree that one of the most common and effective ways of measuring employee engagement drivers is through opinion surveys of employees.
2. Results of the study were not published.
3. Although data was collected on total years of work experience and tenure with the target organization, this information is not included in the thesis as analysis yielded no findings of significance in themselves or in relation to the study.
4. Digital branding refers to when the organization unifies employees' computer monitor and phone backgrounds.

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