

## **Standardizing Measures of Effective Internal Communications**

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### **Abstract**

Effective internal communication is critical to the success of any organization, yet evaluating efforts remains a challenge for many as there seems to be a lack of comprehensive understanding and standardized approaches. Practitioners remain under increasing pressure to improve and maximize the return of communication efforts on organizational value. This demand creates a need to translate action and performance into firm value effects. This study builds on previous research that proposed standards for evaluating internal communication to inform a framework and move towards standardization to better demonstrate the value of effective internal communication and its link to organizational success. Theories of relationship management and employee engagement, as well as theories applied to the function of internal communication and the return on communication investment, were explored to validate proposed definitions and identify themes and trends that may impact evaluation since the introduction of proposed standards, including advances in technology, changing demographics, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings highlight how and to what extent organizations are using and evaluating internal communication and validated proposed standards. A proposed framework is introduced to demonstrate the impact of effective internal communications on organizational success and measure efforts to optimize strategies and achieve organizational goals.

*Keywords:* internal communication, employee engagement, relationship management, return on communication investment

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## **Standardizing Measures of Effective Internal Communications**

### **Introduction**

Effective internal communication is critical to the success of any organization.

Researchers argue communication programs and initiatives that support organization-employee relationships shape organizational success by impacting productivity, retention, and overall corporate reputation (Meng & Berger, 2012; Men & Stacks, 2014; O'Neil et al., 2018; O'Neil et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2023). Despite the importance of its function, evaluating internal communication efforts remains a challenge for many organizations – there seems to be a lack of comprehensive understanding and standardized approaches.

Through a study conducted to identify standards for internal communication, O'Neil et al. (2018) found public relations practitioners have difficulty knowing how to measure and evaluate their efforts. Within the industry, there remains confusion on how to measure basic public relations activity in general, with variability in proposed evaluation frameworks (O'Neil et al., 2018). Additionally, a shifting landscape in technology and workforce continues to transform business and communication practices, including the impact of globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic (Santoso et al., 2022). Internal communication, in particular, poses a challenge in developing a single measurement model to account for all factors affecting any type of organization (Mendez et al., 2013). O'Neil et al. (2018) argue that this lack of a standardized approach to measuring internal communication efforts ultimately adds to potential inefficiency over a shared vocabulary and metrics to compare and contrast results.

Standards provide a norm in comparative evaluations (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Using a common language to measure is advantageous for management, practitioners, clients, agencies, and researchers, enabling comparison to increase reliability, promote efficiency, and bring more credibility to public relations (O'Neil et al., 2018). Standards are not best practices,

but rather a definition of what needs to be measured (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011). Best practices indicate how best to meet the objective of the standard (Michaelson & Stacks, 2011).

When researching measurements to evaluate the return on investment of organizations' internal communication efforts, Meng and Berger (2012) identified five aspects of internal communication initiatives that have been measured regularly: increased awareness or understanding; concentrated engagement among employees; improved job performance; changed employee behaviours; and improved business performance at the organizational level. This discovery was based on an international survey conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide (now Towers Watson) to examine trends and actions in organizations' employee communication practices and business performance. Meng and Berger (2012) supported the study with in-depth interviews with award-winning senior communication executives. The study also indicated that high-effective organizations are much more likely to measure and evaluate internal communication than low-effective organizations (Meng & Berger, 2012). High-effective organizations are evaluated through reputation and brand performance, market competitiveness, achieving stated goals and objectives, financial performance, organizational growth, and customer satisfaction with products/services (Meng & Berger, 2012). Towers Watson identified seven characteristics of effective internal communication programs: helping employees understand the business; educating employees about organizational culture and values; providing employees with information on organizational performance and financial objectives; integrating new employees into the organization; communicating to employees on how their actions affect customers; providing employees with information about the value of their total compensation package; and asking employees for feedback about their opinions on the company (Meng & Berger, 2012).

Within the context of Meng & Berger's (2012) research, O'Neil et al. (2018) developed and proposed standards and definitions for evaluating internal communications (see Appendix A) through a Delphi study, including outcomes (awareness, knowledge, understanding, relevance, and retention of information), outcomes (attitude, advocacy, authenticity, empowerment, collaboration, teamwork, discretionary effort, trust, satisfaction, transparency, and fairness), and organizational impact (productivity, innovation, continuous improvement, reputation, employee retention, and safety).

Practitioners remain under increasing pressure to improve and maximize the return of communication efforts on organizational value (Meng & Berger, 2012). This demand creates a need to translate action and performance into firm value effects (Meng & Berger, 2012). This study builds on previous research and seeks to inform a framework for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes.

## **Literature Review**

### **Relationship Management and Organization-Employee Relationships**

Research on relationship management and its public relations function is extensive. Ledingham (2003) explicated a general theory that mutual benefit and symmetry occur when organization-public relationships are effectively managed. Grunig (2006) proposed the role of public relations is to cultivate high-quality, long-term relationships with publics affected by organizational actions and theorized that these relationships lead to organizational effectiveness through the development of goals desired by both the organization and its publics. Hon and Grunig (1999) offered strategies to maintain and support organization-public relationships and have identified control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, and commitment as key indicators of successful, high-quality, long-term relationships.

Organization-public relationships are defined as patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics (Broom et al., 2000). Employees are almost always a strategic public for organizations and critical to organizational effectiveness (Grunig, 1992a). Attractiveness, profitability, and future operations depend on an organization's readiness to recognize employees as the most vital public for organizational development (Aggerholm et al., 2011). Men and Stacks (2013) suggested employees and organizations have the closest connection and relationship and that employee "attitudes, behaviours, and performance directly contribute to productivity, organizational performance, and success" (Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 306). Organization-employee relationships are "the degree to which an organization and its employees trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with one another, and commit themselves to the other" (Men, 2015, p. 2). Positive organization-employee relationships increase the likelihood of organizations meeting goals and objectives through employee support (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

According to Verčič (2020), the development of relationship management in public relations "has introduced engagement as the paradigm in which organizations integrate, interact, and collaborate" with various publics (p. 1). Theory suggests that "employees who perceive socio-emotional resources and benefits from an organization feel a sense of obligation to return to their company by exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviours" (Lee, 2023, p. 3). The reciprocal organization-employee relationship, based on trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment, evolves in response (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Saks (2006) and Lee (2021) argue that employees reciprocate in organization-employee relationships through engagement.

Employee engagement can be defined as a distinct and unique construct comprising of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components associated with individual role performance

(Saks, 2006). Harter et al. (2007) define employee engagement as a psychological concept referring to an individual's involvement and satisfaction with and enthusiasm for work. Saks (2017) argues it is a holistic investment of oneself to focus on job performance and involves a willingness to dedicate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to one's job. Generally, it can be thought of as the degree to which an employee is engaged in the tasks assigned to them and connected to others (Iman et al., 2023). Most of the commonly used conceptualizations of engagement are built from work by Kahn (1990), who theorized that engagement is developed through three constructs: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. Through this analysis, Kahn (1990) defines employee engagement as the “harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). The physical aspect is connected to the physical energy invested to fulfil a role (Kahn, 1990). The cognitive aspect is related to beliefs of employees, leaders, and working conditions (Kahn, 1990). The emotional aspect is connected to how employees feel and their positive or negative attitude toward their organization and leadership (Kahn, 1990). Therefore, according to Kahn (1990), employee engagement implies physiological as well as physical presence in performance.

Scholars argue engaged employees feel a strong emotional bond with their employer and commit time and effort to helping an organization succeed (Mishra et al., 2014; Quirke, 2017). Studies have shown engaged employees are deeply committed to their organization, leading to key improvements in business outcomes, including reductions in absenteeism, turnover, shrinkage, safety incidents, and product defects (Mishra et al., 2014; Robinson, 2012).

Employee engagement is crucial to the organization-employee relationship, connecting practices and strategies to tangible business outcomes (Kang & Sung, 2017). Engaged employees

represent a competitive advantage (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Organizations that successfully engage employees see greater productivity and experience less turnover, contributing to overall profitability (Harter et al., 2002). Furthermore, Men et al. (2020a) argue "employee engagement is an antecedent to organizational commitment because once employees are engaged in their work, a sense of commitment to their job and their organizations will follow" (p. 7). Research has shown that employee engagement is dependent on internal communication (Bakker et al., 2011; Karanges et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2022; Mishra et al., 2014; Pugh & Dietz, 2008; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Saks, 2006; Santoso et al., 2023; Verčič, 2020; Verčič & Vokic, 2017; Vokic et al., 2020, Welch & Jackson, 2007).

It is generally accepted in literature that key drivers of employee engagement include work environment, recognition of one's work, social climate, personality traits, as well as internal communication (Verčič & Vokic, 2017). Scholars and practitioners believe internal communication affects employee attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviour, impacting safety, quality, and productivity (O'Neil et al., 2021). These results are often cited in literature as employee engagement (O'Neil et al., 2021). Research has shown a connection between effective internal communication (including its satisfaction) and employee motivation and identification with their organization (O'Neil et al., 2021). Bakker et al. (2011) argue internal communication is part of the organizational context in which employees are engaged or disengaged. Welch (2011) specifies that engagement is influenced by internal communication with the potential to effectively transfer values of the organization to employees and involve them in organizational goals, leading to engagement. It is this practice, Verčič & Vokic (2017) argue, that leads to engaged employees. Studies have also shown various internal communication elements, including innovative organizational communication initiatives, open channels of communication,

constant feedback, and information sharing, are positively associated with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Caesens et al., 2014; Fearon et al., 2013; Verčič & Vokic, 2017). These elements are characteristic of a symmetrical communications model, known to build trust between an organization and its publics (Grunig, 1992b).

Furthermore, internal communication has been shown to improve trust between employees and management, therefore improving the organization-employee relationship (Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Organizations that share reliable and open communication with employees promote a sense of belonging and commitment and help employees better understand organizational goals (Mishra et al., 2014). Trust and commitment are byproducts of systems designed to develop relationship satisfaction for both parties – systems that include open, appropriate, clear, and timely communication (Chia, 2005). Spretizer and Mishra (1999) found that the clearer the communication, the more trust between employees and management is improved, and Dolphin (2005) found that sound relationships can only be developed on the basis of trust and reliable information.

Through a conceptual model, Welch (2011) describes the influence of internal communication on employee engagement, adopting Kahn's (1990) three dimensions. Included in the model are dedication, absorption, and vigor, as well as commitment as an antecedent of engagement (Welch, 2011; Verčič and Vokic, 2017). The model positions aspects of leadership communications by management in relation to employee engagement and suggests communication represents a type of psychological need that organizations should satisfy in order to increase employee engagement, with aspects of internal communication positioned as antecedents of engagement variables (Welch, 2011; Verčič and Vokic, 2017). Welch (2011)

defines effective internal communication as the cause of innovation, competitiveness, and organizational effectiveness.

In their research, Verčič and Vokic (2017) found internal communication strategies, when applied effectively, help organizations create and sustain high levels of employee engagement, leading to higher levels of organizational performance. Their study supported findings from previous research by Ruck and Welch (2012), who argued employee engagement is influenced by internal corporate communication and effective line, peer, and team management communication, as well as arguments that organizations that communicate effectively with their employees are four times more likely to have high levels of employee engagement (Verčič & Vokic, 2017). To contribute to engagement, however, Verčič and Vokic (2017) argue that organizational practices of internal communication need to be acceptable and appropriate for employees, and engagement is unlikely to improve unless leadership believe in the importance of internal communication.

### **Internal Communications**

Grunig (1992b) first conceptualized symmetrical communication as dialogue, negotiation, listening, and conflict management as opposed to persuasion, manipulation, and giving orders. Rather than controlling or manipulating how the other thinks or behaves, a symmetrical communication model focuses on individual, organization, and public's use of communication to adjust ideas and behaviours (Grunig, 2013).

In its simplest form, internal communications is viewed as providing employees with information (McKenzie, 2007). This definition does not effectively demonstrate the strategic role internal communications play in organization-employee relationships. Symmetrical systems of internal communications are characteristic of excellent and effective organizations (Grunig,

1992a). Mazzei (2014) describes internal communication as the interactive sharing of information through two-way communication. Its two-way nature "aims to build dialogues and promote mutual understanding between the organization and its employees" (Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 305). Internal communication creates and maintains communication systems between employers and employees and facilitates a transfer of ideas, information, attitudes, and emotions between the groups (Verčič, 2019). It is the "communications transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and in different areas of specialisation that are intended to design and redesign organisations, to implement designs, and to co-ordinate day-to-day activities" (Frank & Brownell, 1989, pp. 5–6, as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007).

It is important to note that while internal communication(s) is the term most recognized to describe the function, it is used interchangeably with other terms in literature, including internal relations, employee (or staff) communication, employee relations, and internal public relations (Argenti, 1996; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Quirke, 2017; Smidts et al., 2001; Welch & Jackson, 2007; Wright, 1995). Kalla (2005) describes internal communication as the integration of four different functions: business communication, organizational communication, management communication, and corporate communication. Integrated internal communication includes not only employee relations and the technical corporate communication function but also efficient knowledge sharing, the creation of motivation and security, and the development of managers' communication skills (Friedl & Verčič, 2011; Kalla, 2005). Van Riel & Fombrun (2007) describe internal communication as an element of organizational communication within a model of overall integrated corporate communication. Similarly, Dolphin (2005) considers internal communication as part of the corporate communication function, and Smidts et al. (2001) interpret the function as employee communication applied to supervisors and colleagues.

Internal communication is seen as a facet of organizational communication, which also includes public relations, public affairs, environmental communication, investor relations, recruitment, and corporate advertising (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Welch and Jackson (2007) describe internal communication as the strategic management of interactions and relationships between employees at all levels of the organization. Lee (2022) characterizes internal symmetrical communication as listening, opportunities for participation in decision-making processes, and accessibility, whereas Grunig (1992a) characterizes it as reciprocity, network symmetry, horizontal communication, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centred style, tolerance for disagreement, and negotiation. Research suggests organizations adopt internal communication programs aligned with symmetrical models that include sharing information, encouraging participation, conveying balanced information, and being open to scrutiny in order to support organization-employee relationships (Men, 2015).

Internal communication is necessary to develop organization-employee relationships (Lee et al., 2022). Scholars have determined internal communication programs as an essential antecedent through which employees enter relationships with their organizations (Lee et al., 2022). Grunig (1992a) suggests internal symmetrical communication programs support relationship management by building open, trusting, and credible relationships with employees. Through information exchange, internal communication helps maintain connections (Ćorić et al., 2020).

According to Men (2014), internal symmetrical communication emphasizes the employee voice and participation in decision-making, therefore building trust, transparency, and strong mutually beneficial organization-employee relationships. Kang and Sung (2017) and Lee et al. (2022) suggest symmetrical internal communication builds and nurtures quality organization-

employee relationships by effectively facilitating mutual understanding and open interactions between leadership, management, and employees. When symmetrical communication occurs, employees are more likely to perceive the relationship with their organization as beneficial to their welfare based on mutual understanding (Kang & Sung, 2017; Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men & Stacks, 2014; Park et al., 2014). Employees believe their organization cares about them beyond economic exchange when internal communication systems are effective and, therefore, foster trust, satisfaction, and commitment as a result (Lee et al., 2022).

While most scholars agree strategies that support symmetrical communication with employees is characteristic of effective organizations, it has also been noted that it would be unrealistic to suggest that internal communication can be conducted solely two-way (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Except in small organizations, it is a practical impossibility for leadership to discuss strategy with all employees (Welch & Jackson, 2007). One-way communication is unavoidable and sometimes a necessary strategic choice in the form of mediated communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Mediated communication involves the use of communication media, such as an external news release, corporate website, or internal newsletter, as a way of ensuring message consistency (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Grunig et al. (2002) argue mediated communication can be considered symmetrical if content meets employees' need to know rather than leaderships' need to tell. However, mediated communication can involve controlled and uncontrolled media, where controlled is characterized by the content, format, and mode of delivery in control of the organization, and uncontrolled characterized as messages filtered by gatekeepers, such as a line-manager distorting strategic messaging with their own opinion or interpretation (Welch & Jackson, 2007). To effectively disseminate key internal messages to

employees, controlled media is considered more inline with dimensions of internal communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Welch and Jackson (2007) argue internal communication happens constantly within an organization and includes informal conversations (uncontrolled) as well as managed communication (controlled). Kalla (2005) suggests internal communication highlights multi-disciplinary interests and defines the function as all formal and informal communication taking place at all levels of an organization. Ćorić et al. (2020) state, “internal communication practices within the organization include the entire spectrum of communication activities, formal and informal, with the main goal of disseminating information to various audiences within the organization” (p. 365). Activities include downward, upward, and horizontal communication and can be initiated by anyone in the organization (Ćorić et al., 2020). Carrière and Bourque (2009) argue, however, the sole responsibility for effective communication systems is with management. Cheney and Christensen (2001) relate internal communication to employee relations, mission statements, and organizational development and suggest it occurs at three levels: day-to-day management (employee relations), strategic (mission), and project management (organizational development).

Whitworth (2011) suggests organizational hierarchical communication (i.e., top-down, bottom-up communication) is an important component of internal communication systems and includes layers of executives, managers, supervisors, and nonmanagement employees. Through the development of stakeholder theory, Freeman’s (1984) research identified internal stakeholders to include line management, team members, departments, and subsidiary managers (as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007). The theory encourages organizations to consider different groups with different stakes in an organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Further applying the

theory to internal communications, Welch and Jackson (2007) identified five stakeholder groups at different levels in organizations: all employees; strategic management, including the dominant coalition and top management; day-to-day management, including supervisors, middle managers or line-managers; work teams, including departments and divisions; and project teams.

Participants in the first three groups are interpreted as manager-to-employee, whereas participants in the latter two groups are interpreted as peer-to-peer (Welch and Jackson, 2007).

Welch and Jackson (2007) suggest communication with all employees promotes corporate culture (e.g., mission), and communication from strategic management communicates organizational issues, including goals, objectives, activities, and achievements. Day-to-day management sets controls and routines (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Communication among peers in work teams and project teams includes task and project information and issues (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

Qin and Men (2023) interpret controlled internal communication as corporate internal communication, which focuses on formal communication led by the organization's communication function (Kalla, 2005). Likely (2008) identifies five roles of corporate internal communication: communicator/reporter, educator/trainer, change agent, operational performance advisor, and relationship manager. Corporate internal communication disseminates information with controlled timing of messages and consistency of language and provides employees with timely and important information through various channels (Kang & Sung, 2017; Qin & Men, 2023; Verčič et al., 2015). In contrast, peer communication, which is considered a form of internal communication, is understood as informal networks where information flows horizontally as employees exchange information with co-workers (Odden & Sias, 1997; Sollitto & Myers, 2015; Qin & Men, 2023). Researchers argue informal communication with peers can

lead to supportive peer relationships, associated with employee outcomes such as organizational commitment, psychological well-being, sense of belonging, and employee engagement (Chen & Feeley, 2012; Colbert et al., 2016; Qin & Men, 2023; Salanova et al., 2021; Torrente et al., 2012).

Research suggests organizations utilize a diverse range of communication channels for effective internal communication, and the choice of channels depends on an organization's size, profile, culture, environment, and employee knowledge and comfort with technology (Dévényi, 2016). Communication channels can be classified as written and oral, as well as traditional and new (Dévényi, 2016; Lee, 2018; Men, 2014a). Written communication includes traditional forms, such as letters, memos, brochures, reports, manuals, posters, and bulletin boards, as well as new channels, including email, websites, Internet, blogs, podcasts, chat rooms, instant messaging, social media, and Intranet (Lee, 2018). Oral communication channels include traditional face-to-face communication, such as team meetings, focus groups, and social gatherings, as well as traditional channels of telephone conversations and voicemail, and new channels, such as online videoconferencing (Lee, 2018).

Research has also explored which communication channels are preferred and commonly used within organizations as it relates to employee productivity and organizational effectiveness (Dévényi, 2016; Lee, 2018; Men, 2014a; Sheer & Chen, 2004). These have commonly been tested through a framework using media richness theory, which suggests a continuum distinguishing lean and rich mediums (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Lee, 2018; Sheer & Chen, 2004). The theory suggests face-to-face interaction is considered the richest medium, while written printed communication falls on the lean end of the continuum (Lee, 2018). In the middle are channels such as video conferencing, telephones, instant messages, and emails (Lee, 2018).

Research suggests that in the context of organizational communication, using rich media channels is most effective, as they offer immediate feedback and dialogue, with face-to-face communication perceived as the most effective for relationship building, particularly with managers and the dissemination of work-related information to employees (Lee, 2010; Lee, 2018; Johnson & Lederer, 2005; White et al., 2010). Through research, Lee (2018) suggested using a blend of new and traditional media through rich-media channels to help achieve organizational goals and build favourable relationships with employees.

Intense global economic and technological developments, demographic shifts, and workforce migration have had massive impacts on business and workplace settings that organizations must continually identify, modify, and align (Bojadiev & Vaneva, 2021). As a result, the shifting landscape continues to transform business and communication practices, including internal communication. For example, technology advancements have expanded digital channels to inform, connect, collaborate, and motivate employees (Men & Bowen, 2017; Men et al., 2020b). Research suggests organizations are increasingly using social media for internal communication strategies, and digitalization has introduced practitioners to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance capabilities, including chatbots and gamification, to more efficiently connect and engage with employees (Cardon & Marshall, 2014; Haddud et al., 2016; Sievert & Scholz, 2017; O'Neil et al., 2021). As virtual work arrangements become more common, digital technologies have been adopted and adapted to enhance environments and allow dispersed employees to interact (Bojadiev & Vaneva, 2021). Iman et al. (2023) suggest organizations recognize the significance of the expanding list of communication channels in increasing employee engagement and utilize the varied ways of maintaining open communication systems to foster quality organization-employee relationships. Verčič (2019) cautions that due to the

varying levels of complexity, formality, cost, and capacity of channels, organizations need to consider the needs and preferences of employees, resources, speed of data transfer, goals, and message and receiver characteristics when choosing channels to reach employees.

Broom and Sha (2013) outline four main purposes of internal communications: to acculturate employees to understand the values of an organization; to inform employees on important news within the organization; to listen to gain a better understanding of employees; and finally, to foster interpersonal communication among employees. Verčič (2019) argues globalization drastically affects how these purposes occur. Globalization has “extended the boundaries of organizations beyond national political borders and thus created a heterogenous workforce that calls for cross-cultural communication – a complex process” (Verčič, 2019, p. 197). An increasingly globalized world creates more opportunities to make a mistake when interacting and communicating with different cultures (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2009). While communication policies can help mitigate organization-wide problems and difficulties, problems can be underlined with individuals from different cultures interacting and exchanging information in ways not typical for their own culture (Hargie & Tourish, 2009; Verčič, 2019). Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2012) point to the role of language as a vital component of any organizational policy, particularly its internal communication function. However, it is not the only component to consider when adapting internal communication programs to communicate with a global employee base effectively. There are additional challenges to internal communication when examined from a cultural lens (Smith, 2013).

Globalization means internal communication in multicultural organizations respects employees’ cultural profiles and adapts organizational messages accordingly (Apud & Apud-Martinez, 2008, as cited in Verčič, 2019). To successfully manage multicultural internal

communication programs, Molleda (2008) suggests professional cultural competence, responsive and proactive circumstantial or environmental perspectives, and understanding of internal communication channels. According to Adler (2002), it is necessary to recognize cultural diversity without judgment and to avoid cultural blindness that ignores cultural identities in order to successfully manage internal communications in different cultural contexts. The relationship fostered by the internal communication function should build a strong bond with employees across transnational environments (Neill & Jiang, 2017).

According to Neill (2015), one of the biggest factors impacting internal communications is generational shifts in the workforce. While Baby Boomers and Generation X tend to favour similar styles, Millennials and Generation Z have different expectations and lean towards open, supportive, and affirming communication in the workplace (Field, 2021; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Furthermore, they tend to favour a style that is collaborative and are unlikely to accept an organizational culture where information is communicated on a need-to-know basis, unlike previous generations who tend to work autonomously (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Neill, 2015). Millennials and Generation Z prefer to work for organizations that share core values they deem important, which has created a focus on developing internal brands and communicating value proposition to establish employee commitment (Field, 2021; Neill, 2015). Previous research has shown that newer generations tend to be less loyal to employers and more willing to move on if they do not find value (Neill, 2015).

The entrance of Millennials and Generation Z into the workforce has also shifted internal communication tactics. Friedl & Verčič (2011) argue that workers born after 1980 – also known as digital natives – have grown up with digital media and a plethora of technological devices, such as computers, cell phones, and video games, and, therefore, differ from previous

generations in their way of perceiving and processing information. Digital natives favour short messages on the device of their choosing over long mass emails (Field, 2021; Neill, 2015). Communication also needs to be convenient and easy to access in a variety of ways (Neill, 2015). Research has also shown that organizations are adopting internal social media channels to enable dialogue in a format Millennials and Generation Z expect (Field, 2021; Neill, 2015). Organizations should not ignore the specific needs and expectations of digital natives and consider ways of adapting internal communication and its channels since Millennials and Generation Z are the future innovative potential of any company (Friedl & Verčič, 2011). As Baby Boomers transition into retirement, Neill (2015) also discovered one of the driving factors that has led organizations to examine internal communication more closely is how to handle the loss of institutional knowledge and experience. Organizations need to understand how to adapt and enhance the transfer of knowledge and culture to newer generations to remain competitive (Neill, 2015).

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on many organizations' internal communication function (Gomes et al., 2021). In many ways, the pandemic tested the role of internal communication in managing adaptation to drastic changes to the ways companies operate (Bojadjev & Vaneva, 2021; Toledano et al., 2022). The sudden switch to remote work, new health and safety measures, and the reorientation and interruption of activity were communicated to employees in a time of confusion and uncertainty and in the face of sometimes contradictory and highly politicized messages from perceived authorities and experts (Tejedor et al., 2020; Toledano et al., 2022). Beyond job performance, organizations needed to train employees to cope with the ambiguity of the situation (Li et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). Research suggests the pandemic has led to a focus on employee engagement and, by extension, internal

communication and the role it plays in organization-employee relationships (Ecklebe & Löffler, 2021; Gomes et al., 2021; Guzzo et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Men et al., 2022; Santoso et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2023; Tejedor et al., 2020; Toledano et al., 2022; Qin & Men, 2023).

Employee engagement plays a critical role in sustaining an organization, especially in times of crisis (Santoso et al., 2023). Moreover, research has demonstrated the positive role of effective internal communication in dealing with an organizational crisis and managing employees (Frandsen & Johansen, 2011; Johansen et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2023). Transparent internal communication, in particular, is suggested as normative to foster a favourable organization-employee relationship and facilitate positive behaviours during a crisis as it demonstrates an organization is honest, caring, and eager to listen (Kim, 2018; Lee et al., 2021; Men & Stacks, 2014). The consistent use of transparent communication builds trust with employees (Hungerford & Cleary, 2021; Santoso et al., 2023). Researchers also argue that organizational trust is built through competence, integrity, and dependability within organization-employee relationships, which becomes more critical during turbulent times (Chathoth et al., 2007; Qin & Men, 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations were wise to communicate accurate and timely information with employees, include them in the decision-making process, and consider the impact of decisions on employees' work and life, thus creating a sense of authentic intention and trust in the organization's competence in surviving the pandemic (Kim & Rhee, 2011; Men et al., 2022; Qin & Men, 2023). While research is still emerging, studies have shown the pandemic provided an opportunity to demonstrate the value of internal communications, with organizations believing the pandemic had a positive influence on

the function, prompting significant changes in activity as a result of learned lessons and strengthening its role in strategic decision-making (Gomes et al., 2021; Toledano et al., 2022).

Research also suggests the pandemic changed the mode and frequency of internal communications, as well as preferred channels (Bojadjiev & Vaneva, 2021; Qin & Men, 2023). According to Bojadjiev and Vaneva (2021), face-to-face communication has been replaced by texts and messenger applications and happening at an increased frequency. Qin and Men (2023) found increased frequency of internal communication activity as organizations work to cultivate employee psychological outcomes, including trust and wellness, as a direct result of the pandemic. Bojadjiev and Vaneva's (2021) study also revealed virtual modes of communication have become the preferred channels by employees and leaders over face-to-face interactions. While there has been an increase in internal communication frequency, research also shows both employees and leaders still prefer shorter meetings, and in fact, the tendency was strengthened after the onset of the pandemic (Bojadjiev & Vaneva, 2021).

### **Measuring Return on Communication Investment**

In its simplest form, return on investment (ROI) is a financial ratio used to express profit in direct relation to investment (Flamholtz, 1985, as cited in Meng & Berger, 2012).

Organizations want to maximize ROI to maximize value and identify cost-reducing alternatives to address effective measures (Weitz et al., 2009, as cited in Meng & Berger, 2012). There has been increasing pressure for communicators to measure the value of their efforts in relation to organizational development, and ROI has emerged as the term to identify the critical role of communication effectiveness (Meng & Berger, 2012; Verčič, 2022). However, because the term (and equation) is rooted in traditional accounting methods, it excludes nonfinancial performance indicators, generating doubt over accuracy and predictive power in determining returns on

nonfinancial functions, including communication initiatives (Canibano et al., 2000; Laitinen, 2003; Meng & Berger, 2012). As a result, organizations are adopting value-based approaches to measure returns by combining both financial and non-financial data in ROI calculations (Meng & Berger, 2012). Communication scholars and practitioners agree ROI calculated based on financial and non-financial costs and benefits is more accurate and useful (Meng & Berger, 2012). Similarly, marketing and advertising scholars also believe using a single metric to assess the performance of communication in their respective fields (i.e., integrated marketing communications) is problematic and instead call for the development of metrics that evaluate both the short-term return on customer investment and long-term value of customer relationships (Meng & Berger, 2012; Schultz et al., 2004).

Public relations research has explored various metrics to evaluate the return on communications initiatives. While there does not appear to be a one-size-fits-all solution, scholars agree a mix of qualitative and quantitative perspectives best demonstrates the efforts of communication programs (Meng & Berger, 2012). Grunig et al. (2002) assessed the value of public relations at four levels: program, function, organization, and society. The study identified nine value outcomes: awareness and information; organizational motivation; issue anticipation; opportunity identification; crisis management; overcoming executive isolation; change agency; social responsibility; and public policy activities (Grunig et al., 2002). Grunig et al. (2002) argued that the public relations function contributes to organizational effectiveness when a part of the dominant coalition, empowered to effectively build quality, long-term relationships with strategic publics. The value of these relationships can be identified through increasing market share, lower market and distribution costs, avoiding overregulation, weathering bad times, greater employee alignment and productivity, being able to attract and retain talent, being able to

attract investors, access to new global markets, and favourable media coverage (Grunig et al., 2002).

Stacks (2017) identified contemporary thought in public relations research on the relationship between outcomes, return on expectations, and ROI in relation to the communications function. Financial indicators include unit sales, gross profits, and expenses (Stacks, 2017). Nonfinancial indicators include credibility, trust, reputation, relationships, and confidence (Stacks, 2017). Meng and Pan (2012) suggest a balanced scorecard to measure the effectiveness of communication programs and the impact on an organization's business performance that separates value into short-term (financial indicators) and long-term (nonfinancial indicators).

While internal communication has seen considerable growth as a specialization in public relations over the last decade, there is discussion in academia over who in the organization owns the practice as part of overall strategic communication (Helsby, 2002; Kang & Sung, 2017; Mishra et al., 2014; Neill, 2015; Verčič, 2019; Verčič et al., 2022). Research has found that numerous functions claim internal communication, including human resources, change management, organizational development, marketing, executive management, corporate strategy, and corporate communications (public relations) (Verčič, 2019). Verčič (2019) claims the field is multidisciplinary, with internal communications positioned between public relations, human resource management, and marketing, making it simultaneously part of many organizational functions while not being a part of any. The argument among scholars is that there needs to be integration of both internal and external communications for consistent messaging to all stakeholders, which includes employees – in order to be effective, messaging cannot be created in silos (Mishra et al., 2014). Mishra et al. (2014) argue that traditionally, internal

communication has been seen as the role of human resources, while external communication the responsibility of public relations or marketing. However, research by Helsby (2002) indicated that internal communication is mostly located in communications departments, citing that most practitioners believe the role can be disadvantaged if it sits in either human resources or marketing. Helsby (2002) did note, however, that in practice, there are few if any directors of internal communication and that most practitioners report through corporate communications or human resource management. More recent findings have suggested that the communications function tends to now take the lead with internal communication initiatives in close collaboration with human resources and executive leadership (Neill, 2015; Verčič et al., 2022). Verčič et al. (2022) found in their research of 26 organizations that none had a separate internal communications department or person, but rather, in most organizations, internal communication was the responsibility of one or few employees in corporate communications. Where a corporate communications department did not exist, marketing handled internal communication tasks (Verčič et al., 2022).

The confusion over responsibility of internal communication further complicates how it should be evaluated for effectiveness. In their study, Verčič et al. (2022) found that both corporate communications and human resources functions agreed internal communication involves transferring information within the organization, however, there was no clear agreement on the direction of transfer. Respondents from human resources mainly saw the process as one-way communication, in which management sends information and employees receive it (Verčič et al., 2022). Helsby (2002) had also identified that executive management perceived internal communication as a messaging service. If organizations are going to evaluate internal communication efforts – and they should – the question of which variables to measure would

depend on how the organization views the function of internal communication and its position within the organization. Verčič (2019) found that the position of internal communication is determined by an organization's size, culture, management style, financial resources, employee characteristics, organizational expectations, and changes in the organizational environment.

Communication research suggests internal communication is a key responsibility in public relations practice (Verčič, 2019; Zerfass et al., 2010). In recent years, it has gained more recognition in theory as scholars explore its use in helping organizations navigate issues that include the rise of employer branding, workplace uncertainty caused by the great recession, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as looming worker shortages (Lee et al., 2021; Moroko & Uncles, 2008; Neill, 2015; Verčič et al., 2012). However, the discussion on the effectiveness of internal communication and its link to financial performance and a return on investment can be found in public relations and corporate communications literature over the last four decades (Broom & Dozier, 1983; Dozier, 1984; Dozier, 1990; Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Meng & Berger, 2012; Stacks & Watson, 2007; Stacks & Michaelson, 2010). Internal communication experts agree management and psychological theories are most useful in understanding internal communication practices, with roots in language studies, media studies, and marketing, and while it is widely accepted that internal communication belongs in communication studies, it is also understood that it is with great influence of management and human resources theory (Verčič, 2019; Verčič et al., 2012). The methodology of internal communication measurement in communications (public relations) research, therefore, stems mostly from these academic disciplines (Verčič, 2019).

Scholars argue an organization's business performance is dependent on its ability to effectively communicate with its employees (Santoso et al., 2023). Despite the important role

scholars and practitioners claim internal communications has on organizational effectiveness, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding and standardized approaches to measuring its ROI. According to O’Neil et al. (2021), the question of how to evaluate internal communication has had an easy answer for far too many years: we don’t. The researchers cited reasons such as too busy, too dumb, and too hard as arguments they heard from practitioners (O’Neil et al., 2021). Meng and Berger (2012) cited reasons that included a lack of money and staff, difficulty determining a direct link between communication initiatives and business results, as well as time constraints. Weiner (2021) suggests clear and relevant communication objectives help focus communication efforts, increase efficiency, secure management buy-in, and build accountability.

If internal communication has organizational impact, then, theoretically, as long as the organization has articulated goals, these goals can be affected by internal communication (O’Neil et al., 2021). Measure, therefore, is more than proving value – it is also a “diagnostic tool that reveals opportunities for planning” (O’Neil et al., 2021, p. 203). Measurement acts as an informer to strategic planning as well as a cue to current state and a guide for correction (or not) (O’Neil et al., 2021). As an ongoing strategic activity, O’Neil et al. (2021) argue measurement and evaluation enable communicators to “join other organizational functions in solid, research-based, data-driven strategy” (p. 203). It is clear measurable objectives and strong strategic plans designed to drive towards those objectives, along with an evaluative process, that contribute to the perception of the value of the function (O’Neil et al., 2021). Data gained through measurement-based campaigns validate assumptions or enable corrective action (O’Neil et al., 2021). Measurement and evaluation can examine impact on employees, the organization, and society at large, making measurement indispensable for any internal communicator or strategic manager, and therefore, according to O’Neil et al. (2021) answers the question of why measure

internal communication. However, Verčič et al. (2022) argue that no matter how well internal communication is evaluated, it is of little benefit unless leadership is willing to commit resources to improve.

Verčič et al. (2022) argue that while internal communication makes use of various strategies and tactics, its success can only be measured if appropriate metrics are used. O'Neil et al. (2021) suggest organizations identify and prioritize metrics that best align with evaluating communication objectives. Researchers suggest a nuanced approach to evaluation that divides internal communication measurements into outputs, outtakes, and outcomes because it takes into account complex realities and meanings (Hargie & Tourish, 2009; Lindenmann, 1993; Men & Bowen, 2017; Verčič et al., 2022). Similarly, the Barcelona Principles 3.0 recommended evaluation of outputs and outcomes (AMEC, 2020).

According to O'Neil et al. (2021), outtakes “involve the response and reactions of the target audience to the communicative activity” (p. 206). Measurements include awareness, knowledge, and retention of information and evaluate informational communication objectives (O'Neil et al., 2021). As an example, O'Neil et al. (2021) point to employee awareness and understanding of business goals, safety protocols, and other information that helps them perform their jobs effectively.

Outcomes measure the effects of communication on target audiences, such as changes in attitude, opinion, and behaviour, and can be evaluated through advocacy, empowerment, and collaboration (AMEC, 2020). O'Neil et al. (2021) point to examples that include employee discretionary efforts to defend the organization's reputation, employee empowerment to take initiative, and employees sharing ideas and collaborating across departments and divisions.

Outcomes can also include job satisfaction, innovation, sales, and talent recruitment (O'Neil et al., 2021).

Outputs include measurements that are visible to the eye (vanity metrics), and while the easiest to measure, scholars argue they are the least useful in isolation (O'Neil et al., 2021). For example, O'Neil et al. (2021) state that an employee who clicks on an email or newsletter story does not equate to the employee understanding, retaining, or applying the information shared. However, linking outputs to outcomes can provide a more fulsome assessment: tracking employee attendance (output) at a training event for social media in the workplace and then analyzing employee use of social media (outcome) (O'Neil et al., 2021).

Meng and Pan (2012) found that measurement efforts in employee communication have largely focused on employee participation, engagement, satisfaction, and productivity; however, the "measurement of internal communication at the financial level attracts increasing attention as the organization moves towards excellence and efficiency" (p. 484). The researchers identified five outcomes regularly measured for internal communication programs: increased awareness and understanding of the communication program; better concentrated employee engagement; improved job productivity and performance; changed employee behaviour; and improved business performance at the organizational level (Meng & Pan, 2012). Other research has found symmetrical internal communication creates employee-related organizational outcomes that include supportive behavioural intentions, employee advocacy, trust, employee satisfaction, and high-quality organization-employee relationships (Kang & Sung, 2017; Kim & Rhee, 2011; Krishna, 2022; Men, 2014b; Men & Stacks, 2014).

Employee satisfaction with internal communication programs has a positive relationship with imperative work outcomes (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Research has established

relationships between communication satisfaction and key organizational variables, including organizational identification, membership satisfaction, employee productivity, job satisfaction, service quality, job performance, organizational commitment, and satisfaction with work relationships (Sharma & Kamalanabhan, 2012). Research has also found dissatisfaction with internal communication programs correlates with negative, dysfunctional organizational outcomes, including reduced employee commitment, greater absenteeism, higher employee turnover, reduced productivity, and increased occupational stress and burnout (Shanafelt et al., 2003).

Scholars suggest both qualitative and quantitative approaches should be taken to measure and evaluate internal communication efforts (AMEC, 2020; Lindenmann, 2003; Macnamara, 1992; O'Neil et al., 2021). Qualitative research, including focus groups, in-depth interviews, and sentiment analysis, can lead to better understanding and describe how and why employees engage with content and respond (O'Neil et al., 2021; Van Ruler, 2019; Volk, 2016).

Quantitative approaches can include surveys, digital metrics, and readership numbers and can help establish statistical baseline numbers to examine the relationship between variables or predictors (O'Neil et al., 2021). O'Neil et al. (2021) suggest practitioners use Google Analytics to understand time and behaviour on a website or social media analysis to examine usage, engagement, sentiment, or conversation topic. Conducting periodic or annual surveys to collect data to measure satisfaction, reputation, or commitment can also help identify relationships and predictors dependent on trust or engagement (Men et al., 2020a; Men et al., 2020b; O'Neil et al., 2021).

The advancement of digital tools and developments in AI have also advanced internal communication measurement and evaluation (O'Neil et al., 2021). Practitioners have access to

new data sets to transform insights into objectives, drive strategy, segment target audiences, pinpoint affinities and behaviours, and identify influencers to help amplify messages (O’Neil et al., 2021). These data can also be used to establish new benchmarks and gauge performance against business impacts and can help answer questions regarding channel preference among employees, frequency of communication, content, sentiment, and medium (O’Neil et al., 2021). However, O’Neil et al. (2021) caution that regardless of the tool or metric, “it is critical to view data from many sources to obtain a comprehensive understanding of actionable insights” (p. 212). If conducted correctly, the researchers argue, digital analytics can provide an effective and robust way to measure internal communications (O’Neil et al., 2021).

### **Research Problem**

Effective internal communication strategies and initiatives are vital in shaping organizational success, impacting productivity, retention, and overall corporate reputation. Despite the importance of its function, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding and standardized approaches to measuring the effectiveness of internal communications. This study built on previous research to inform a framework for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational goals.

### **Research Questions**

Research focused on three questions to better understand current practices for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes.

**RQ1: How and to what extent do organizations use internal communication strategies to support organizational goals?**

This question explored how practitioners and leadership use a two-way symmetrical communication model to support organization-employee relationships and meet organizational goals and objectives through employee support.

**RQ2: How and to what extent have organizations adapted internal communication strategies to changing employee needs?**

This question examined the impact of digitalization, globalization, changing demographics in the workforce, and the shift in work location, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, on internal communication strategies.

**RQ3: How and to what extent do organizations evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication strategies?**

This question examined whether practitioners or leadership implement measures to evaluate internal communication strategies that gain support from organizational leaders.

### **Research Method**

A mixed-model research approach examined current practices for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected at more than one stage of the study through either a survey or in-depth interview to support the research questions. The study was reviewed and received ethics clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (see Appendix B).

The study attempted to survey 100 practitioners who support internal communications at their organization. In total, 46 eligible responses were collected. Building on Meng and Berger (2012) and O'Neil et al.'s (2018) research, the survey helped identify different aspects of internal communication programs that organizations have measured on a regular basis to assess effectiveness; determine which internal communication efforts are deemed most important; and

attempted to demonstrate a causal relationship between effective internal communications and an organization's business results.

LimeSurvey was used to develop a web-based survey as well as collect and store the data. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants in several rounds, with a link to the survey shared via email to targeted audiences in the researcher's network or posts to the researcher's LinkedIn timeline and relevant LinkedIn groups (See Appendices C and D) (Stacks, 2017).

The survey (see Appendix E) consisted of primarily closed-ended questions designed to collect categorical and continuous data that captured current practices in evaluating internal communications by practitioners (Dillman et al., 2014; Stacks, 2017). A total of four screening questions (not including consent to participate) were included in the survey: three at the start determined eligibility to participate, and one embedded throughout the survey to ensure respondents provided relevant data. The survey was live from November 1, 2023, through February 2, 2024, took approximately 15 minutes to complete, and responses were anonymous.

In addition to the survey, one-hour in-depth virtual interviews (see Appendix F) over Zoom were conducted between January 4, 2024, and February 3, 2024, with ten professionals who provide executive leadership in internal communication strategies at their organizations. Building further on Meng and Berger (2017) and O'Neil et al.'s (2018) research, this method was used to identify patterns and trends of best practices and metrics that leadership has used to address communication effectiveness and gain support from senior organization leaders. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy in data analysis and securely erased once the study was complete. Ethical practices for protecting participants as human subjects were employed, including gaining informed consent, protecting participants from harm and deception, protecting privacy and confidentiality, and selecting participants equitably for this purposive

sampling (Stacks, 2017; Yin, 2018). Participants were recruited from the researcher's network as well as cold contacting.

Suitable participants for both the survey and in-depth interviews included representation from public relations, corporate communications, human resources, and employee engagement functions based on findings in literature that suggested responsibility for internal communication does not lie in one specific organizational department but with the understanding that these functions support organization-employee relationships (Verčic, 2019). The survey was open to practitioners who work in a role or department that serves one of the functions and participates in developing internal communication initiatives or programs. Participants of the in-depth interview worked in an executive role that oversaw at least one of the functions. Participation was also open to individuals from organizations of varying sizes and from various industries in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. Research has shown characteristics of effective communication models defined in this study are more predominately practiced in the Anglosphere (Grunig et al., 1995). The sample size for each method was selected to adequately address the research questions by exposing diverse opinions before reaching data saturation.

## **Results**

The survey was accessed 118 times in the duration it was active, with 35 partial responses and 65 complete. The remaining 18 captured responses did not attempt to answer the consent question. Of the 65 completed responses, 46 were eligible and 19 were screened out in the first three questions. As shown in Table 1, of the eligible responses, 43 responses were from Canadian practitioners, two from the United States, and one from the United Kingdom. All eligible responses ( $N = 46$ ) are included in the results.

**Table 1**

*Survey: Where is your organization headquartered?*

Country	<i>n</i>
Canada	43
United States	2
United Kingdom	1
Other	4 <sup>a</sup>
Australia	0
New Zealand	0
Don't know	0

*Note.* *N* = 46.

<sup>a</sup> Not eligible to participate; survey was terminated.

As shown in Table 2, most respondents indicated they work in the public sector and education industry (*n* = 24). Other industry representation included health care (*n* = 4), non-profit and philanthropy (*n* = 4), professional services (*n* = 4), financial services (*n* = 2), transit (*n* = 2), and information technology (*n* = 2), as well as one each from energy and utilities, sports, public safety, and maritime shipping and logistics.

**Table 2**

*Survey: Which industry best describes where your organization operates?*

Industry	<i>n</i>	%
Public sector and education	24	52
Health care	4	9
Non-profit and philanthropy	4	9
Professional services	4	9
Financial services	2	4
Information technology	2	4
Energy and utilities	1	2
Other		
Transit	2	4

Industry	<i>n</i>	%
Sports	1	2
Maritime/shipping and logistics	1	2
Public safety	1	2
Hospitality and Tourism	0	0
Manufacturing	0	0
Media and entertainment	0	0
Retail/Wholesale	0	0
Don't know/prefer not to answer	0	0

*Note.* *N* = 46.

As shown in Table 3, respondents represented varying organization sizes, with most respondents indicating they work in an organization of 1,001 to 5,000 employees (*n* = 21).

**Table 3**

*Survey: To the best of your knowledge, how many people are employed by your organization?*

Number of employees	<i>n</i>	%
Fewer than 50	4	9
50 – 100	6	13
101 – 500	3	6
501 – 1000	3	6
1,001 – 5,000	21	46
5,001 – 10,000	4	9
More than 10,000	4	9
Don't know/prefer not to answer	1	2

*Note.* *N* = 46.

Data collected from all ten in-depth interviews were considered eligible (*N* = 10) and included in the results. All interview participants work in Canada for Canadian-based organizations representing various organization sizes (see Table 4). As shown in Table 5, most participants work in the public sector (*n* = 6), two represented non-profits, and one each in hospitality and tourism and health care. Half of the participants (*n* = 5) work for an organization that includes at least one unionized group of employees.

**Table 4***Interview participants: Organization size*

Number of employees	<i>n</i>	%
Fewer than 50	3	30
50 – 100	1	10
101 – 500	1	10
501 – 1000	0	0
1,001 – 5,000	4	40
5,001 – 10,000	1	1

*Note. N = 10.***Table 5***Interview participants: Industry*

Industry	<i>n</i>	%
Public sector	6	60
Non-profit	2	20
Hospitality and tourism	1	10
Health care	1	10

*Note. N = 10.*

**RQ1: How and to what extent do organizations use internal communication strategies to support organizational goals?**

To understand how and to what extent organizations use internal communication strategies to support organizational goals, it was necessary to examine how practitioners and leadership use communication models (or not) to support organization-employee relationships and meet organizational goals and objectives through employee support.

The survey asked practitioners to specify how their organization uses internal communication programs and tactics on a consistent basis. The criteria were based on the seven characteristics of effective internal communication programs identified in previous research (Meng & Berger, 2012). As shown in Table 6, 57% ( $n = 37$ ) of the respondents said internal

communication is used to educate employees about organizational culture and values, 54% ( $n = 35$ ) said the function is used to ask for feedback from employees about their opinions on the organization, and 51% ( $n = 33$ ) said it is used to help employees understand the business. Also receiving relatively high responses were internal communications that provide employees with information on organizational performance and financial objectives with 49% ( $n = 32$ ) as well as integrating new employees into the organization with 43% ( $n = 28$ ). Eighteen respondents said internal communication is used to communicate to employees how their actions affect the customer, and 13 said it was used to provide employees with information about the value of their total compensation package. One respondent identified that none of the identified characteristics are used at their organization on a consistent basis.

**Table 6**

*How internal communication is used on a consistent basis*

Purpose	%
Educate employees about organizational culture and values	57
Ask for feedback from employees about their opinions on the organization, including internal processes and procedures	54
Help employees understand the business	51
Provide employees with information on organizational performance and financial objectives	49
Integrate new employees into the organization	43
Other	29
Communicate to employees how their actions affect the customer	28
Provide employees with information about the value of their total compensation package	20
None	2
Don't know/prefer not to answer	0

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

A number of respondents ( $n = 5$ ) included other in their response to how internal communication is used at their organization on a consistent basis and elaborated. One respondent included that internal communication is used to

keep employees informed about health and safety, wellness programs, inform employees about emergencies, code calls, or situations that could impact employee safety, communicate to employees about EDI topics and social issues (such as safety and wellbeing supports amidst the ongoing war in the middle east/Gaza, etc.).

Another cited that the function is used to “update our employees on various team rosters, provide an overview of the news landscape on any given day and amplify our own content that we produce to the organization.” The other three respondents kept it shorter and included that internal communication at their organization is used for “building morale,” to disseminate “sector news,” and “communicate with employees about crises or emergencies.”

When asked about the role internal communication plays in their organization, all ten interview participants identified that the role includes disseminating various forms of information to employees, including at times of normal operations and in crisis. Half ( $n = 5$ ) the participants specifically identified that the role is used to influence or has an impact on the culture of the organization. One participant further elaborated that internal communication is “equipping people throughout the company, whether they’re a manager or whether they’re an entry-level employee, with quality information that gets them on board with what our mission, vision, and shared values are.”

Additionally, one participant identified that the role of internal communication at their organization is to build trust with employees, elaborating that,

it’s very much an inside-out sort of process, so that we want to make sure our internal audiences learn about something first. We don’t want them to be surprised about something appearing in the news that they weren’t aware of because I think that really erodes trust. We want to make sure those stakeholders feel that our leadership, in

particular, has their best interest at heart and keeping them informed. I think it's important, certainly, just sort of with day-to-day things that are communicated out to our audiences, whether that be operational stuff, pensions, vacations, that sort of thing, but then when you come to a period of issue or crisis, that's when it really matters, and again, we want it to be very much inside out.

When discussing key characteristics of internal communication programs at their organizations, several themes emerged. As shown in Table 7, most interview participants ( $n = 6$ ) identified their internal communication program as consistent, including consistency in tone and message, as well as expectation with regular dissemination. Also high on the list were characteristics identified as collaborative ( $n = 5$ ), transparent ( $n = 5$ ), and accessible ( $n = 5$ ). Participants also identified their internal communication programs as dynamic ( $n = 4$ ), timely ( $n = 2$ ), and concise ( $n = 2$ ).

**Table 7**

*Key characteristics of internal communication programs*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Consistent	6	60
Collaborative	5	50
Transparent	5	50
Accessible	5	50
Dynamic	4	40
Timely	2	20
Concise	2	20

*Note.*  $N = 10$ .

Collaborative emerged as a key characteristic theme as participants discussed working across multiple departments to create and disseminate messaging, including corporate communications, marketing, human resources, legal, and employee engagement functions, as

well as executive leadership. Several participants ( $n = 2$ ) identified that internal communication is decentralized in their organizations, and other participants ( $n = 3$ ) identified that while internal communication is centralized, the responsibility lies within a department that serves both the marketing and communications function. One participant noted that several departments within their organization share responsibility for the dissemination of internal communication, creating confusion and affecting the timeliness of messaging, stating that sometimes there is “communication that should have gone out earlier, that is just going out now – there is confusion about whose message it is and who should be sharing it.”

Accessible emerged as a theme as participants discussed being able to reach employees in various workplaces and stages, including remote and rotating shift work, as well as considerations for different employee groups, including new, seasonal, and even unionized. There is a diverse range of interests and concerns among any employee base that need to be taken into consideration when executing internal communication programs. Dynamic emerged as a theme as participants discussed the flexibility of internal communication programs at their organizations, including informal discussions and emails, as well as the return of in-person meetings and events.

While all interview participants ( $N = 10$ ) identified that feedback was important to internal communication programs, only five indicated that they have mechanisms in place to regularly gather feedback from employees, including annual employee satisfaction surveys, pulse surveys, or feedback loops (web forms and dedicated email addresses). While not considered a mechanism for regular feedback, one participant did, however, indicate that employee feedback is filtered as it is often brought forward by the union:

Feedback is probably functionally on a day-to-day basis, not as important as it would be in a non-union environment. That's because, and this may not be the case everywhere, but this union is very strong and powerful and established, who take their role as representative of the employee very seriously, so there is a well-worn path for employees to go to their union representative to bring forward concerns, so we don't hear a lot necessarily directly.

When discussing why there are no mechanisms in place to gather regular employee feedback, most participants indicated that there are plans to improve, however, some ( $n = 3$ ) indicated a lack of support, resources, or appetite:

I think we model the old adage: if you are not prepared to look at it or change it, don't ask people what they think of it. It is sort of a double-edged sword that I think we could be doing better at getting feedback, and I do think some of those processes have a lot of value, absolutely, but they might not be one-size-fits-all, and they might not be appropriate for us, so I completely understand and respect the caution and the decision not to engage.

When discussing how important feedback is to their internal communication program, several participants ( $n = 3$ ) referenced the need to understand how to improve. One participant stated:

I think any organization that is not doing regular employee engagement surveys, regardless of how low the uptake is – because that in and of itself is an important indicator – I think they are selling themselves short, and they are really cutting off a critical piece of data they need because if your workforce is unhappy, you need to know if you are ever going to make it better.

One participant indicated feedback, and therefore, symmetrical communication, is important to employee satisfaction and contributes to organizational success:

You can't have communication without it being two-way; otherwise, it's just telling somebody something. Communication has to be two-way, so if we're not taking the time to hear from our employees, they're not going to feel heard or that they're valued, and if they don't feel heard and valued, then they are not going to be productive.

All ten interview participants tied internal communication to employee engagement. There was, however, a divide in understanding what employee engagement means and how it impacts the organization. Most participants ( $n = 6$ ) referenced employee engagement as creating ambassadors for the organization, impacting reputation and talent recruitment. Other participants ( $n = 4$ ) cited its impact on productivity, fueled by mutual excitement for their job and contribution to organization:

I truly believe internal communications has a huge effect on the morale of the company. If people don't feel that they are in the know, they are going to feel like they're not cared about, and when they don't feel cared about, they're not going to want to come to work, productivity is going to slip, they're not going to feel a part of the family, part of the team. Internal communications, plays an essential role in that and delivering those messages that make people feel that they are part of the team and they do have a say and a part to play in our vision, our mission, our goals, and that they're important to the success of the organization.

One participant also pointed out the importance of managing organization-employee relationships, stating, "when you're dealing with your internal groups, you have to have your

issues management hat on from the get-go because they can rapidly switch from being your biggest ambassadors to the biggest pots of dynamite in your wheelhouse.”

The survey asked participants several questions in relation to achieving organizational success, identified in previous research as characteristic of high-effective organizations, including financial performance, the achievement of stated goals and objectives, growth, customer satisfaction, reputation and brand perception, and market competitiveness (Meng & Berger, 2012). Participants were asked to identify how they would describe the overall success of their organization. As shown in Table 8, 43% ( $n = 20$ ) of respondents identified that they consider their organization to be successful, while 22% ( $n = 10$ ) consider their organization to be very successful, and 24% ( $n = 11$ ) moderately successful. Only 11% ( $n = 5$ ) consider their organization to be slightly successful, and no respondents identified their organization as not successful.

**Table 8**

*Survey: How would you describe the overall success of your organization?*

Success	$n$	%
Very successful	10	22
Successful	20	43
Moderately successful	11	24
Slightly successful	5	11
Not successful	0	0

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

The survey asked participants to assess the current performance of their organization. As shown in Table 9, most respondents ( $n = 21$ ) assessed the performance of their organization as good, while 28% ( $n = 13$ ) assessed performance as excellent, 26% ( $n = 12$ ) as average, and none as poor.

**Table 9**

*Survey: How would you assess the current performance of your organization?*

Performance	<i>n</i>	%
Excellent	13	28
Good	21	46
Average	12	26
Poor	0	0

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

When asked to what extent their organization has achieved stated goals and objectives, 46% ( $n = 21$ ) of respondents identified that their organization had mostly achieved stated goals and objectives, while 35% ( $n = 16$ ) said moderately, 15% ( $n = 7$ ) stated they were fully met, and 4% ( $n = 2$ ) said slightly (see Table 10).

**Table 10**

*Survey: To what extent has your organization achieved stated goals and objectives?*

Achieved	<i>n</i>	%
Fully	7	15
Mostly	21	46
Moderately	16	35
Slightly	2	4
Not	0	0

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

The survey asked participants to describe the growth of their organization over the last three years. Most respondents described growth as either successful ( $n = 14$ ), very successful ( $n = 13$ ), or moderately successful ( $n = 11$ ) (see Table 11).

**Table 11**

*Survey: How would you describe the growth of your organization over the last three years?*

Growth	<i>n</i>	%
Very successful	13	28
Successful	14	31
Moderately successful	11	24
Slightly successful	5	11
Not successful	1	2
Don't know/prefer not to answer	2	4

*Note.* *N* = 46.

The survey also asked participants to describe customer satisfaction, with most respondents (*n* = 17) stating customers are moderately satisfied with their organization and products/services, while 32% (*n* = 15) said customers were satisfied, 20% (*n* = 9) stated customers were very satisfied, 9% (*n* = 4) slightly satisfied, and one respondent did not know/preferred not to answer (see Table 12).

**Table 12**

*Survey: Customer satisfaction with your organization and its products/services*

Satisfaction	<i>n</i>	%
Very satisfied	9	20
Satisfied	15	32
Moderately satisfied	17	37
Slightly satisfied	4	9
Not satisfied	0	0
Don't know/prefer not to answer	1	2

*Note.* *N* = 46.

When asked how they would describe the reputation and brand perception of their organization, 41% (*n* = 19) of respondents said perception is good, 28% (*n* = 13) said excellent,

20% ( $n = 9$ ) said average, and 11% ( $n = 5$ ) stated that reputation and brand perception of their organization is poor (see Table 13).

**Table 13**

*Survey: How would you describe the reputation and brand perception of your organization?*

Perception	$n$	%
Excellent	13	28
Good	19	41
Average	9	20
Poor	5	11
Don't know/prefer not to answer	0	0

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

Finally, the survey asked participants to assess their organization against competitors in the market. A majority of the respondents ( $n = 17$ ) identified their organization as competitive, while 24% ( $n = 11$ ) said their organization was very competitive, 17% ( $n = 8$ ) said moderately competitive, 11% ( $n = 5$ ) said slightly, 9% ( $n = 4$ ) did not know or preferred not to answer, and one respondent identified their organization as not competitive (see Table 14).

**Table 14**

*Survey: In comparison to competitors in the market, how would you assess your organization?*

Competitiveness	$n$	%
Very competitive	11	24
Competitive	17	37
Moderately competitive	8	17
Slightly competitive	5	11
Not competitive	1	2
Don't know/prefer not to answer	4	9

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

**RQ2: How and to what extent have organizations adapted internal communication strategies to changing employee needs?**

To understand how and to what extent organizations have adapted internal communication strategies to changing employee needs, it was necessary to examine the impact of digitalization, globalization, changing demographics in the workforce, and the COVID-19 pandemic on internal communication strategies.

As shown in Table 15, interview participants ( $N = 10$ ) named various channels and platforms that are utilized at their organization to support internal communication, including instant messaging ( $n = 8$ ), employee newsletters ( $n = 7$ ), video conferencing ( $n = 7$ ), and social media ( $n = 7$ ).

**Table 15**

*Channels and platforms utilized to support internal communication*

Channel/platform	<i>n</i>	%
Instant messaging	8	80
Employee newsletter (daily, weekly, monthly)	7	70
Video conferencing (e.g., Teams, Zoom)	7	70
Social media	7	70
Email (mass, targeted)	6	60
Communication cascade	5	50
In-person meetings	5	50
Intranet	4	40
Town halls	4	40
Shared drives (e.g., SharePoint, Google)	4	40
Website	3	30
Company-issued mobile devices	2	20
Digital calendars	1	10
Digital screens	1	10
Surveys	1	10

*Note.*  $N = 10$ .

Several participants ( $n = 3$ ) stated that despite incorporating more digital tools into their strategies, face-to-face (in-person) channels were common, given the size of their employee base

(fewer than 50). One participant made a point of mentioning that their organization does not have an intranet – all information for employees is public-facing on their website. Another participant noted that their organization had adopted an asynchronous model, where they rely heavily on instant messaging and disseminating information without the need to gather for a meeting.

When discussing how and to what extent internal communication strategies have been impacted by digitalization (communication technology) at their organization, all ten interview participants noted that they leverage technology for efficiency, including adopting instant messaging and video conferencing platforms, investing in infrastructure to support mass communication or social media management, as well as transitioning the employee onboarding process to an asynchronous online course-based model rather than in-person onboarding orientation. Several participants also noted that the impact of digitalization has led to more video content, hybrid or remote work and events, and that information has become more accessible for employees. To put the impact into perspective, one participant noted the reliance on digital technology:

We've moved heavily into digital. When I started – I'm not kidding – we had phone trees. We relied heavily on things like an internal newspaper for information that was printed and dropped in bundles throughout our buildings, and we've really shifted away from that. Now, it's just not a reality.

With the increase in utilizing digital technology, one participant did note an increased focus on cybersecurity and privacy protection, stating there is now a heightened concern about privacy that I don't ever remember. The confidentiality piece, we were always aware of, but the idea of now how we use social media and sending sound bytes – how secure is the information? Are we saying things online that we

shouldn't be, or who can see them in privacy settings. We have had people hack in.

Those sorts of concerns never existed before.

All ten interview participants worked for Canadian-based organizations with no offices outside of the country or their own province. When discussing the impact of globalization on internal communication strategies, all participants said they had not given it any consideration, given employees are Canadian based. However, half of the participants ( $n = 5$ ) did tie globalization to efforts in equity, diversity, and inclusion, including training and guidelines. One participant noted, "we have a really robust set of inclusive guidelines around language" that includes cultural considerations. Another stated:

We have activities related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging. We try to be as "plain speak" as possible as part of the tone of voice that we use. That's very important to us, whether it be written communication or on a poster in the washroom, we try to be culturally sensitive and make our communication style as accessible as possible.

One participant also noted that there are a lot of employees at their organization for whom English is not a first language and that efforts have been made to create more accessible documents, including instructional guides with photos. They also shared that it has made them more aware of Canadian constructs that might not be known to everyone (e.g., pension plan) and that consideration has been given to building "communication out in a way that doesn't make any assumptions about what a person knows or values."

When discussing the impact of changing generational demographics on internal communication strategies at their organization, participants had varied responses, however, the conversation focused on technology for all ten participants. Some participants noted an uptake in multimedia, other participants noted a shift to creating content that is mobile-first, and others a

shift in content that is personalized, stating younger employees “don’t want to wade through someone else’s information – they just want you to get to the point that is relevant to them.”

Three participants noted the challenges in disseminating information to audiences that have “varying levels of competency and familiarity” with technology and “have been using technology in different ways.” One participant stated:

We try to make sure that everyone receives a consistent message, but potentially not in the same way, meaning someone – and not be stereotypical – but someone of an older demographic might not want to rely on their mobile device to see news on our intranet site. They might prefer to have a newsletter or something they can flip through. A Millennial or younger may prefer to do everything on their mobile device and have a very remote style of work. Whether it’s an internal campaign or notifying employees that there has been a change in procedure, we try to hit multiple methods and channels so that we can ensure everyone has been touched at least once.

Another participant noted that it’s an ongoing challenge to get multi-generational buy-in when it is almost like “a different language that they speak when they use technology.” Another shared that there are four different generations across their small team of six:

To have four in such a small team is challenging because we have Generation Z, who are on the ball with technology, and then we have one individual who would be part of the Boomer generation who just isn’t as equipped with technology. Trying to find a way to share information with each of them is challenging. We often default to one-on-one conversations.

Two participants noted a push from younger generations to use AI and its impact on not just internal communication strategies but organizational policies (that then need to be communicated to employees):

We're just developing a policy now, but there has been an uptake of AI. There is a push of, "hey, this new tool came out – can we use it?" I do see that push coming a little bit more from the younger generations, and they have more of an acceptance of it, and I would say the older generations are looking at it with a bit more caution, privacy-wise.

One participant tied the shift of changing demographics to an internal communication strategy that equips employees with skills and tools necessary to communicate in a way that will resonate with younger generations. They believe the strategy helps create employee ambassadors that can speak to the community and advance talent recruitment efforts, but also train older generation employees to communicate better with younger employees so that knowledge is transferred effectively.

Finally, when discussing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on internal communication strategies, all ten interview participants noted the focus on technology, resulting, as one participant commented, in the normalization of its use. Several participants indicated that the shift to remote work has led to more convenience with increased reliance on instant messaging and video conferencing, as well as a shift to more asynchronous communication. Three participants did note, however, that the frequency of internal communication has increased at their organizations, including meetings as well as information being pushed out to employees. This was tied to a legacy from the pandemic of fulfilling a sense of immediacy that has now become expected.

Other legacies from pandemic communication on current internal communication practices noted by participants include a focus on health and wellness, more streamlined communication, and a shift in tone. One participant shared that the biggest impact of COVID-19 is the attention paid to how they communicate with employees by email:

There has been a massive change in email: language, style, brevity, inclusion, empathy, care, concern – we’ve been able to make some progress in arguing for things to appear in our email communications that hadn’t been a concern prior to the pandemic. It was all, “what do I care about as a senior leader and needing to tell people?” Our argument was always, you should care more about how this is received: be more empathetic, describe in plain English – it had fallen on deaf ears previously, and the pandemic allowed us to reset so that we have much more license now as internal communications to say, actually, this how we can do it better. So those have been good improvements.

In terms of a focus on health and wellness, one participant stated that “if the pandemic brought anything to us it was mental health awareness and resources – people are more aware of the impact of work on our mental health and that has impacted the way we communicate and engage with employees.” Another participant tied the learnings from the pandemic to the visibility it brought to communications:

A lot of stakeholders were tired, stressed, angry, and communicators became a conduit for a lot of that anxiety. We were putting out information, not always in the best ways – we could have done a lot better – and we were getting a lot of that anxiety and concern back, and it was our responsibility to take that and, as much as we could, filter out the personal attacks we received. There was a lot of anger that came back at the organization through internal communication. We really needed to listen and say, “well, how can we

do this better?” I think the pandemic forced a lot of learning for communicators. It was hard, but probably a good thing, and in a broader perspective for communications, I think it forced the C-suite to further realize the importance of communications and needing to be at the table and needing to be properly resourced.

Several participants also commented that the pandemic has made internal communications much more streamlined and efficient at their organizations, with one participant noting that,

there was a benefit of centralizing all communications during the pandemic. We’ve lost that a little bit. The return to normal three or four years later has meant that we’ve lost some of the benefit of that centralization from a communications perspective, but there are vestiges that hang on. We’ve seen more collaboration between communicators who have internal communication responsibilities, sharing and trying to promote synergies, trying to find a way not to overwhelm by mass email and find other platforms to do more.

**RQ3: How and to what extent do organizations evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication strategies?**

To understand how and to what extent organizations evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication strategies, it was necessary to examine whether practitioners or leadership implement measures to evaluate internal communication strategies that gain support from organizational leaders.

The survey asked practitioners if their organization uses formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives. Of the 46 eligible responses, 48% ( $n = 22$ ) said they do not, 39% ( $n = 18$ ) said they do, and 13% ( $n = 6$ ) did not know or preferred not to answer. As shown in Table 16, respondents that use formal

measurements or assessments ( $N = 18$ ) do so in more than one way at their organization: 78% ( $n = 14$ ) said formal measurements or assessments are used as standard operating practice, 44% ( $n = 8$ ) use metrics to seek additional budget or staff, 28% ( $n = 5$ ) inform a balanced scorecard, and 6% ( $n = 2$ ) measure out of personal interest.

**Table 16**

*Survey: How are formal measurements or assessments of internal communication used?*

Use	<i>n</i>	%
Standard operating practice/reporting	14	78
Seek additional budget/staff	8	44
Inform a balanced scorecard	5	28
Personal interest	2	11
Other		
Understand impact on staff	1	6
Impact on revenue, objectives and key results, and build credibility	1	6
Improve communications	1	6
Don't know/prefer not to answer	1	6

*Note.*  $N = 18$ .

The survey also asked participants several questions in relation to outcomes of internal communication initiatives proposed by O'Neil et al. (2018) as evaluation standards. As shown in Table 17, 100% ( $N = 18$ ) of respondents whose organization uses formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives measure outcomes of business performance, 94% ( $n = 17$ ) measure outcomes in employee engagement as well as employee behaviour change, and 89% ( $n = 16$ ) measure outcomes of increased awareness and understanding as well as improved job performance.

**Table 17**

*Survey: Which outcomes of internal communication initiatives does your organization measure?*

Outcome category	<i>n</i>	%
Effect on business performance	18	100
Employee engagement	17	94
Employee behaviour change	17	94
Increased awareness and understanding	16	89
Improved job performance	16	89

*Note.*  $N = 18$

Broken down further (see Appendix G), the top outcomes practitioners report their organizations are using formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives are attitude (employee engagement) at 94% ( $n = 17$ ); reputation (effect on business performance), trust (employee behaviour change), and understanding (increased awareness and understanding), each at 72% ( $n = 13$ ); and awareness (increased awareness and understanding), knowledge (increased awareness and understanding), collaboration (improved job performance), teamwork (improved job performance), satisfaction (employee behaviour change), and employee retention (effect on business performance), each at 67% ( $n = 12$ ).

The survey asked all respondents ( $N = 46$ ) to identify on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not at all and 5 being very) how valuable they think outcomes are to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives through categories of effect on business performance, employee engagement, employee behaviour change, increased awareness and understanding, and improved job performance. As shown in Table 18, outcome categories ranked high as valuable or very valuable, with a median of either 4 or 5.

**Table 18**

*Survey: Value of outcome categories to evaluating the effectiveness of internal communications*

Outcome category	Scale <sup>a</sup> (n)						Median
	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know/prefer not to answer	
Effect on business performance	0	3	11	19	11	2	4
Employee engagement	0	3	2	15	25	1	5
Employee behaviour change	1	2	6	17	19	1	4
Increased awareness and understanding	0	0	3	11	31	1	5
Improved job performance	0	3	17	16	9	1	4

*Note.*  $N = 46$ .

<sup>a</sup>Reflects a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all valuable and 5 is very valuable.

Broken down further (see Appendix H), the survey asked all respondents ( $N = 46$ ) to identify on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not at all and 5 being very) how valuable they feel outcomes within each category are to evaluating the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives. Ranked as very valuable with a median of 5 were outcomes of trust, authenticity, transparency, understanding, awareness, and knowledge. Collaboration was the only outcome to rank with a median of 4.5. The majority of outcomes ranked as valuable with a median of 4: reputation, employee retention, continuous improvement, innovation, safety, productivity, attitude, advocacy, satisfaction, fairness, relevance, retention of information, teamwork, and empowerment. Discretionary effort ranked with a median of 3.

When asked how and to what extent internal communication programs are measured at their organizations, most interview participants ( $n = 7$ ) noted a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures, while two participants indicated they only use quantitative measures, and one said only qualitative measures are used. Quantitative measures included website, intranet, and social media analytics, email open and clickthrough rates, attendance, and responses to calls

of action. However, one participant did note that “clicks, hits, and volumes of views don’t necessarily equate to comprehension.” One participant noted that the output of internal communication is measured at their organization rather than its success. Qualitative measures were gathered through feedback (or lack of) either anecdotally (e.g., word of mouth) or formal methods (e.g., survey). Several participants noted that the absence of questions was an indication that information was complete and communicated effectively. One participant did include employee satisfaction as a qualitative measurement. When asked how and to what extent measurements of internal communication programs are used at their organizations, all interview participants ( $N = 10$ ) indicated measurements are used to inform communication strategies and tactics, including how content is written, formatted, and disseminated, as well as informing issues management.

Interview participants were also asked which measurements of internal communication programs they find most valuable or effective, regardless of whether the measurement was currently collected at their organization. Responses included both quantitative and qualitative, including comprehension, compliance, responses to calls of action, employee retention and recruitment, employee giving, engagement through feedback, value in what is being communicated, reach, organizational culture, and employee engagement. One participant noted the most valuable measurement for them was the absence metric:

The absence of complaints, because we do have actually a quite communicative internal audience, and if they’re not happy, if they dislike things that we’re doing, they will write to leadership, whine on social media, or write to us. That’s when we know we didn’t get things quite right – we haven’t done a sensible job of communicating this. The absence of complaints means we’ve probably done a decent job of communicating clearly what

needs to happen. I am conscious, though, that it might also mean we've done a bad job of communicating and it just hasn't been seen or digested or read. We're conscious of that calibration point as well.

When asked how and to what extent the direct impact of internal communication value on organizational outcomes is addressed at their organizations, interview participants tied their efforts to themes of employee engagement: morale, culture, pride, and satisfaction. Participants also noted that they connect employee retention and recruitment to the value of effective internal communication programs. One participant said the impact translates to revenue, customer satisfaction, and overall reputation. Four participants indicated they address the direct impact through their organization's strategic plan and whether goals and objectives were met, with one stating, "ultimately, you're trying to help other departments achieve their goals – you're serving a function that is built to assist them." Another participant tied the impact to the organization's vision:

There have been conversations about the connection to how well we communicate our vision and how much opportunity we give people to engage with the vision in a way that allows them to connect the dots of what they're doing on a day-to-day basis.

Several participants also noted that they address the impact of internal communication value by compliance with policies and meeting deadlines (e.g., filling out forms). Two participants who work in organizations that include at least one unionized employee group also noted that impact is addressed through a reduction in grievances as a result of clear and timely communication that builds trust with employees.

Finally, when discussing challenges to measuring internal communication programs at their organizations, interview participants noted a variety of reasons that included not having

enough capacity or resources, not being able to translate qualitative data, lack of support from senior leadership, as well as confusion of ownership that leads to inconsistencies in data collection and benchmarks. Several participants also reported that digital and survey fatigue creates a challenge for viable data collection, as does how individuals use technology: “people use technology differently – if everybody in every department used it the same way, it would be pretty easy to measure.” A lack of knowledge was also identified as a challenge to measuring internal communication programs by several participants, with one noting, “we have hired a lot of generalists, and so they can do everything to some extent but don’t necessarily carry a deep skill set in data and analysis.” Two participants who work in unionized organizations noted that the union creates a challenge to measuring internal communications because sometimes they receive qualitative feedback filtered and interpreted through the third party in an organization-employee relationship.

The survey asked participants ( $N = 46$ ) if their organization uses formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives. It also asked participants to assess their organization against characteristics identified in previous research as high-effective organizations in an effort to help identify the presence of a causal relationship between evaluating internal communication initiatives and organizational success. As shown in Table 19, participants who answered yes to using formal measurements and assessments and no to using formal measurements and assessments ( $N = 37$ ) assessed their organizations relatively the same. Data collected from participants who answered don’t know or prefer not to answer were not included in the analysis. A t-test (assuming unequal variance) was conducted to test and confirm whether the data were statistically significant. The results yielded a value for all instances higher than the critical value ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating the data are not significant.

**Table 19**

*Analysis of formal measurements of internal communication against organizational success*

Characteristic of organizational success	Mean rate		<i>p</i>
	Yes	No	
Overall success	3.7	3.7	0.986
Current performance	3 <sup>a</sup>	2.9 <sup>a</sup>	0.854
Achieved stated goals and objectives	4	3.5	0.055
Growth	3.5	3.5	0.964
Customer satisfaction	3.8	3.4	0.216
Reputation and brand perception	2.9 <sup>a</sup>	2.7 <sup>a</sup>	0.435
Market competitiveness	3.1	3.5	0.516

*Note.* Unless otherwise indicated, the mean is calculated from a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was the lowest score and 5 was the highest.

<sup>a</sup>Mean calculated from a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 was the lowest score and 4 was the highest.

The survey also asked participants ( $N = 46$ ) to identify, to the best of their knowledge, the size of their organization. The results were analysed against whether formal measurements or assessments of internal communication initiatives are used at respondents' organizations in an effort to identify a causal relationship with organization size. As shown in Table 20, there was relatively similar representation of organization size from participants who answered yes to using formal measurements and assessments and no to using formal measurements and assessments ( $N = 39$ ), with an average organization size of 501-1,000 employees each. Data collected from participants who answered don't know or prefer not to answer were not included in the analysis. A t-test (assuming unequal variance) was conducted to test and confirm whether the data were statistically significant. The result yielded a value higher than the critical value ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating the data are not significant.

**Table 20**

*Analysis of organization size against the use of formal measurements of internal communication*

Size of organization	Formal measures ( <i>n</i> )		<i>p</i>
	Yes	No	
Fewer than 50	1	3	
50-100	3	3	
101-500	1	1	
501-1,000	2	1	
1,001-5,000	7	11	
5,001-10,000	2	1	
More than 10,000	1	2	
Mean	4.2 <sup>a</sup>	4.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.862

*Note.* *N* = 39

<sup>a</sup>Calculated from a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = fewer than 50, and 7 = more than 10,000.

Therefore, 4 = 501-1,000.

Finally, a chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the relation between industry and whether formal measurements or assessments are used to evaluate internal communication initiatives. As shown in Table 21, respondents from various industries reported similarly with respect to whether or not their organization uses formal measurements to evaluate effectiveness. Table 22 outlines the results of the chi-square test,  $X^2 (10, N = 40) = 11.51$ ,  $p = 0.318$ , or a value higher than the critical value ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating the data are not statistically significant.

**Table 21**

*Formal measurements of internal communication against industry*

Industry	Formal measures ( <i>n</i> )		
	Yes	No	Total
Health care	0	2	2
Information technology	1	1	2

Industry	Formal measures ( <i>n</i> )		
	Yes	No	Total
Non-profit and philanthropy	1	3	4
Professional services	2	2	4
Public sector and education	8	12	20
Energy and utilities	1	0	1
Financial services	2	0	2
Public safety	0	1	1
Sports	0	1	1
Transit	2	0	2
Maritime/shipping and logistics	1	0	1
Total	18	22	40

Note. *N* = 40

**Table 22**

*Chi-square test results: Formal measurements of internal communication against industry*

	Value	df	<i>p</i>
$X^2$	11.51	10	0.318
N	40		

## Discussion

The examination of approaches to evaluating effective internal communication programs and initiatives to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational goals focused on theoretical concepts of relationship management and employee engagement, as well as theories applied to the function of internal communication and the return on communication investment. In particular, data collected from the survey and in-depth interviews were used to build on previous research by Meng & Berger (2012) and O'Neil et al. (2018) in an effort to validate their findings, especially with impacts felt from advances in technology, changing demographics, and the COVID-19 pandemic since, and move towards standardizing a framework for evaluating

internal communication efforts to better demonstrate the value of the function and its link to organizational success.

First, it was necessary to determine how and to what extent organizations use internal communication strategies to support organizational goals, assuming practitioners and leadership use a two-way symmetrical communication model to support organization-employee relationships and meet organizational goals through employee support. Data collected from both the survey and in-depth interviews demonstrate a focus on internal communication strategies designed to support a two-way symmetrical communication model with characteristics that build successful, high-quality relationships, including asking for feedback, consistency, and transparency. According to Hon and Grunig (1999), positive organization-employee relationships increase the likelihood of organizations meeting goals and objectives. Theory suggests employees reciprocate their relationship with an organization through engagement, and that engagement is dependent on internal communication, affecting employee attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and behaviour (O'Neil et al., 2021). Engaged employees perceive their relationship with their organization as beneficial and believe their organization cares about them beyond economic exchange (Kang & Sung, 2017). Data from both the survey and in-depth interviews suggests organizations use internal communication in a way that supports those theories by disseminating information that helps employees understand the business, integrates employees into the organization, communicates objectives, builds morale, and, overwhelming, educates employees about organizational culture and values. Internal communication that communicates how employees' actions affect the customer, as well as transactional information that provides details about the value of employee compensation packages, ranked low on the list. Welch (2011) specifies that engagement is influenced by internal communication with the potential to

effectively transfer values of the organization to employees and involve them in organizational goals. The data would suggest this is a top consideration for both the interview and survey samples, ranking at the top of the list for survey respondents and evident in discussions with interview participants, including equipping employees with quality information to “get them on board” with the mission, vision, and shared values, as well as creating opportunity for employees to “engage with the vision in such a way that allows them to connect the dots to what they’re doing on a day-to-day basis.”

Two-way symmetrical communication is characterized as building dialogues, which often involves creating opportunities for feedback. While results from the survey sample ranked feedback high on the list of how internal communication is used consistently at organizations, the interview sample painted a different picture: feedback is important, but not regularly done, if at all. However, while most scholars agree strategies that support symmetrical communication with employees are characteristic of effective organizations, it has also been noted that it would be unrealistic to suggest internal communication can be conducted solely two-way (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Grunig et al. (2002) argue internal communication can be considered symmetrical if content meets employees’ need to know rather than leaderships’ need to tell. This was evident in conversations with interview participants as they outlined characteristics of their internal communication programs, such as taking an inside-out approach, addressing anticipated questions, and even adapting style and language to be more inclusive. This would argue that organizations included in the sample do indeed practice two-way symmetrical internal communication even if they do not create regular opportunities for feedback.

There is also evidence from the interview sample to suggest that the use of cascading communication is prevalent in internal communication programs, supporting theories that

internal communication happens at all levels of the organization and includes layers of executives, managers, supervisors, and nonmanagement employees (Welch & Jackson, 2007; Whitworth, 2011). This would imply that internal communication includes management-to-employee and peer-to-peer, both of which, researchers argue, lead to supportive peer relationships, associated with outcomes that include organizational commitment, psychological well-being, sense of belonging, and employee engagement (Chen & Feeley, 2012; Colbert et al., 2016; Qin & Men, 2023; Salanova et al., 2021; Torrente et al., 2012).

Research also suggests that using a blend of new and traditional media through rich-media channels helps build favourable relationships with employees and, therefore, achieves organizational goals (Lee, 2018). Data from the interview sample shows organizations utilize a range of communication channels for effective internal communication, including traditional (face-to-face) and new media (digital newsletters, social media) through rich media channels (in-person meetings, emails, video conferencing, instant messaging). Additionally, the interview sample indicated concern in ensuring internal communication is accessible to all employees in terms of reaching them in various workplaces and stages, including channels, suggesting how employees consume internal communication is considered in developing effective internal communication strategies to result in positive organization-employee relationships.

Considering a condition for completing the survey was whether the respondent worked in a role or department that participates in developing or implementing internal communication programs or initiatives, it can be assumed that the survey sample represents organizations that employ internal communication strategies and initiatives. Most respondents considered their organization to be successful, assessed its current performance as good, had mostly achieved stated organizational goals and objectives, seen successful growth, described customer

satisfaction with products/services as moderately satisfied, described the reputation and brand perception of their organization as good, and assessed their organization as competitive in the market. It can be argued that these data support theories that internal communication is characteristic of excellent and effective organizations and, therefore, develops organization-employee relationships that support organizational goals (Grunig, 1992a; Lee et al., 2022).

To support the research problem, it was also necessary to determine how and to what extent organizations have adapted internal communication strategies to changing employee needs. Intense global economic and technological developments, demographic shifts, and workforce migration have had massive impacts on business and workplace settings that organizations must continually identify, modify, and align (Bojadiev & Vaneva, 2021). As a result, the shifting landscape continues to transform business and communication practices, including internal communication. Data collected from in-depth interviews suggest organizations are increasingly using social media for internal communication strategies, as well as adopting and adapting digital technologies to enhance environments that allow dispersed employees to interact, including video conferencing and instant messaging. These findings are inline with research from O'Neil et al. (2021) and Bojadiev and Vaneva (2021). Furthermore, interview participants noted incorporating more digital channels into their strategies and leveraging technology for efficiency, suggesting a recognition in the expanding list of communication channels in increasing employee engagement and utilizing the varied ways of maintaining open communication systems to foster quality organization-employee relationships, as suggested by Iman et al. (2023).

While the interview sample did not have experience developing internal communication strategies for transnational environments, there was some consideration for a multicultural

employee base through efforts that support equity, diversity, and inclusion, including training and guidelines that support inclusive language and consideration for communication that does not make assumptions about what an individual knows or values. These findings support research in managing positive organization-employee relationships with internal communication that respects cultural profiles (Verčič, 2019).

According to Neill (2015), one of the biggest factors impacting internal communications is generational shifts in the workforce, with newer generations favouring styles of communication and engagement from employers that differ from older generations. Millennials and Generation Z prefer to work for organizations that share core values they deem important, which has created a focus on developing internal brands and communicating value proposition to establish employee commitment (Field, 2021; Neill, 2015). This was evident in conversations with interview participants and supported by data from the survey results, which indicate high consideration is given to using internal communication to educate employees about organizational culture and values. Furthermore, Friedl & Verčič (2011) argue that workers born after 1980 – also known as digital natives – have grown up with digital media and a plethora of technological devices and, therefore, differ from previous generations in their way of perceiving and processing information. Data from the in-depth interviews overwhelmingly support this theory as all participants indicated a shift in how technology is used to support internal communication programs at their organizations, signaling consideration for how the content is consumed and supports positive organization-employee relationships.

Additionally, Neill (2015) also discovered one of the driving factors that has led organizations to examine internal communication more closely is how to handle the loss of institutional knowledge and experience as Baby Boomers transition into retirement, suggesting

organizations need to understand how to adapt and enhance the transfer of knowledge and culture to newer generations to remain competitive. Data from one interview, in particular, supports these findings in that consideration has been given to using internal communication programs to enable older generations to transfer knowledge to newer generations entering the organization, suggesting there is an increased awareness among practitioners and leadership of this concern and the tactical use of internal communication and employee engagement to help address it.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on many organizations' internal communications function (Gomes et al., 2021). Research suggests the pandemic has led to a focus on employee engagement and, by extension, internal communications and the role it plays in organization-employee relationships, including activity that cultivates employee psychological outcomes of, for example, trust and wellness (Gomes et al., 2021; Qin & Men, 2023). There is evidence to support these theories from the interview sample, including fulfilling a sense of immediacy with internal communication that is more timely, concise, and consistent, and a focus on internal communication and employee engagement tactics that support health and wellness. While research is still emerging, studies have also shown the pandemic provided an opportunity to demonstrate the value of internal communications, with organizations believing the pandemic had a positive influence on the function, prompting significant changes in activity as a result of learned lessons and strengthening its role in strategic decision-making (Gomes et al., 2021; Toledano et al., 2022). Data from the interview sample supports this theory, with several participants identifying more license to adapt and advise and recognition from senior leadership by inclusion in the dominant coalition and proper resources.

There is also evidence to support theories that the mode of frequency of internal communications, as well as preferred channels, has changed as a result of the pandemic (Bojadjiev & Vaneva, 2021; Qin & Men, 2023). Data from the interview sample showed an increase in internal communication activity, including meetings, as well as a shift to more asynchronous communication and, overwhelmingly, a reliance on technology, such as instant messaging and video conferencing.

Given the dominance of the topic of technology in conversations with the interview sample as well as findings in literature, it is difficult to argue whether a shift and increase in the use of digital technology for internal communication strategies was a direct impact of one factor in particular. It is more likely that a combination of factors, including advances in technology and increased accessibility of digital communication tools, shifting generational demographic preferences, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic created a perfect storm, so to speak, allowing for the normalization of what seems to be a reliance on technology in internal communication practices and employee engagement.

Finally, to support the examination of approaches to evaluating effective internal communication programs and initiatives to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational goals, it was necessary to determine how and to what extent organizations evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication strategies and gain support from organizational leaders.

Scholars argue an organization's business performance is dependent on its ability to effectively communicate with its employees (Santoso et al., 2023). However, according to O'Neil et al. (2021), the question of how to evaluate effective internal communication has had an easy answer for far too many years: it's not evaluated. Data collected from the survey sample

support this thought. When asked if their organization uses formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives, most responded with either no or don't know/prefer not to answer. While data from the interview sample did suggest internal communication programs and initiatives are measured, it was with quantitative outputs (vanity metrics) and qualitative outtakes, identified as the response and reaction to the communication activity, and not outcomes, which O'Neil et al. (2021) identify as the effect of communication activity and evaluated through employee advocacy, empowerment, and collaboration.

However, there is evidence from the interview sample to suggest there is consideration for the direct impact of internal communication value that ties to themes of employee engagement (morale, culture, pride, and satisfaction), employee retention and recruitment (satisfaction and reputation), as well as revenue, customer satisfaction, and overall reputation. This would suggest an understanding of the impact of effective internal communication strategies on organizational goals but challenges in demonstrating that impact through evaluation. The interview sample noted a variety of challenges that included not having enough capacity or resources, not knowing how to translate qualitative data or data analysis knowledge and expertise, lack of support from leadership, and confusion over ownership of the function, which supports findings from researchers, including Meng and Berger (2012), Meng and Pan (2012), and O'Neil et al. (2021). Data from the survey sample suggests organizations that are measuring internal communication are doing so as part of standard operating practice/reporting, to seek additional budget/staff, and inform a balanced scorecard, suggesting the elimination of barriers such as a lack of support from leadership, lack of capacity and resources, and lack of knowledge and expertise or understanding of how to translate qualitative data.

Meng and Berger (2012) also identified through their research that high-effective organizations are much more likely to measure and evaluate internal communication than low-effective organizations. Data collected from the survey suggests organizations that do use formal measurements for internal communication and those that do not are assessed similarly in terms of organizational success and, therefore, effectiveness, suggesting there is no link between measuring and performance. Furthermore, statistical analysis determined the data not statistically significant, therefore, confirming a rejection of that hypothesis. This does not mean, however, that internal communication in general is not linked to high-effective organizations, but rather could further suggest barriers to demonstrating impact through evaluation exist.

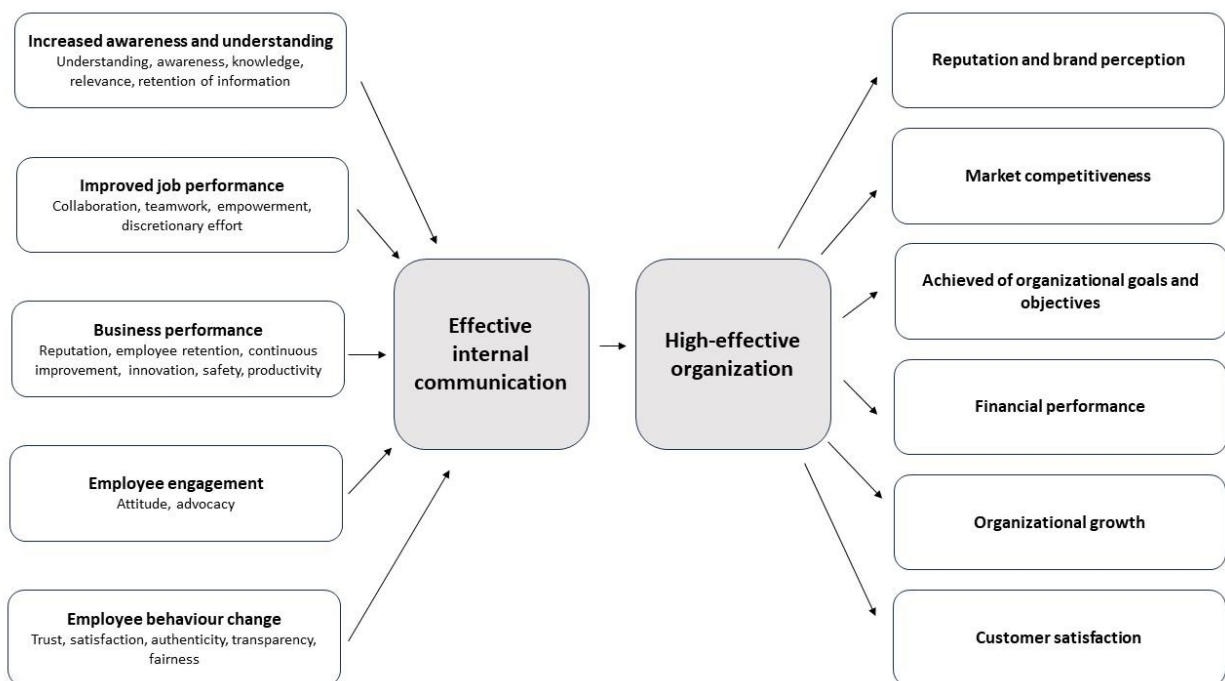
Research also suggests whether an organization is more likely to measure or evaluate internal communication is dependent on an organization's size, culture, management style, financial resources, employee characteristics, organizational expectations, and changes in the organizational environment (Verčic, 2019). Data were analyzed to determine whether there was a connection between organizations that use formal measurements to evaluate internal communication and organizational size. Statistical analysis determined the data not statistically significant, suggesting there is not a link between the two variables. Similarly, data were analyzed to determine whether there was a connection between organizations that use formal measurements to evaluate internal communication and industry. Statistical analysis also determined this data not statistically significant, suggesting there is no link. These findings suggest barriers to evaluating internal communication are less likely to exist as a result of organization size and industry, which could be impacted by organizational environment, rather than challenges identified by interview participants that relate to culture, management style, expectations, and financial resources.

Practitioners remain under increasing pressure to improve and maximize the return of communication efforts on organizational value (Meng & Berger, 2012). This demand creates a need to translate action and performance into firm value effects (Meng & Berger, 2012). When researching measurements to evaluate the return on investment of organizations' internal communication efforts, Meng and Berger (2012) identified five aspects of internal communication initiatives that have been measured regularly: increased awareness or understanding; concentrated engagement among employees; improved job performance; changed employee behaviours; and improved business performance at the organizational level. Within the context of Meng & Berger's (2012) research, O'Neil et al. (2018) developed and proposed standards and definitions (see Appendix A) for evaluating internal communications. Data collected from the survey and in-depth interview samples suggest these standards for evaluation are still valid. Organizations that do measure internal communication identified through the survey sample overwhelmingly confirmed that it is done through outcomes of business performance, employee engagement, employee behaviour change, awareness and understanding, and job performance. Furthermore, survey results confirm practitioners, whether they measure internal communications or not, find measurements of business performance, employee engagement, employee behaviour change, awareness and understanding, and job performance to be valuable outcomes to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication. Data collected through the in-depth interview sample validate these results with participants tying internal communication efforts and measurement value to business performance (reputation, employee retention), employee engagement (advocacy), employee behaviour change (trust, satisfaction, authenticity, transparency, fairness), awareness and understanding (understanding, awareness, knowledge, relevance, retention of information), and job performance (empowerment).

To evaluate effective internal communication, a framework (see Figure 1) is then proposed that assumes outcomes can be measured to determine effective internal communication. Effective internal communication translates into a high-effective (or successful) organization that results in outputs and outtakes defined by Meng and Berger (2012), measured through organizational growth, customer satisfaction, reputation and brand perception, achievement of stated organizational goals and objectives, market competitiveness, and financial performance.

**Figure 1**

*Proposed framework to evaluate effective internal communication*



## Conclusion and Limitations

Effective internal communication is critical to the success of any organization. Researchers argue communication programs and initiatives that support organization-employee relationships shape organizational success by impacting productivity, retention, and overall

corporate reputation (Meng & Berger, 2012; O'Neil et al., 2018; O'Neil et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2023). Despite the importance of its function, evaluating internal communication efforts remains a challenge for many organizations – there seems to be a lack of comprehensive understanding and standardized approaches. Standards would provide a common language for practitioners to measure in a consistent and comparable manner, increasing reliability, promoting efficiency, and bringing more credibility to public relations, enabling the optimization of strategies that help achieve desired organizational outcomes (O'Neil et al., 2018). O'Neil et al. (2018) developed and proposed standards and definitions for evaluating internal communications through a Delphi study that built on research from Meng & Berger (2012), including outcomes, organizational impact.

This study sought to validate standards proposed by O'Neil et al. (2018) to inform a framework for evaluating internal communication efforts and move towards standardization to better demonstrate the value of effective internal communication and its link to organizational success. Theories of relationship management and employee engagement, as well as theories applied to the function of internal communication and the return on communication investment, were explored to validate proposed definitions and identify themes and trends that may impact evaluation of the function since the introduction of proposed standards, including advances in technology, changing demographics, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Data collected from a survey sample of practitioners were analyzed to test the proposed definitions by O'Neil et al. (2018) to determine validity. Data collected from an in-depth interview sample of leadership were analyzed to support survey findings as well as identify current themes and trends in evaluating effective internal communication.

The findings confirmed that while practitioners and leadership understand the value of internal communication and its impact on organizational success, there still remain challenges to evaluating the function's effectiveness and demonstrating that value. The majority of practitioners surveyed indicated that their organization does not use formal measurements or assessments to evaluate internal communication programs and initiatives, and data from the interviews noted a variety of challenges that included not having enough capacity or resources, lack of support from leadership, confusion over ownership of the function, and not knowing how to translate data or which data to use. A standardized framework to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communications would help break down those barriers by promoting efficiency and consistency that leads to credibility.

Findings also uncovered that the proposed standards by O'Neil et al. (2018) are still valid. Practitioners and leaders that are evaluating internal communications are doing so through outcomes of business performance, employee engagement, employee behaviour change, awareness and understanding, and job performance. Data also showed that whether they measure or not, practitioners and leaders find measurements of business performance, employee engagement, employee behaviour change, awareness and understanding, and job performance to be valuable outcomes of effective internal communication and to the evaluation of the function.

Advances in technology and increased accessibility of digital communication tools, shifting generational demographic preferences, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, seem to have created a normalization of the use of technology in internal communication practices and employee engagement. Findings uncovered that there is an increased reliance on tools, such as instant messaging and video conferencing, and an effort to communicate with employees through a variety of digital channels and at an increased mode of frequency. While research is still

emerging on the full impact of these changes, findings of this study uncovered that there does not seem to be a negative impact on the value placed on the proposed standards or the need to create additional definitions. Rather, these changes have strengthened the proposed definitions with data pointing to increased internal communication efforts that result in positive organization-employee relationships and include outcome characteristics tied to employee engagement, employee behaviour change, awareness and understanding, and job performance.

Practitioners remain under increasing pressure to improve and maximize the return of communication efforts on organizational value (Meng & Berger, 2012). This demand creates a need to translate action and performance into firm value effects (Meng & Berger, 2012). The proposed framework for evaluating the effectiveness of internal communication assumes the proposed standards are valid and an appropriate measure to determine if internal communication effort is effective. Effective internal communication translates into a high-effective, or successful, organization that results in measurable outputs and outtakes. This framework can be used to demonstrate the impact of effective internal communications on organizational success and enable practitioners and leaders to effectively measure their efforts to optimize strategies and achieve organizational goals.

To validate the findings of this study, a larger sample size is necessary. The limited sample size from the survey calls for more data to fully understand how and to what extent organizations are measuring the effectiveness of internal communication programs and initiatives, as well as to further validate the value placed on the proposed standards. Despite efforts to achieve a statistically meaningful sample size of 100, only 46 responses were eligible for analysis. A larger sample size would have also provided a more meaningful statistical analysis to validate hypotheses of causal relationships between measurement and organizational

effectiveness, as well as size and industry. Furthermore, most data collected through the survey were from practitioners who work at Canadian organizations and from the public sector industry. A broader sample size from the Anglosphere and industries would have provided more diverse insights. The study was limited to organizations that operate in the Anglosphere; however, literature exists on effective internal communication and measurement from countries outside the Anglosphere. The collection and analysis of data from a more diverse sample would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how and to what extent effective internal communication programs and initiatives are measured with benefit to public relations research on a global scale.

Similarly, the in-depth interview sample represented Canadian organizations and the majority from the public sector. A broader sample size would have provided more diverse insights. This study also attempted to better understand the impacts of globalization on internal communication. The sample size did not include organizations that need to communicate with employees across transnational environments. Additional research is required to fully understand the impact of globalization on internal communication efforts and how it may affect a standardized approach to evaluation. While the sample size of 10 was selected to adequately address the research questions by exposing diverse opinions before reaching data saturation, it is important to note that in-depth interviews do not allow for generalizability to larger populations and that data are reliant on the participant's ability to recall certain information (Stacks, 2017).

Further, the study was designed to capture insights from practitioners who work in a role or department that serves a public relations, corporate communications, human resources, or employee engagement function, however, responsibility for internal communication can also lie within a marketing function. Additional research on the relationship between marketing and the organization-employee relationship, as well as how and to what extent marketing practitioners

measure internal communication programs and initiatives, would provide more comprehensive insights.

It is also important to note that the samples from both the survey and in-depth interviews included colleagues within the researcher's network, and while attempts were made to eliminate bias in data collection, it is possible responses were biased.

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## Appendix A

### Proposed Standards and Definitions for Evaluating Internal Communications

#### *Increased awareness and understanding*

**Understanding:** Employees' ability to relate knowledge to their work in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals.

**Awareness:** Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic.

**Knowledge:** Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics.

**Relevance:** Degree to which employees find communication from the organization meaningful and useful.

**Retention of information:** Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked after a certain timeframe.

#### *Employee engagement*

**Attitude:** Employees' way of thinking or feeling about a subject (the organization, topic, or issue), ranging from very positive to very negative.

**Advocacy:** Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote or defend an organization and its products and services.

#### *Improved job performance*

**Collaboration:** Employees across different departments or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully.

**Teamwork:** Employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective.

**Empowerment:** Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance.

**Discretionary effort:** Employees' effort given to an organization, team, or project, beyond what is required.

*Employee behaviour change*

**Trust:** Employees' belief in the reliability, truth, and integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication.

**Satisfaction:** The extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work.

**Authenticity:** Employees' perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of organizational objectives.

**Transparency:** Employees' perception of the organization's willingness to share positive and negative information in a timely fashion.

**Fairness:** Employees' perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just.

*Business performance*

**Reputation:** Stakeholders' (internal and external) evaluation of an organization based on personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication.

**Employee retention:** Number or percentage of employees who remain employed after a certain period of time.

**Continuous improvement:** Small or large improvements to efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or process in the work environment.

**Innovation:** Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviours related to the organization.

**Safety:** Employee freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury, or loss.

**Productivity:** The quality and quantity of work output based on resources.

## Appendix B

### Certificate of Ethics Clearance to Involve Human Participants in Research



**McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)**  
 c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support  
 MREB Secretariat, GH-305  
 1280 Main St. W.  
 Hamilton, Ontario, L8W 4L8  
 email: [ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca)  
 Phone: 905-525-9140 ext. 23142

#### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

**Today's Date:** Sep/22/2023

**Supervisor:** Dr. Terry Flynn  
**Student Investigator:** Graduate Student Erika Kastner  
**Applicant:** Erika Kastner  
**Project Title:** Standardizing Measures of Effective Internal Communications  
**MREB#: 6707**

Dear Researcher(s)

The ethics application and supporting documents for MREB# 6707 entitled "Standardizing Measures of Effective Internal Communications" have been reviewed and cleared by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants.

The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. The above named study is to be conducted in accordance with the most recent approved versions of the application and supporting documents.

Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the Annual Report in advance of the yearly anniversary of the original ethics clearance date: Sep/19/2024. If the Annual Report is not submitted, then ethics clearance will lapse on the expiry date and Research Finance will be notified that ethics clearance is no longer valid (TCPS, Art. 6.14).

An Amendment form must be submitted and cleared before any substantive alterations are made to the approved research protocol and documents (TCPS, Art. 6.16).

Researchers are required to report Adverse Events (i.e. an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible, and no more than 3 days after the event occurs (TCPS, Art. 6.15). A privacy breach affecting participant information should also be reported to the MREB secretariat and the MREB Chair as soon as possible. The Reportable Events form is used to document adverse events, privacy breaches, protocol deviations and participant complaints.

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Recruiting Materials	Screening questions_survey	Aug/27/2023	1
Consent Forms	Consent Preamble_survey	Aug/27/2023	1
Recruiting Materials	Snowball recruitment script_Interview	Aug/28/2023	2
Recruiting Materials	Survey recruitment_social media	Sep/13/2023	2
Recruiting Materials	Survey and interview recruitment_email	Sep/13/2023	3
Interviews	Interview Guide	Sep/13/2023	2
Test Instruments	Survey questions	Sep/13/2023	2
Consent Forms	Oral consent log_interviews	Sep/13/2023	2
Consent Forms	Oral Consent Script	Sep/13/2023	3
Consent Forms	Letter of Information_Survey	Sep/13/2023	2
Consent Forms	Letter of Information_Interview	Sep/13/2023	3
Response Documents	Summary of Revisions for MREB 6707 Kastner	Sep/13/2023	1

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## Appendix C

### Invitation Email to Participate in Survey

Subject line: Invitation to participate in communications research survey

Hello,

My name is Erika Kastner. I am currently pursuing a Master of Communications Management degree from McMaster University and would like to invite you to participate in a survey I am conducting as part of my final capstone research.

The objective of my research is to better understand current practices for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes. Your insight would be greatly appreciated.

The survey is no more than 23 questions and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Responses are anonymous.

The survey closes DATE AND TIME TBD and can be accessed online through the following link:

SURVEY LINK

I would also appreciate your help in reaching a broader audience and ask that you kindly consider sharing the survey link or forwarding this email to other practitioners in your network. Your support would be invaluable in helping gather diverse and insightful responses.

Thank you for your time,

Erika Kastner, MCM Candidate  
McMaster University

[kastnee@mcmaster.ca](mailto:kastnee@mcmaster.ca)

## Appendix D

### Survey Recruitment LinkedIn Post

Effective internal communication is critical to the success of any organization. But how do we measure our efforts? As part of my @MCM final capstone research, I'm looking to better understand current practices for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes. If you work in a role or department that serves a public relations, corporate communications, human resources, or employee engagement function, I'd love to get your insight by participating in a survey: [SURVEY LINK](#)

It should only take about 15 minutes of your time. Responses will be anonymous. The survey closes DATE AND TIME TBD.

I would also appreciate help in reaching a broader audience and ask that you kindly consider sharing the survey link or this post with your network. Your support would be invaluable in helping gather diverse and insightful responses.

Thank you!

## Appendix E

### Survey

#### Welcome Message

Thank you for accessing this survey. The objective of my research is to better understand current practices for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes. The survey is no more than 23 questions and should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Responses are anonymous.

#### Screening Question #1

- 1. Do you currently work in a role that serves a public relations, corporate communications, human resources, or employee engagement function? (required)**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

*If the response is no or don't know, the survey is terminated.*

#### Screening Question #2

- 2. Do you or the department you work in participate in developing or implementing internal communication programs or initiatives? (required)**

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

*If the response is no or don't know, the survey is terminated.*

#### Screening Question #3

- 3. Where is your organization headquartered? (required)**

- Australia
- Canada
- New Zealand
- United Kingdom
- United States
- Other
- Don't know

*If the response is other or don't know, the survey is terminated.*

### **Survey Questions**

**4. Which industry best describes where your organization operates? (required)**

- Energy and Utilities
- Financial Services
- Health care
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Media and Entertainment
- Non-profit and Philanthropy
- Professional Services
- Public Sector and Education
- Retail/Wholesale
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

5. **To the best of your knowledge, how many people are employed by your organization?** (required)

- Less than 50
- 50–100
- 101–500
- 501–1,000
- 1,001–5,000
- 5,001–10,000
- More than 10,000
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

6. **Which of the following best describes how your organization uses internal communication programs and tactics on a consistent basis? Please select all that apply.** (required)

- Help employees understand the business
- Educate employees about organizational culture and values
- Provide employees with information on organizational performance and financial objectives
- Integrate new employees into the organization
- Communicate to employees how their actions affect the customer
- Provide employees with information about the value of their total compensation package
- Ask for feedback from employees about their opinions on the organization, including internal processes and procedures

- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**7. Does your organization use formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives?** (required)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

*If response is no or don't know/prefer not to answer, the survey moves to question 14*

**8. How are formal measurements or assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives used at your organization? Please select all that apply.** (required)

- Inform a balanced scorecard
- Seek additional budget/staff
- Standard operating practice/reporting
- Personal interest
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**9. Which outcomes of internal communication initiatives does your organization measure for effectiveness through the perspective of increased awareness and understanding? Please select all that apply.** (required)

- Awareness: Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic

- Knowledge: Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics
- Understanding: Employees' ability to relate knowledge to their work in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals
- Relevance: Degree to which employees find communication from the organization meaningful and useful
- Retention of information: Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked after a certain timeframe
- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**10. Which outcomes of internal communication initiatives does your organization measure for effectiveness through the perspective of the effect on employee engagement? Please select all that apply. (required)**

- Attitude: Employees' way of thinking or feeling about a subject (the organization, topic, or issue), ranging from very positive to very negative
- Advocacy: Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote or defend an organization and its products and services
- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**11. Which outcomes of internal communication initiatives does your organization measure for effectiveness through the perspective of improved job performance?**

**Please select all that apply.** (required)

- Empowerment: Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance
- Collaboration: Employees across different departments or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully
- Teamwork: Employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective
- Discretionary effort: Employees' effort given to an organization, team, or project, beyond what is required
- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**12. Which outcomes of internal communication initiatives does your organization measure for effectiveness through the perspective of employee behaviour change?**

**Please select all that apply.** (required)

- Authenticity: Employees' perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of organizational objectives
- Trust: Employees' belief in the reliability, truth, and integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication
- Satisfaction: The extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work

- Transparency: Employees' perception of the organization's willingness to share positive and negative information in a timely fashion
- Fairness: Employees' perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just
- Other (please specify)
- None
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**13. Which outcomes of internal communication initiatives does your organization measure for effectiveness through the perspective of the effect on business performance? Please select all that apply. (required)**

- Productivity: The quality and quantity of work output based on resources
- Innovation: Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviours related to the organization
- Continuous improvement: Small or large improvements to efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or process in the work environment
- Reputation: Stakeholders' (internal and external) evaluation of an organization based on personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication
- Employee retention: Number or percentage of employees who remain employed after a certain period of time
- Safety: Employee freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury, or loss
- Other (please specify)
- None

- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**14. How would you describe the overall success of your organization? (required)**

- Very successful
- Successful
- Moderately successful
- Slightly successful
- Not successful
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**15. How would you assess the current performance of your organization? (required)**

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**16. To what extent has your organization achieved stated goals and objectives?**

(required)

- Fully achieved
- Mostly achieved
- Moderately achieved
- Slightly achieved
- Not achieved
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**17. How would you describe the growth of your organization over the last three years?**

(required)

- Very successful
- Successful
- Moderately successful
- Slightly successful
- Not successful
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**18. How would you describe customer satisfaction with your organization and its products/services? (required)**

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Not satisfied
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**19. How would you describe the reputation and brand perception of your organization?**

(required)

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Poor
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**20. In comparison to competitors in the market, how would you assess your organization?** (required)

- Very competitive
- Competitive
- Moderately competitive
- Slightly competitive
- Not competitive
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**21. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being very, how valuable do you think the following aspects are to evaluating the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives:** (required)

**a. Awareness and understanding** (required)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**b. Employee engagement** (required)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**c. Improved job performance** (required)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**d. Employee behaviour change** (required)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**e. Business performance** (required)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**22. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being very, how valuable do you think the following outcomes are to evaluate the effectiveness of internal**

**communication initiatives: (required)**

**a. Awareness: Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**b. Knowledge: Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**c. Understanding: Employees' ability to relate knowledge to their work in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals (required)**

- 1
- 2

- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**d. Relevance: Degree to which employees find communication from the organization meaningful and useful (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**e. Retention of information: Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked after a certain timeframe (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**f. Attitude: Employees' way of thinking or feeling about a subject (the organization, topic, or issue), ranging from very positive to very negative (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**g. Advocacy: Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote or defend an organization and its products and services (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**h. Empowerment: Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

- i. **Collaboration: Employees across different departments or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully** (required)
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- j. **Teamwork: Employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective** (required)
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- k. **Discretionary effort: Employees' effort given to an organization, team, or project, beyond what is required** (required)
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5

- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**l. Authenticity: Employees' perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of organizational objectives (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**m. Trust: Employees' belief in the reliability, truth, and integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**n. Satisfaction: The extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4

- 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- o. Transparency: Employees' perception of the organization's willingness to share positive and negative information in a timely fashion (required)**
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- p. Fairness: Employees' perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just (required)**
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- q. Productivity: The quality and quantity of work output based on resources (required)**
- 1
  - 2
  - 3

- 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- r. **Innovation: Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviours related to the organization** (required)
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- s. **Continuous improvement: Small or large improvements to efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or process in the work environment** (required)
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  - Don't know/prefer not to answer
- t. **Reputation: Stakeholders' (internal and external) evaluation of an organization based on personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication** (required)

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**u. Employee retention: Number or percentage of employees who remain employed after a certain period of time (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**v. Safety: Employee freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury, or loss (required)**

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- Don't know/prefer not to answer

**23. Do you have additional comments or observations you would like to share about evaluating the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives as it pertains to your role or organization? (optional)**

**Confirmation Notice**

Thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey and support this research. Should you wish to get in touch with questions, concerns, or additional comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly at [kastnee@mcmaster.ca](mailto:kastnee@mcmaster.ca).

Erika Kastner, MCM Candidate  
McMaster University

## **Appendix F**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Introduction**

My name is Erika Kastner. I am currently pursuing a Master of Communications Management degree from McMaster University. In this context, I would like to interview you to complete my capstone research. I would like to ask you several questions to better understand current practices for evaluating internal communication to optimize strategies and achieve desired organizational outcomes.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are free to end this interview at any time. All of your information will be kept confidential and will only be shared with my research supervisor, Dr. Terry Flynn. With your permission, I would like to record our interview, as it will allow me to listen more attentively to our discussion. Following our interview, I will transcribe our discussion. Once my research has been completed, both the video file and transcript will be securely erased. Are these conditions acceptable? Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### **Interview Questions**

1. How would you describe the role of internal communications in your organization?
2. What would you consider key characteristics of your internal communication program?
3. How would you describe the role of your department in the strategic development or implementation of internal communication programs?
4. How would you describe the role of your department in the strategic management of organization-employee relationships?

5. How important is employee feedback about the organization to your internal communication program?
6. What specific internal communication channels and platforms are utilized to support internal communication programs at your organization?
7. How and to what extent have your internal communication strategies adapted to the impact of digitalization (i.e., communication technology)?
8. How and to what extent have your internal communication strategies adapted to the impact of globalization (e.g., cross-cultural communication)?
9. How and to what extent have your internal communication strategies adapted to the impact of changing demographics in the workforce?
10. How and to what extent have your internal communication strategies adapted to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?
11. How and to what extent are internal communication programs at your organization measured?
12. How and to what extent do you use measurements of internal communication programs?
13. What would you consider the most valuable or effective measurements of internal communication programs?
14. How and to what extent do you address the direct impact of internal communication value on organizational outcomes?
15. What would you consider challenges to measuring internal communication programs at your organization?

16. Do you have additional comments or observations you would like to share about evaluating the effectiveness of internal communication initiatives as it pertains to your role or organization?

**Conclusion**

I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me today and participating in this research. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to add anything that comes to mind. May I contact you if I have follow-up questions regarding our discussion? Thank you.

## Appendix G

### Measured Outcomes of Internal Communication Initiatives

Outcome	<i>n</i>	%
Increased awareness and understanding		
Understanding: Employees' ability to relate knowledge to their work in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals	13	72
Awareness: Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic	12	67
Knowledge: Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics	12	67
Relevance: Degree to which employees find communication from the organization meaningful and useful	9	50
Retention of information: Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked after a certain timeframe	5	28
None	2	11
Other		
Behaviour - cultural and task-based	1	6
Don't know/prefer not to answer	1	6
Employee engagement		
Attitude: Employees' way of thinking or feeling about a subject (the organization, topic, or issue), ranging from very positive to very negative	17	95
Advocacy: Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote or defend an organization and its products and services	7	39
None	1	6
Don't know/prefer not to answer	0	0
Improved job performance		
Collaboration: Employees across different departments or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully	12	67
Teamwork: Employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective	12	67
Empowerment: Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance	11	61
Discretionary effort: Employees' effort given to an organization, team, or project, beyond what is required	5	28
None	2	11
Don't know/prefer not to answer	0	0
Employee behaviour change		
Trust: Employees' belief in the reliability, truth, and integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication	13	72

Outcome	<i>n</i>	%
Satisfaction: The extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work	12	67
Authenticity: Employees' perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of organizational objectives	11	61
Transparency: Employees' perception of the organization's willingness to share positive and negative information in a timely fashion	9	50
Fairness: Employees' perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just	7	39
Other		
Feel value is being contributed and recognized	1	6
None	1	6
Don't know/prefer not to answer	1	6
Business performance		
Reputation: Stakeholders' (internal and external) evaluation of an organization based on personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication	13	72
Employee retention: Number or percentage of employees who remain employed after a certain period of time	12	67
Continuous improvement: Small or large improvements to efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or process in the work environment	10	56
Innovation: Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviours related to the organization	7	39
Safety: Employee freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury, or loss	7	39
Productivity: The quality and quantity of work output based on resources	6	33
Don't know/prefer not to answer	1	6

*Note.* *N* = 18

## Appendix H

### Value Placed in Outcome to Evaluating the Effectiveness of Internal Communications

Outcome	Scale <sup>a</sup> (n)						Median
	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know/prefer not to answer	
Effect on business performance							
Reputation: Stakeholders' (internal and external) evaluation of an organization based on personal and observed experiences with the company and its communication	1	2	8	13	22	0	4
Employee retention: Number or percentage of employees who remain employed after a certain period of time	2	3	12	13	16	0	4
Continuous improvement: Small or large improvements to efficiency, productivity, and quality of a product or process in the work environment	1	5	5	22	13	0	4
Innovation: Thinking differently and experimenting with new approaches, ideas, or behaviours related to the organization	1	4	11	16	14	0	4
Safety: Employee freedom from physical and emotional harm, injury, or loss	2	7	7	10	20	0	4
Productivity: The quality and quantity of work output based on resources	2	7	12	16	9	0	4
Employee engagement							
Attitude: Employees' way of thinking or feeling about a subject (the organization, topic, or issue), ranging from very positive to very negative	0	1	12	18	15	0	4
Advocacy: Employees' discretionary effort and time to promote or defend an organization and its products and services	1	3	9	17	15	1	4
Employee behaviour change							
Trust: Employees' belief in the reliability, truth, and integrity of the organization's leadership, decision-making, and communication	0	1	4	10	31	0	5
Satisfaction: The extent to which employees are happy or content with their job or work	0	3	12	14	17	0	4

Outcome	Scale <sup>a</sup> (n)						Median
	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know/prefer not to answer	
Authenticity: Employees' perception that an organization is transparent, honest, and fair, especially regarding the pursuit of organizational objectives	0	1	2	13	30	0	5
Transparency: Employees' perception of the organization's willingness to share positive and negative information in a timely fashion	0	1	3	14	28	0	5
Fairness: Employees' perception that organizational processes that allocate resources and resolve disputes are impartial and just	0	3	14	13	16	0	4
Increased awareness and understanding							
Understanding: Employees' ability to relate knowledge to their work in a way that helps the organization achieve its goals	0	2	5	14	25	0	5
Awareness: Whether employees have heard of an organizational message, issue, or topic	0	2	2	13	29	0	5
Knowledge: Employees' level of comprehension about organizational messages, issues, or topics	0	0	7	14	25	0	5
Relevance: Degree to which employees find communication from the organization meaningful and useful	0	1	6	17	22	0	4
Retention of information: Degree to which employees can recall key messages or topics when asked after a certain timeframe	1	4	13	17	11	0	4
Improved job performance							
Collaboration: Employees across different departments or units coming together to solve a problem and/or create something successfully	0	2	8	13	23	0	4.5
Teamwork: Employees within the same unit coming together to successfully achieve a common goal or objective	0	2	8	16	20	0	4
Empowerment: Employees have the information, rewards, and power to take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve performance	0	3	4	23	16	0	4

Outcome	Scale <sup>a</sup> ( <i>n</i> )						Median
	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know/prefer not to answer	
Discretionary effort: Employees' effort given to an organization, team, or project, beyond what is required	0	3	20	14	8	1	3

*Note.* *N* = 46.

<sup>a</sup>Reflects a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is not at all valuable and 5 is very valuable.