

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

**AN EVALUATION OF INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION  
AT KZN SHARKS BOARD IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**By**

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

While many communication executives in organizations are becoming aware of the significance of good internal strategic communications with employees and the strategic advantage it brings to an organization, it has been noted that, internal strategic communication is not given the same level of importance as external communication (Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vericic and Sriramesh, 2007). Since the rise of internal strategic communication in 1990s in the US, internal communication has been one of the “fastest growing specializations fuelled by the drastic reduction of trust employees have of management, resulting in lower-level employee loyalty (Vercic et al., 2012:223). Omilion-Hodgess and Baker (2014:435) is mindful that “when managing organizational identity, great attention is often paid to external stakeholders while internal stakeholders receive far less consideration”. With a focus on corporate identification and internal strategic capability, many of the organizational theorists (e.g. Omilion-Hodgess and Baker, 2014; Cicognani, Palestini, Albanesi, and Zani, 2012) uphold that colleagues are the essential resource, perhaps even ambassadors, for an organization.

This study focuses on KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board (KZNSB) whose origin could be associated with the incident which left people of Margate Beach disappointed back in the 1957 where so many lives of people amongst whom were tourists who had chosen the KZN as holiday destination (KZN Sharks Board Legacy, 2009-2011). Shark attacks have the negative effect on tourism. Interestingly, the mandate of the KZNSB which is the protection of bathers on the beaches of the KZN coastline from shark attacks and also facilitate research into the biology and behaviours of sharks and other marine animals (e.g. dolphins, turtles) can only permeate the various levels of the organization structure through effective internal strategic communication (Sharks Board Marketing Strategy, 2014-2016; Sharks Board Legacy, 2011).

Like many other organisations in South Africa, KZNSB previously known as the Natal Sharks Board has undertaken a variety of post-apartheid changes (e.g. structural changes, introduction of affirmative action policy within the broader framework of employment equity (EE); introduction

of employee assistance programme (EAP) etc.) which required effective internal strategic communication to go down to all levels of employees as an internal audience (KZN Sharks

Board Marketing Strategy, 2014-2016; KZN Sharks Board Communication Procedure 2014; KZN Sharks Board Legacy, 2009-2011).

It is argued that in addition to the role of internal strategic communication to ensure corporate identification, and motivate employees, there is the informative role which helps employees in avoiding uncertainty (Cicognani et al., 2012). It is therefore important that, employers such as KZNSB reduce employee uncertainty by effectively using internal strategic communication since the remedy for rumors and a pervasive sense of uncertainty is the provision of accurate and timely information.

Internal strategic communication is a useful vehicle to enable employees to translate vision and strategic objectives into reality at KZNSB through coordinated day-to-day activities and appropriate behaviour of employees (see Appendix 1: KZNSB for Strategic Goals and Strategic Objectives of KZNSB). It is important to highlight that KZNSB is not a flat organisation as it has a number of hierarchical levels between the Chief Executive and the lowest employee. An organogram is included in this study to reflect a clear indication of the hierarchical levels that internal communication has to pass through on its way from the top or bottom of KZNSB (see appendix 2 for the organogram for KZNSB). KZNSB has a total of 190 employees from its head office and 11 base stations which are along the coastline of KwaZulu-Natal. At KZNSB, the lower level employees comprise three occupational groups, namely unskilled, skilled and technicians. Specifically, KZNSB's lower-level employees who are not skilled or semi-skilled have been predominantly junior, sea-going employees who happen to be black people (Sharks Board Legacy, 2011). It is also noteworthy that historically, sea-going occupation has always been seen as a male sport, and KZNSB seeks to improve on this situation. Senior managers, scientist and officers constitute middle management. Top management at UKZN includes the Chief Executive and executives who are responsible for each of the six Divisions, namely corporate support services, research and education, operations, finance, business development,

and maritime school of excellence. Table 1 below depicts the hierarchical levels and employee numbers at KZNSB.

Table 1: Employee Levels, Grades and Numbers at KZNSB

Level in the organisation	Occupational Grades	Number of Employees
Junior Employees	Unskilled	100
	Skilled	35
	Technicians	36
Middle management	Senior Management	14
Top management	Executive Management	6

Source: Human Resources, KZNSB, 2016

It is important to highlight that the maritime school of excellence which focuses on maritime skills development and placement programme was developed on an interim basis by the KZNSB in response to a Ministerial directive. As such, the legal mandate and funding of the Board have not yet been extended to include this function. The programme is therefore included on a provisional basis, pending formal mandate extension and funding.

Over the years, KZNSB has changes from an organization with management and officers comprised of only white people with blacks as labourers who were called “sea going crew” to a more equal opportunity working environment (Sharks Board Legacy, 2011). Management at KZNSB comprises black and white employees. Arguably, efforts to redress positively the historical impacts of South Africa’s past with regards to employment opportunities and other discriminatory practices that may have existed at the KZNSB but also the variety of organisational changes could not yield much without internal communication to inform, but also explain strategic issues to employees. Effective internal strategic communication to employees is powerful as it contributes to a unified corporate identity. On the other hand, internal strategic communication that is ineffective may result in disunited corporate identity, and frustrated employees who do not have organizational commitment, loyalty and strong sense of belonging.

According to Omilion-Hodgess and Baker (2014:435) “employees are positioned to serve as either ambassadors of the organization or as liabilities depending on the way they speak about the organization to those both within and outside their workplace”.

The KZNSB underwent an organisational re-design in 2009 to address demographic imbalances due to South Africa’s recent history of apartheid (KZN Sharks Board Legacy, 2009-2011). The value of internal strategic communication during and after organizational changes of this nature needs no emphasis at all. Literature is explicit that, internal strategic communication is vital to inform and explain the nature of changes and corresponding effects to various stakeholders but also promote internal coordination of activities (Cicognani et al., 2012; Raj and Jyothi, 2011). It is noteworthy that the establishment of a fully-fledged tourism, education and marketing division in 2009 within KZNSB to promote and market the board to external stakeholders is a meaningful acknowledgement that it is not only the internal communication; but also external communication that is key for any organization to achieve its organisational ambition and strategic direction (KZN Sharks Board Legacy, 2009-2011).

Raj and Jyothi, (2011) are conscious that, “organizational everyday talk” reflect the relationship employees share with their organization and directly influence the manner in which they speak about the organization to other stakeholders. For example, if employees engage each other in harmful talk about their organization (e.g. distrust or disgust), it is likely they will do the same when conversing with those outside the organization. Conversely, if employees identify with their organization and feel a sense of commitment, they are likely to repeat these positive feelings both in their work and in their encounters with external stakeholders, serving as brand ambassadors (Raj and Jyothi, 2011).

Lack of trust and openness, presenting employees with misleading information, withholding information, and/or neglecting to engage, and deliver information are some of the aspects of internal communication which severely affect employee perceptions of an organization and have detrimental effects on employee commitment, and loyalty (Omilion-Hodgess and Baker, 2014).

Inevitably, employees try to understand what is happening in an organization by discussing these occurrences both internally and externally (Omilion-Hodgess and Baker, 2014:437-439).

Furthermore, KZNSB has developed a number of policies and structure which have an influence on internal strategic communication. For example, in 2010 KZNSB established a Business Development Division to deal with promotion of tourism, educational and marketing activities (KZN Sharks Board Legacy, 2009-2011; KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board Marketing Strategy, 2014-2016). A new communication policy and communication procedure manual were drafted and approved at Board level and communicated amongst all staff members at Sharks Board in 2014 (KZNSB Communication Procedure Manual, 2014:6).

It is very important to use views of employees and managers at different hierarchical levels to understand and evaluate how KZNSB has implemented internal strategic communication over the years and how this has changed or not. Omilion-Hodgess and Baker (2014:435) are mindful that “many organizations fall short by simply doing internal communication as opposed to engaging, informing, and dialoging with employees in a strategic, purposeful, and authentic manner”.

Despite explicit and powerful warnings to organizations not to underestimate the importance of strategic communication with internal stakeholders, many firm have often misjudged the value internal stakeholders have, not only in shaping organizational identity, but also as a key part of the organization’s internal basis of competitiveness. Internal strategic communication is one of the neglected management instruments for engendering employee identification with their organizations (Omilion-Hodgess and Baker, 2014; Smith, 2013; Dolphin, 2005).

While internal strategic communication involves transactions between individuals and groups at various levels (e.g. top managers, middle and junior managers, and lower-level employees) and in different areas of specialization within an organization to coordinate key changes, it also equally pays attention to long term direction (Smith, 2013). Thus, internal strategic communication focuses on informing and explaining to employees both about the current reality, future reality, and also provides meaning between these two realities of an organization. As

employees of today require more information about the organization that they work for, it is not difficult to see how internal strategic communication will increasingly become a catalyst to organizational excellence and effectiveness. It is essential to underscore that, internal strategic communication is a useful tool for announcing, explaining or preparing people for change at organizational but also personal-level.

While researchers and communicators have been interested in the role of employee communications for decades, this interest has been limited in comparison to the attention given to external communications (Steyn, Steyn and Rooyen, 2011). In this regard, it is suggested that, researchers devote as much attention to internal and strategic communication to employees as it does to stockholders and customers.

### **1.1 Research Problem**

It is posit that “amidst the rush towards heighten efficiency and competitiveness is a sense that most organizations don` t care a great deal about their employees” (Steyn, Steyn and Rooyen, 2011:5). Scholars such as Mishra et al., (2014:185) lament that “historically, employees as a public have been understudied, but also been undervalued....in favour of external publics”. For example, scholars have identified the lack of scholarship on internal communication within the public relations domain as one of the glaring gaps that ought to be addressed (Mishra et al., 2014). In addition, the scant scholarship that exists on internal communication considers employees as a single entity or internal stakeholder. This view of internal communication has invoked the need to treat different employees differently (e.g. office staff, field staff, top managers, junior managers, literate staff, illiterate staff etc.) if internal strategic communication is to be effective.

On the other hand, studies rooted in human resource have focused on internal communication as a management tool (Lachotzki and Noteboom, 2005). In a slightly different way, researchers from a marketing background have perceived employees as internal customers. This has led to development of internal marketing to interact with employees. Furthermore, internal strategic communication has also been studied in terms of change management as well (Mishra et al., 2014). Some scholars posit that we have emerged from previous studies with little theoretical

understanding of how internal strategic communication makes organizations more effective while others echo that, internal strategic communication is a “rather neglected” management instrument (Daly, 2002; Mishra et al., 2014).

Existing studies on internal strategic communication are fundamentally different from this study at KZNSB. Previous studies on internal communication have mainly focused on intra-organizational communication which is quite often equated with employee communication such that they have ignored the “strategic element” in the internal communication. The current study

focuses both on “internal communication” and the “strategic” element of internal communication in order to evaluate how KZNSB (corporate) itself, its products, and services have been presented and promoted through the variety of intentional, and communication activities with employees as the audience in order to achieve strategic outcomes (e.g. vision, mission, major goals, growth).

In this context, no empirical study has been conducted to understand how KZNSB intentionally communicated or created meaning; and what factors affected positively or negatively the sharing of meaning between KZNSB and its employees. It is therefore, vital to evaluate how internal strategic communication at KZN Sharks Board was effective or ineffective in ensuring meaningful progress towards the vision, strategic goals and objectives. Kennan and Hazleton (2006) highlight the need for an organization to recognize employees as a distinct public worthy of unique attention.

In summary, there is a research gap on internal strategic communication in general and at KZNSB in particular which are relevant to this study. Existing studies have not focused much on the “strategic” dimension of internal communication which deals with strategically relevant issues of an organization. There is no previous research at KZNSB that has focused on internal strategic communication. Previous studies on KZNSB have actually focused on technical aspects of shark prevention (e.g. physical barriers to shark attacks, shark nets, drumlines, and non-lethal shark repellent technology) rather than internal organization and communication within this organization (KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board Marketing Strategy, 2014-2016).

## **1.2 Research Objectives**

The overall research objective of this qualitative study was to focus on views of internal stakeholders, namely employees and managers at different levels to evaluate how internal strategic communication between top managers and junior staff members was conducted within KZNSB in South Africa. The following are the secondary objectives.

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of internal strategic communication within KZNSB in South Africa according to views of members of top managers, middle managers and junior employees.
2. To assess the ineffectiveness of internal strategic communication within KZNSB in South Africa according to views of top managers, middle managers and junior employees.
3. To analyse how internal strategic communication has changed over the years at KZNSB.
4. Recommend how internal strategic communication can be improved at KZNSB.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This evaluative study was interested in the views of internal stakeholders, namely employees at different levels (i.e. top management, middle management, and junior staff) to understand factors which contributed to effective and ineffective internal strategic communication, but also its strategic consequences. Internal communication happens constantly within organisations and includes informal chat on the “grapevine” as well as managed communication. It is with this view in mind that, the key research question in the study is: *“How is internal strategic communication between top managers and junior employees done at KZNSB as the organisation tries to achieve its strategic goals and objectives?”* In order to answer the main research question, the following secondary and evaluative questions were developed:

1. How is internal strategic communication between top managers and junior staff members effective at KZNSB in South Africa?
2. How is internal strategic communication between top managers and junior staff members ineffective at KZNSB in South Africa?
3. How has internal strategic communication changed over the years at KZNSB?

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

This evaluative study is significant to management and also employees of KZNSB, because it uses their views as internal stakeholders to evaluate internal strategic communication which is vital for the operations and achievement of strategic objectives of KZNSB in South Africa. As being strategic means focusing on few key issues with the greatest impact, this study is valuable as it seeks to pinpoint factors which enable but also impedes internal strategic communication at KZNSB from the viewpoint of employees and also management. The study has potential to reveal the role of internal, purposeful communication to advance KZNSB's vision and mission. In this regard, the study has the potential to provide both employees and managers with insight on what needs to be done to improve internal strategic communication. As many studies have focused on external strategic communication, this study is significant as it enhances our understanding of how internal strategic communication occurs in a context where most of the employees have low literacy levels. In this respect, the study is also important not only to academics in communication and strategic management, but also those people who are strategy

practitioners and uses internal strategic communication as a vehicle to achieve strategic outcomes.

#### **1.5 Delimitation of the study**

The study adopted an inward focus as it was restricted to the views of specific employees at KZNSB relevant to this study. In this way, the study deliberately excluded the Board of Directors. Mindful that strategic communication has internal and external components, it is prudent to highlight that this study focused only on the "internal" component of the strategic communication of KZNSB. In trying to understand how internal strategic communication has changed over the years, the study deliberately included long serving employees of KZNSB to reflect both on the past and the present realities of this organisation. This study has more to do with the views of internal stakeholders and the way internal strategic communication flows between KZNSB's top managers all the way to and from junior staff members. In this way, the study has not focused on external strategic communication which has been researched

extensively by marketers, public relations and corporate communication practitioners (Mishra et al., 2014).

## **1.6 Structure of the thesis**

The thesis has 6 chapters which are structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 introduces the context of the study, discusses research problem, and presents research objectives and research question. The chapter also discusses the significance of the study as well as delimitation of this study before outlining the structure of the entire thesis.
- Chapter 2 reviews concepts and models relevant to strategic internal communication in this study.
- Chapter 3 looks at the research methodology relevant to strategic internal communication in this study.
- Chapter 4 presents the findings of this evaluative study.
- Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings of the study.
- Chapter 6 presents the conclusion of this research, recommendations and also areas for future research.

## **1.7 SUMMARY**

Internal strategic communication is very important in an organization such as KZNSB to achieve strategic outcomes. Generally, less attention and emphasis has been given to internal strategic communication compared to external strategic communication. No research has been conducted to evaluate how internal strategic communication is done at KZNSB. Internal strategic communication is helpful to employees to identify with their organization, build employee loyalty and commitment, but also establish and cement connection between top management and low-level employees as they pursue the vision and strategic objectives together as one. The chapter has ended by outlining the structure of this thesis. The next chapter focuses on review of literature relevant to this qualitative study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to review literature and previous studies relevant to the concept of internal strategic communication. In this regard, the chapter has three key sections. The first section discusses the aspect of what is strategic in the internal communication. The second section explores the nature of internal communication, its role, and channels. The last section of this chapter explores different models of internal communication to delineate key issues that will be focused in this study to evaluate internal strategic communication.

### 2.1 Definition of Strategic Communication

In an attempt to unpack the concept of internal strategic communication, it is prudent to initially decompose the concept to what is “strategic communication” before examining what is “internal communication”. This will provide a firm foundation to subsequently define internal strategic communication. This approach is sensible as Hallahan et al., (2007:4) is clear that “although the term strategic communication has been used in the academic literature for many years, scholars are only now in the process of coherently exploring this in terms of a unified body of knowledge”.

Interestingly, the insertion of the word *strategic* in between the words *internal and external communication*, reframes the niche of internal strategic communication in this study. Thus, internal strategic communication actually overlaps the two large domains of strategy management and communication in the internal context of an organisation. In this way, strategic communication as a term is descriptive of not only context, and scope, but also strategic nature of intended outcome (Mishra et al., 2014). But what is strategic in the communication? The section below reviews the meanings of strategic as serving managerial vision and mission; emergent and valuing employee’s at all organizational levels; and strategic as related to organizational survival and efficiency.

## **2.2 “Strategic” as communication of organizational vision and mission**

It is notable that, the initial use of the term strategic in organization theory was in the 1950s to describe how organizations compete in the marketplace, obtain competitive advantage, and gain market share (Kataria and Garg, 2013). In its most negative context, the term strategic is understood as having originated in warfare and is in its strictest sense described as the art of war. The word strategy originates from the Greek word for “generalship” (Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, 1984).

As a result, the term often has negative associations, particularly in an era in which organizations are perceived as using their resources to manipulate their environments to their own benefit without consideration of stakeholders and the concerns of society in general. Associating strategic as a war metaphor in connection with communication practice can thus strengthen the existing negative perceptions of the field. In addition to formulating their own communication strategies, communication practitioners are often tasked to communicate to employees the vision and mission of the organization as set out by management. To be strategic, internal communication must be centered on the organization’s strategic intent with the purpose of strategic alignment. The communicator must also be in a position to be part of strategic management and play a role in both strategy development and implementation (Mishra et al., 2014). Although this remains the standard view of strategic communication, alternative perspectives on strategy formulation open up new directions for studying the role of communication in strategy formulation and execution.

In one application, the term strategic is associated with power and decision making. When used in conjunction with communication, strategic implies that, communication practice is a management function. Mintzberg (1979:237) was the first to describe the “strategic apex” of the organization as consisting of “those people charged with overall responsibility of the organization—the chief executive officer ... and any of the top-level managers”.

## **2.3 “Strategic” as emergent and valuing employees at all organizational levels**

Alternative, and more positive, notions of strategy have also emerged since the 1950s. These reject the use of strategic only in an asymmetrical context. Mintzberg (1990) perspective on

emergent strategy hold that strategy is based on prior experience and action. Emergent strategy thus legitimates and values the actions and decisions of employees at all levels of the

organization (Kataria and Garg, 2013). Not only does this approach challenge the notion of top-down communication, it focuses the attention on the impact of communication on strategy formulation (i.e., how communication about daily practices eventually impacts the strategic decisions of organizations) (Mishra et al., 2014).

The term strategic is also increasingly used in conjunction with change management to describe the role of communication practitioners in organizational change (Mishra et al., 2005). This interpretation of strategic allows students of strategic communication to explore the links between communication, and organizational change. Communication practice (be it through public relations, advertising, or marketing) is often used for symbolic management (Mishra et al., 2014). Strategic communication therefore also describes how organizational symbols are created through communication practice, both internally and externally; this provides the opportunity to apply visual narrative theory to this discipline.

#### **2.4 “Strategic” in relation to organizational survival and efficiency**

It is interesting that, strategic is also associated with organizational survival over a long term and efficiency (Louw and Venter, 2014; Mishra et al., 2014). One example is the effort to prove the contribution of communication practice to the organization’s bottom line, which relates to parameters of strategic communication. Communication practitioners contribute to organizational survival by privileging influential publics in organizational environments, particularly by urging their organizations to adhere to the dominant value systems in those environments (Holtzhausen, 2005). This creates the opportunity to argue that, inclusiveness might often, if not always, be an appropriate strategy for organizational survival and rejects the notion that strategic necessarily implies asymmetrical communication. It is also vital to realize that strategic is sometimes seen as emphasizing action and practice.

## **2.5 “Strategic” as associated with action and practice to implement strategy**

The term strategic is often associated with practice and the tactics used to implement strategy (Mintzberg, 1990). In this regard, it can be argued that, strategic used in this context has the potential to reinforce the perception that, the practice of communication is merely tactical and not considerate of long term, larger social, political, and economic factors. The term strategic,

therefore, also has the potential to reveal the importance and contribution of the tactical level of communication practice and so legitimate the work of communication practice at all levels.

Focusing on practice brings a much-needed critical approach to the field of strategic communication. From this perspective, the notion of practice as part of the strategic process allows scholars to study how strategic communication practices transform organizations.

Because of its many-faceted meanings, the term strategic might offer one of the most inclusive, although conflicting and contradictory descriptions of the field of communication practice. Although it emphasizes the role of communication as a management practice, it does not necessarily imply power and control of management over other stakeholders (Mishra et al., 2014). It also allows for the study of participatory communication practices that include stakeholder communication, change management, and complex analyses of organizational environments (Kataria and Garg, 2013). Strategic further includes the study of all communication practices, including those of public relations, advertising, and marketing, as well as the other disciplines of communication (Kataria and Garg, 2013).

According to Hallahan (2007) strategic communication refers to “the purposeful and deliberate use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission”. The definition by Hallanhan et al., (2007) emphasizes on the nature of this communication by highlighting how it is done (e.g. purposeful or intentional) and also the nature of what it seeks to achieve (mission). In this regard, strategic communication is a tool in use by both public and private organization for managing both internal and external stakeholders, especially in the face of modern day complexities

(Hallahan, et al., 2007). In attempt to depict scope, De Klerk and Verwey (2013) gave a very compressive and encompassing definition of strategic communication.

In a slightly different view, De Klerk and Verwey (2013:56) focuses on the organizational level and the actual means of achieving the mission by asserting that “strategic communication is about how an organization functions to advance its mission by intentional, persuasive means of communication, not only via marketing, corporate and other institutionalized forms of public communication, but via all of the organization’s communication”. This suggests two key issues. Firstly, in addition to the purposeful nature of communication, being persuasive is added as another central issue in strategic communication. Secondly, that the focus of strategic

communication is on strategic (long term focus) rather than tactical application of communication. This takes cognizance that an organization communicates across organizational endeavors (De Klerk and Verwey, 2013:370).

Anyone researching strategic communication needs to be mindful that, strategic communication is increasingly being construed as a sensible unifying framework to analyze communications by organizations. It is important to consider an organization’s communications activities from a “*strategic*” and “*integrative*” perspective because organizations are using an expanding variety of methods to influence the behaviors of their constituencies—what people know, how people feel, and the ways people act—relative to the organization (Lauren, 2012 Kataria and Garg, 2013; Mishra et al., 2014). This suggests that, an audiences’ experiences with and impressions of organizations are not a result of one communicative activity, but rather a comprehensive or sum total of the people’s experiences (Stenberg, 2012). In the light of the above, it is increasingly questionable whether the effects of any particular communication activity can be validly examined in isolation.

Nonetheless, the use of strategic communication as a unifying framework creates problems especially that, different disciplines have different goals which may not be strategic at all (Stenberg, 2012; Kataria and Garg, 2013; Mishra et al., 2014). Purposeful influence is the fundamental goal of strategic communications by organizations. This may not be the case with

certain disciplines of communication whose goal may be simply to provide information (e.g., technical communication) or establish and maintain mutually satisfactory relationships (public relations). Hallanhan et al., (2007:11) asserts that, “these foci are only necessary—but not sufficient—conditions for organizations to achieve strategically important goals”. The coordination of the fragmented communication activities in a strategic way that focuses on the audience’s needs, as well as concerns has to be combined with purposeful and intentional communication to achieve strategically significant goal (Hallahan, 2006). In a slightly different way, it is possible that, the term strategic evokes a one-sided approach to organizational management that is based in asymmetrical or top-down communication that does not permit for the exploration of alternative approaches to the communication practices of an organization (Kataria and Garg, 2013). Critics argue that this view of strategic communication erroneously suggest that the role of communication is to ensure information transfer from the supervisor to the subordinate in order to gain compliance, eliminate dissension and conflict, and achieve blind

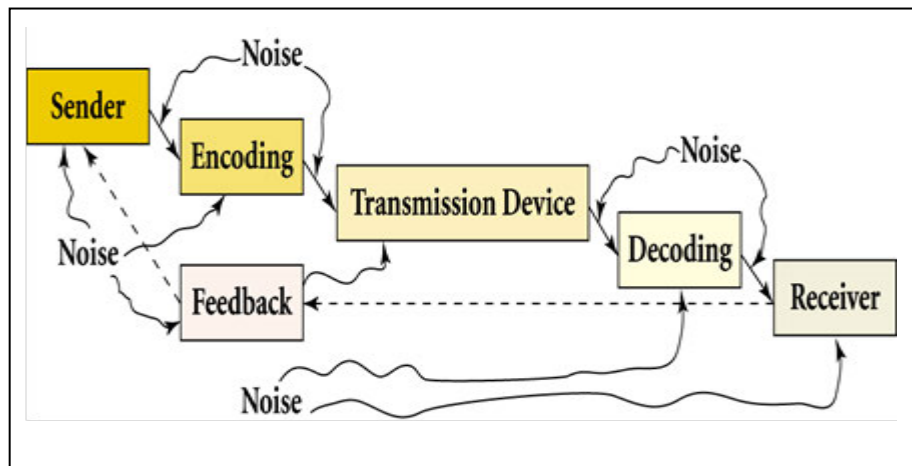
acceptance of organizational goals and roles by employees (Holtzhausen, 2002). In this study, strategic communication is considered as being purposeful communication by an organization to advance its strategic direction (vision, mission) and strategic goals by intentional, persuasive means of communication, not only via marketing, corporate and other institutionalized forms of public communication, but via all of the organization’s communication.

This definition is chosen because it acknowledges the distinctive aspects of being (1) purposeful, persuasive communication showing how an organization presents and promotes itself and interact with its audiences; (2) integration of variety of communication vehicles; (3) long term focus evident in the emphasis of advancing organizational vision and mission; and (4) uses comprehensive, two way persuasive methods. Strategic communication offers new possibilities for both researchers and practitioners, as it is more encompassing than traditional fields such as public relations and marketing communication (Stenberg, 2012). As this study focuses on internal strategic communication, it is imperative that the next section explore the concept of internal communication. Murray (2012:179) observes that, communication is a top skill of leadership that is sadly neglected.

## 2.6 Internal Communication

It is common that communication is categorized as internal and external while simultaneously acknowledging that these are all parts of an integrated whole (Kataria and Garg, 2013). Scholars who focus on internal communication are cautioned that the need for sophisticated communications by the internal audience is not different from that outside the organization (Kataria and Garg, 2013). As alluded to earlier on, this study adopts an inward focus to deliberately focus only on the internal component of strategic communication. Figure 1 shows how communication is a process for giving or exchanging information with others ensuring that there is no noise or interruptions. Effective communication occurs when the receiver clearly understands the intended message that is sent without disturbance in a form of noise (Mishra et al., 2014) (see figure 1).

Figure1: **Communication Process**



Source: Guffey, and Lowely (2013:10)

It is important to acknowledge that there are different definitions of internal communication. Firstly, internal communication is sometimes defined as the full series of strategies that people in an organization use to communicate with each other (Kataria and Garg, 2013). In this regard, some scholars highlight that internal communication serves as a catalyst for organizations to reach their goals and objectives by creating a communication culture within the business. This is characterized by a two-way flow of information that moves information from the top to the

bottom and then moves feedback back up to the top (Kataria and Garg, 2013). Viewed in this way, internal communication is often perceived as a synonym for intra-organizational communication or employee communication (Mishra et al., 2014). This calls for bottom-up communication instead of bottom-down communication as the only means of communicating the organizational strategy and operations.

Secondly, Dolphin (2005) focuses on organisation's leaders and employees to define internal communication as communication between the organization's leaders and one of its key publics: the employees. In this regard the emphasis is on identifying and tailoring of internal communication to internal stakeholders (Mishra et al., 2014). All too often, companies fail to integrate their various internal communications channels. The result is chaotic communications to employees (Dolphin, 2005). The problem is that these communications often come from different company sources. Today, however, many companies are adopting the concept of integrated internal communications to carefully integrate and coordinate internal communication

to deliver a clear, consistent, and compelling message about the organization and its products (Mishra et al., 2014).

Thirdly, Kalla (2005) focuses on social interaction in their definition of internal communication. In this vein, internal communication is a "social interaction through messages" and reflects management's ability to build relationships between internal stakeholders at all levels within an organization. The focus of internal communication is often to ensure that employees can support a decision and understand how it impacts their work. Kale (2006) and Hollensen (2003) note that focus on social interaction also emphasizes the role of employee-focused internal marketing thereby supporting the management of relationships between the organization's decision makers and internal markets (employees).

Fourthly, an emphasis on the transactional and coordination dimensions of communication is evident in the notion that, "internal communications may be defined as transactions between individuals and groups at various levels and in different areas of specialization and these transactions are intended to design (and redesign) organizations and coordinate day-to-day

activities” (Dolphin, 2005:172). Lastly, a simple tactical perspective, focusing on methods suggest that internal communication refers to “all methods (internal newsletter, intranet) used by a firm to communicate with its employees” (Cornelissen, 2004:189). While this definition reflects the need to consider the media and content of message involved in internal communication, it obviously lacks the notion of internal communication as a key part of strategic management.

In the light of the above, the definition of internal communication adopted in this study draws from the emphasis on communication between the organization’s leaders and one of its key publics termed employees by Dolphin (2005). This involves a full series of strategies that people in an organization use to communicate with each other in pursuit of strategic goals. However, it is important to clarify three issues. Firstly, internal communication in this study does not refer only to those few “official” channels of communication within an organization, such as internal newsletters, notice boards or staff meetings. It actually embraces constant interactions within

KZNSB both overt communications like meetings, memos etc, and more casual forms of communication such as gossip, and pleasantries that convey meaning regarding strategic direction. Secondly, internal communication in this study is not just the “process” that goes from the top to the bottom of an organization.

In this study, communication occurs between leaders and employees. Furthermore, internal communication takes various forms and also uses different tools for specific goals. Additionally, the view of internal communication used in this study is relevant and suitable because it also takes cognisance of the full series of strategies that people employ to purposefully communicate with each other in an organization.

There are three key issues that a researcher of internal communication has to bear in mind. Firstly, internal communication occurs vertically and laterally through flatter lines of communication and team-based consultative communication but also in very hierarchical organizational structures (Vercica et al., 2012:224). This communication may also be formal and also informal between employee and supervisor, peers, as well as managers and subordinates.

Table 2: **Internal Communication Matrix**

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

Source: Welsh and Jackson (2007:185)

Thirdly, internal communication can be viewed in two different ways. Thus, a narrower, and tactical way where it is the process of writing for the in-house employee publication or more strategically when it starts from communicating the vision and proceeds to policy and mission statement and eventually to strategy of achieving a systematic analysis and social interaction through messages at all levels. Thus, there is simultaneous coordination in the most efficient way possible to achieve organizational goals (Vercic et al., 2012:226). Lastly, that, it is erroneous to consider employees as a single public. Actually, there is need to differentiate the approach to internal communication to different stakeholder groups (e.g. line management (boss and boss's boss), team members, and other internal groups (related departments, subsidiary managers) while simultaneously providing a means to focus on all employees.

### **2.6.1 Role of internal communication**

Internal communication plays a variety of roles in an organization. For example, the role of internal communication is sometimes viewed in terms of illuminating the connections between different pieces of information and providing employees with the information they need to do their job and achieve desired results (Quirke, 2008). Mindful that, people at work communicate regardless of the intentions of their managers or leaders, internal communication is helpful on several different levels:

- Tell: simply informing people of the direction, non-negotiable.
- Sell: anticipating some form of backlash, requiring some persuasion.
- Consult: seeking specific areas of input to the decision-making process.
- Involve: seeking varying degrees of involvement and co-creation.

In this way, internal communication also plays a wider role in facilitating different types of conversations “upwards”, “downwards” and “across” the organization (Mishra et al., 2014).

With a focus on employees as an internal customer, internal communication plays the role of internal marketing (i.e., attempting to win participants over to the management vision of the organization). In this respect, there is distinction between communications on behalf of the organization and the day to day intercourse within work groups or between managers and subordinates (Mishra et al., 2014). When internal communication is done properly, it creates a workplace where all employees are informed and working toward the same goals through clear direction for everyday activity (Vercic et al., 2012). As such, internal communication needs to be aligned to support the business objectives and external communication strategies. This element in itself reinforces the importance and relevance of internal communication to the business (Lauren,2012; Vercic et al., 2012).

Traditionally, internal communications have focused on the announcement of management conclusions and the packaging of management thinking into messages for mass distribution to employees (Meade, 2010; Vercic et al., 2012). Without feedback loops and harnessing the active involvement and mediation skills of frontline supervisors or team leaders, broadcasting tends to be more effective at influencing only senior and middle managers than frontline employees. Thus, it fails to empower lower-level employees. It is necessary that, the role of internal communication includes empowering of employees to make better and more informed of daily decisions that are aligned with meeting long-term business (Meade, 2010).

Another key role of internal communication is the contribution to the creation of communication culture within an organisation which encourages a shared identity and sense of belonging to staff members (Mishra et al., 2014). Thus proper organizational communication influences the degree

of trust amongst various employees in the organization and commitment to the organization. For this reason, managers and leaders must be open and truthful in relaying information to employees and relevant stakeholders. It is also paramount that the top echelon listens to concerns of the employees. The way managers communicate with their employees, must

motivate their subordinates in providing superior service to customers (Lowenstein, 2006). When employees perceive that they are getting information from their supervisors and co-workers that is timely, accurate, and relevant, they are more likely to feel less vulnerable and able to rely on their co-workers and supervisors (Thomas, 2009; Mishra et al., 2014).

Berger (2011) argues that internal communication is more likely to be effective when:

- **Senior leaders** are visible, walk the talk, listen and respond to employee issues, care about employee well-being, and tell employees what's happening, why it's happening and what it means to them.
- **Front-line managers** provide regular performance feedback, recognize employee contributions, listen and respond to employees, enable employees to act in ways that contribute to organizational goals and provide development opportunities.
- **The communication system** provides timely information, two-way communication channels, and multiple channels to facilitate learning and sharing of best practices (especially social media); and helps employees understand the marketplace and how their jobs align with organizational goals.

While research helps us understand the key drivers of effective employee communication, it tells us very little about how to move from knowing to doing (Berger, 2011). This is the critical gap in employee communication research today. We need insightful studies that reveal how to convince otherwise reluctant or ineffective front-line managers and leaders to change behaviors, change mindsets and build company cultures for communication. Employees' knowledge and skills about their jobs and the organization provide them with the opportunity to become organizational advocates in communicating brand image, and can in turn enhance the firm's reputation. This is

where the internal and strategic communication integration is encouraged. In the light of the above, it is not surprising that Likely (2008:15) concluded that:

“The internal communication function operates five roles: “(1) communicator (reporter/facilitator/democrat); (2) educator (trainer/coach); (3) change agent; (4) communication consultant with a small “c”

(operational performance and process advisor); and (5) organizational strategist (relationship manager)”.

## **2.7 Channels of Internal Communication**

Lauren (2012) asserts that understanding the preferred and most effective method of internal communication, tools employees currently use the most, understanding employee work patterns (e.g. whether they work from a stationary location or are travelling, whether they work official hours or they work a flexible schedule) is very critical to create a fit between employee needs and internal communication. It has also been noted that varying education levels among employees affect expectations about and satisfaction with communication vehicle and quality, as well as the need for information. As such, a diverse and dispersed workforce means that a one-size-fits-all approach in internal communication may not be very effective (De Kay, 2010; Wu, 2012).

Scholars such as Tapscott and Williams (2008, 2010) classify channels of communication such as in-person, team meetings and e-mail messages as traditional. It is argued that, even though, other medium of communication such as the electronic media have been explored, identified and used by many organisations as their best practice, the best way to reach employees is through face-to-face, interactive communication where questions and clarity on decision rights may be sought rather than relying on indirect channels (Robert, 2002; De Kay, 2010). Face-to-face communication allows for nonverbal communication, as well as for immediate feedback.

Furthermore, a study conducted in 2008 by the Pew Internet & American Life Project revealed that 72% of all full-time employees have an email account that they use for work, and 37% of

those workers check them constantly (Madden and Jones, 2008). The rise in the widespread usage of email resulted from the fact that it is generally rapid, more economical than mailing printed documents and highly practical for a business which is geographically dispersed (De Kay, 2010). Although e-mail is highly convenient for both sender and receiver, it is an impersonal medium and lacks the richness of other information source. Furthermore, email is not the best medium for conveying delicate or complicated information or to influence, persuade, or sell an idea (Madden and Jones, 2008). It is most useful for announcements to communicate the same thing to many people, to keep employees informed about an issue they already know about, and to reach geographically dispersed employees (Tapscott and Williams; 2008; 2010).

According to He and Pedraza-Jimenez (2015) social media (video sharing sites, wikis, photo sharing sites, social network sites such Facebook, Twitter, microblogs, etc.) has taken the world by storm as the numbers of social media users is growing by the day across the world. Previously considered as platform for social issues and for the youth, social media tools have become mainstream communication tools irrespective of age groups. As part of external communication, organizations use social media tools for branding and corporate image (He and Pedraza-Jimenez, 2015). On the other hand, social media tools are also used internally by organizations to communicate with employees.

It is noteworthy that social media as a vehicle of internal communication has several features which include message virility, conversational participation, openness, and sense of community. Social networking interest seems to be growing much faster in most organisations, and the chances are that, it might overtake some other useful communicational medium such as the use of e-mail as the primary form of business communication (He and Pedraza-Jimenez, 2015).

However, Wu (2012) observes that although online technologies have made inroads into the market, many employees are still not using available resources to make good benefits. To put it in other words, the challenge is that communication and online technologies are evolving yet employee engagement remains stagnated in this regard. Thus, He and Pedraza-Jimenez (2015) warns that despite the proliferation of digital solutions, companies should not concentrate on electronic communications at the expense of traditional print or face-to-face communications,

such as brochures, newsletters, and postcards mailed to a staffer's home which target specific employees or groups.

As organisations communicate internally by using both traditional and social media channels, the careful choice and integration of communication vehicle will remain key if internal communication is to be effective and synergistic in creating employees who are loyal and motivated to perform to their level best in a collaborative and connected working context where staff members are engaged towards a common strategic destiny. The absence of strategic and effective internal communication makes an organization vulnerable to “the disgruntled within” an organization (Mishra et al., 2014).

The next section discusses various models of internal strategic communication relevant to this study.

### **3.0 MODELS OF INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

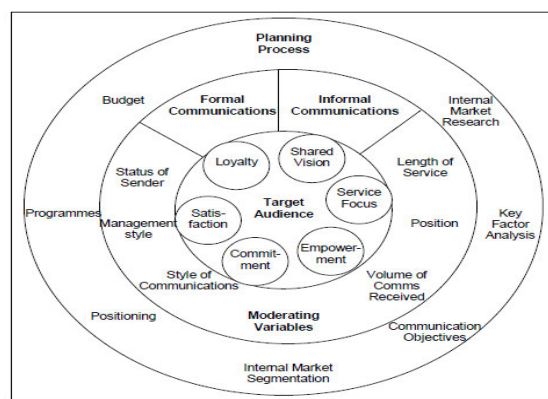
As internal strategic communication draws very much from internal communication, scholars have many models of internal communication to examine and get a good understanding of how other have conceived and evaluated the concept of internal strategic communication. Primarily, there are some models which have focused more on internal communication goals and less on the strategic aspects of the internal communication. For example, Quirke’s framework (2002:169) mainly focuses on a line of progression for four internal communication objectives, namely (1) awareness; (2) understanding; (3) involvement; and (4) commitment without emphasis on the strategic dimension of communication. In Quirke’s framework, the first goal relates to *awareness* of organisational values, goals and strategy achieved through one-way communication. The second goal is *understanding*, which involves more information and additional feedback to ensure that employees actually understand what they are being told; and eliciting support for the organisation’s goals (Quirke, 2002:170). In order to stimulate support, communication exchanges must be less formal and have room for continual discussion. The model by Quirke (2002) also focuses on *involvement*, which means engaging in dialogue to share thought processes and explore alternatives and best means of implementing organisational strategies. The final goal is *commitment*. Commitment results from “a sense of ownership and

this comes from having participated in the process” (Quirke, 2002:170). While this model is informative on objectives of internal strategic communication and how they progress, it has the major weakness of ignoring the strategic nature of what is being communicated internally. It is because of its narrow focus on internal communication goals and progression that this model has not been discussed in detail. Mindful that there are similarities in some of the models, this section critically discusses only four models to understand the variety of key issues. Firstly, the section reviews Asif and Sargeant’s (2000) model of internal communication before focusing on Verwey, Du Plooy-Cilliers and Du Plessis’ (2003) communication triad at Work. Thereafter the focus turns to Watson Wyatt Worldwide’s (2004) hierarchy of effective communication before concluding with a review of Mellor and Dewhurst’s (2008) framework for an effective internal communication function.

### 3.1 Asif and Sargeant’s (2000) model of internal communication

Asif and Sargeant (2000) developed a model for internal communication which provides more detail on the several elements involved in the internal communication process as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: **Model of Internal Communication**



Source: Asif & Sargeant (2000:306)

The centre circle represents the target audience with the small circles showing the desired outcomes of the communication with the audience. This model shows scholars the variety of desired outcomes which are shared vision, service focus, empowerment, commitment, satisfaction and loyalty. The middle circle consists of the moderating variables to effective

internal communication, notably the style of management and communication and the volume of communication received. Finally, the outer circle represents the internal communication planning process. One component of the planning process identified in the model is internal market segmentation. This is an important component because often organisations treat all employees the same, which can result in a deluge of information that they do not necessarily require (Asif and Sargeant, 2000:303). Asif and Sargeant's model recognizes that internal communication needs to be tailored for different employee groups. As shown in the middle circle, Asif and Sargeant, 2000:308) acknowledges that internal communication involves the facilitation of informal as well as the use of formal communication channels.

While Asif and Sargeant's model illustrates several important elements of internal communication, it does not draw a clear link between the overall strategy of the organisation and the internal communication process. The only element that hints at strategy is the inclusion of

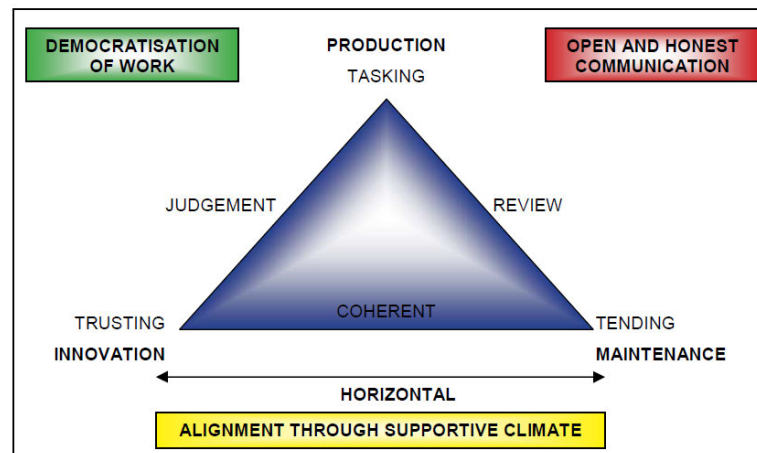
'shared vision' as a goal, indicating a desire to achieve strategic alignment. Overall, the model does not reflect any recognition of the strategic contribution of internal communication.

### **3.2 Verwey, Du Plooy-Cilliers and Du Plessis' (2003) Communication Triad at Work**

Verwey, Du Plooy-Cilliers and Du Plessis' (2003) Communication Triad at Work explain how strategic internal communication fits into the overall communication within an organisation. The triad associate each work function with a specific communication function. Firstly, tasking is associated with production communication whereby information regarding tasks, roles and requirements is communicated. Secondly, trusting is associated with innovation communication wherein information is communicated that allows the organisation to plan and adapt to changes in its environment and through which employees are trusted with the responsibility of developing new ideas. Thirdly, tending is associated with maintenance communication wherein employees are recognised for their contribution and their development is supported in pursuit of organisational goals. Through the process of tasking, tending and trusting, management creates a supportive climate based on a democratic workplace and open and honest communication

through which employee goals are aligned with the goals of the organisation (Verwey *et al.*, 2003:163) (see figure 3).

Figure 3: **The Communication Triad at Work**



Source: Verwey, du Plooy-Cilliers and du Plessis (2003:163)

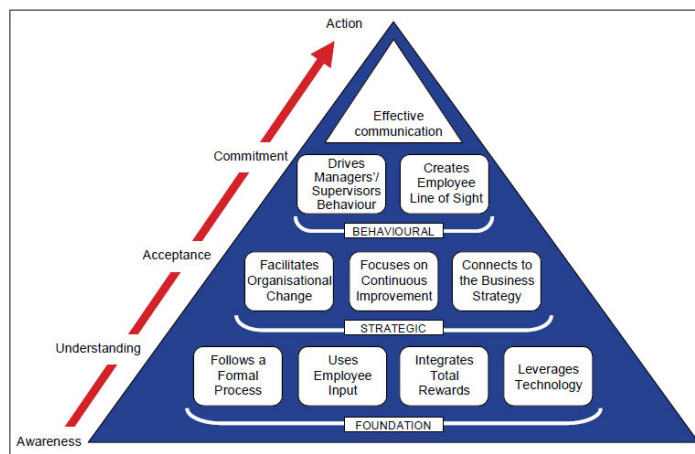
Notably, Verwey *et al.*'s model supports the strategic contribution of internal communication by focusing on strategic alignment and illustrating how strategic internal communication depends

on all aspects of communication in the organisation. Nonetheless, the model provides little insight into the process of internal communication.

### 3.3 **Watson Wyatt Worldwide's (2004) hierarchy of effective communication**

The consulting firm of Watson Wyatt International has developed its own model for effective internal communication which highlights several elements of the internal communication function at three levels, namely foundational, strategic and foundational. It draws from the line of progression identified by Quirke (2002) for internal communication objectives. The Watson Wyatt model (2004) also identifies several key components for the management of internal communication as shown in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: **Hierarchy of Effective Communication**



Source: Watson Wyatt Worldwide (2004)

Firstly, Watson Wyatt Worldwide's (2004) highlight that the foundation of effective internal communication is based on four aspects, which are (1) formal communication process, (2) employee input, (3) the linking of desired behaviour from employees and their compensation and the (4) effective use of communication technology. At the strategic level, effective internal communication must facilitate organisational change, focus on continuous improvement and connect employees to the organisation's strategy.

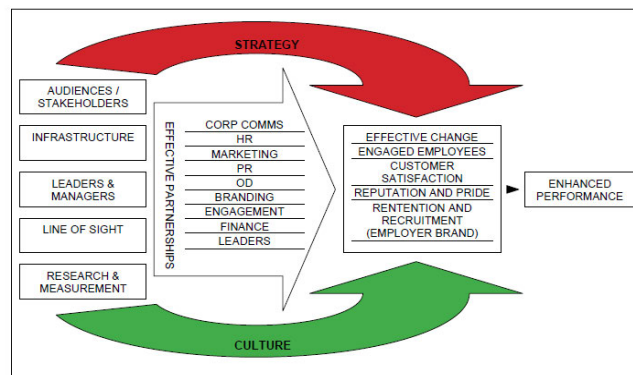
Finally, at the behavioural level, it is argued that effective internal communication should communicate the organisation's vision so that it drives the behaviour of management and supervisors and develops a clear line of sight so that employees can understand how their jobs

contribute to the organisation's goals and achievements (Yates, 2006:74). The model is very insightful for this study as it brings a new dimension to the strategic aspect of internal communication by aligning goals of communication and level with what happens in the organisation. For example, acceptance is related to the strategic level and facilitation of organisational change, focus on continuous improvement, and how communication connects the business strategy. However, the overall model remains linear in approach and driven from the top down. As a result, the principle and necessity for symmetrical communication is not apparent.

### 3.4 Mellor and Dewhurst's (2008) framework for an effective internal communication function

According to Melcrum's framework, there are five key elements which are considered as necessary for an effective internal communication function. These five key elements are audience/stakeholders, infrastructure, leaders and managers, line of sight, and research and measurement. These five elements must work together through partnerships with multiple other departments of the organization in order to achieve the five goals of internal communication: effective change, engaged employees, customer satisfaction, reputation and pride, and retention and recruitment (employer brand). Achieving these goals all then contribute to the overall performance of the organization (Mellor and Dewhurst, 2008). The final component of the framework is that the entire internal communication must take place within the context of the organization's strategy (see figure 5).

Figure 5: Melcrum's Framework for an Effective Internal Communication Function



Source: Mellor and Dewhurst (2008)

The notion of line of sight in this model is insightful for this study as it specifically echoes the need to enable individual employees connects their respective work to the strategic outcomes. Furthermore, it identifies the internal communication infrastructure as a main component of the internal communication function (Mellor and Dewhurst, 2008). Infrastructure refers to the activities, process and channels that are used to implement strategic internal communication and

these are thus important considerations for the management of the function. It also notes the need for effective partnerships, echoing the importance of taking a strategic orientation to the internal communication process which integrates it with the broader communication function. Finally, it recognizes the importance of involving managers in the internal communication process and culture.

In the light of the extensive review of key and relevant concepts, previous studies and models helpful to understand internal strategic communication, the current study adopts the view that strategic communication is purposeful communication by an organization to advance its strategic direction (i.e. vision, mission, strategic objectives) by intentional, persuasive means of communication, not only via marketing, corporate and other institutionalized forms of public communication, but via all of the organization's communication. As justified earlier on, this definition is chosen because it acknowledges the distinctive aspects of being (1) purposeful communication capable of revealing how an organization presents and promotes itself and interact with its audiences. Furthermore, it also has potential to provide insights into how a variety of communication vehicles are integrated in advancing organizational future (Stenberg, 2012).

Furthermore, this study takes a broader view as it does not only focus on those few "official" channels of communication within an organization, but also seeks to embrace informal internal strategic communication within KZNSB, if any. The models of internal communication that have been reviewed also underscore key aspects that are significant to evaluate the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of internal strategic communication between top managers and junior staff members at KZNSB in this study. There is the emphasis on (1) the way how top managers of KZNSB communicated organizational vision, mission, shared values and new developments, and (2) also the focus on goals of communication which ultimately have potential to lead to strategic action and behavioral change as suggested by Asif and Sargeant (2000) (e.g. service focus,

employee loyalty, employee satisfaction) were being effectively or ineffectively pursued in the internal strategic communication.

Furthermore, the study will also dwell on Watson Wyatt Worldwide's (2004) goals (e.g. awareness, understanding, acceptance, commitment, action etc.) to explore how internal strategic communication between top managers and junior staff members effectively and ineffectively affected the awareness, understanding, acceptance, commitment and facilitated organisational changes, continuous improvement, and line of sight for individual employees or linked the individual employees' work to organizational strategic direction (vision, mission) and strategic goals within KZNSB.

Additionally, this inductive study will also evaluate the effectiveness of the series of communication vehicles that have been used at KZNSB and their respective (4) results over the years.

### **3.5 SUMMARY**

This chapter on literature review has critically discussed relevant concepts in this study which include strategic communication, and internal communication, before unpacking the meaning of internal strategic communication. Furthermore, the chapter has also delineated that, this study focuses on strategic communication inside KZNSB. Various role, channels and models of internal communication have been discussed before explicitly highlighting the areas of internal strategic communication which will be focused on in this study. The next chapter discusses the research methodology used in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to describe the process that was used to find answers from a variety of top managers, middle managers and junior employees within KZNSB to the research question of: *“How is internal strategic communication between top managers and junior staff done at KZNSB as the organization tries to achieve its strategic goals and objectives?”* This chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, the chapter discusses the research paradigm, sampling and sample size before describing the interviewees. Secondly, the chapter also discusses how data was collected and analyzed in this study. Thirdly, the chapter also focuses on issues of research quality, ethical concerns and limitations of this qualitative study before concluding with a summary.

As suggested by Remenyi (1996: 22) research is not only about asking why the research is done, but, it is also about asking what to research and how to conduct the research.

### 3.1 Research Paradigm and Approaches

Kuhn (1970) is the first scholar to conceptualise the term of “paradigm” as an overall research framework. In this vein, paradigm means “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, and techniques shared by a group of scientists with a common research interest” (Kuhn’s, 1970:147). There are five elements which make up a paradigm and these are a) a theory or group of closely related theories, b) an ontology, c) a set of methods or techniques-epistemology, d) a number of examples, striking applications, or typical problems linked to a theory and assumptions, and e) a value orientation comprising of evaluations of what types of problems are significant and the criteria for acceptable solutions (Kuhn, 1970).

According to Hall, Griffiths and McKenna (2013:17) “a paradigm describes a general perspective of how the world is viewed and provides a framework that explains how reality is understood by the researcher”. Three aspects of the research paradigm are important in this study.

Firstly, “ontology is concerned with what is the nature of reality and what can be known about that reality” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:13). Creswell (2014) suggests that, reality can be separated into parts and examined individually such that, the knower or researcher can be distanced from whom or what is being studied. Other scholars believe that, reality can also be perceived as being socially constructed by actors acting together in a context (Babbie, 2011). In this regard, the researcher cannot be totally separated from what is known.

Secondly, “epistemology is concerned with the relationship between the knower, the would-be knower and what can be known” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994:108). This focuses on the question: “what is the relationship between the researcher and knower?” Thirdly, methodology is the systematic and theoretical study of methods applied in research. It relates to the question: “how do we know the world or gain knowledge of it?” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:13).

In this retrospective study, a post-positivist paradigm was used to get evaluative views on the effectiveness and also ineffectiveness of the internal strategic communication between top management and junior staff members at KZNSB in South Africa. This post-positivistic paradigm emphasizes that although true reality exists we can never fully understand it. The object of the post-positivism paradigm is to use a different lens to understand and explain social reality (Hall, Griffiths and McKenna, 2013). In this study, the researcher used the worldview of internal stakeholders at different hierarchical levels of KZNSB and interacted with them in individual interviews to understand their reality regarding how strategic internal communication was done between top managers and employees and also evolved at KZNSB in South Africa.

### **3.2 Sampling**

Not everyone employed at KZNSB qualified to participate in this study as there was a specified selection criterion to help with sampling of participants in this study. This qualitative study used non-probability, purposive sampling to identify top managers, middle managers and junior

employees with deep, relevant experience and knowledge of how strategic internal communication between top managers and employees was done at KZNSB.

In his recent *“Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry”*, Schwandt (2015:277) points out that in “sampling based on theoretical or purposive strategy, unit are chosen not for their

representativeness but their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research”.

It is important to mention here that Schwandt (2015:277-278) argues that relevance in purposive sampling may be (1) a matter of choosing a unit(s) because they are critical to understand some process or concept or elaborate some established theory; (2) a unit being known based on previous knowledge to be an extreme, typical, deviant, unique or revelatory; and (3) units being likely to produce predictable contrasts in understanding social action or produce similar or same definition. A researcher may establish explicit criteria of relevance for use as basis of selecting or rejecting participants. A researcher needs to know that failure to specify and explain the criteria suggests that sampling was adhoc, and unspecifiable which makes it difficult to explain or justify why some participants were selected and other left out.

With this guidance, the study purposively selected 13 participants from three layers, namely: 3 participants from top management; 5 from middle management; and 5 from the junior staff level (sea-going crew). All of these had more than five years of working with KZNSB such that they could reflect on how internal strategic communication has been done at KZNSB but also evolved over the years.

In short the selection criteria in this study was that, (1) a participant should be an employee at any level within KZNSB, (2) the employee should have experience of working for KZNSB for a continuous period of not less than 5 years and (3) should be able and willing to share his or her experiences at KZNSB regarding internal strategic communication. Although participants were drawn from different levels in the organisation, emphasis was placed on having more than 5 years of working experience to have enough lived experience of strategic internal

communication at KZNSB. As such employees at KZNSB did not have an equal probability of being chosen for this study. Based on the purposive sample selection criteria, board members as external stakeholders were deliberately excluded from this study which focused exclusively on internal strategic communication as seen from the eyes of internal stakeholders known as top managers, middle managers and junior staff members at KZNSB. Furthermore, there was no any gender or age preference during the participant’s selection process.

### 3.3 Description of Interviews

It is notable that research participants were from three different levels of the organizational structure within KZNSB such as top managers, middle managers and junior staff employed at KZNSB. The oldest interviewee had been with KZNSB for over 35 years while the rest had been with the organization for not less than six years. KZNSB has employees at the headquarters and others in 11 Base Stations along the KZN coastline. As such participant in this study were from the head office in Durban and the Base Station of Zinkwazi which was randomly selected. Some participants were from a Base station mindful that geographical distance may positively or negatively affect or create differences in how internal strategic communication is done. This was also done to get a more holistic rather than partial picture of internal strategic communication at the head office of KZNSB only. There was diversity in the research participants as they were drawn from each of the six Divisions. Table 3 depicts characteristics of research participants in this study.

Table 3: **Characteristics of Research Participants**

<b>Research Participant details</b>				
Level within KZNSB	Division	Gender	Years of service with KZNSB (Between 1964 and 2016)	
3xTop Management	Name of division withheld as it may potentially identify a participant	Gender deliberately hidden.	Between 5 to 35	

5xMiddle management	Operations Research	3 males; 2 females	Between 5 to 30
5x Junior Staff Members	Research Finance Corporate service Operations	4 males; 1 female	Between 5 to 30

In this way, 7 of the research participants were from head office while 6 were from Zinkwazi base stations. As shown in table 3, this study followed the advice that researchers need to use research participants with relevant knowledge and experience of a phenomena understudy, if they are to get meaningful results (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.4 Data Collection

A total of 13 in-depth and face to face interviews were conducted with members of top management, middle management and junior employees at KZNSB in September 2016 to get their views on how internal strategic communication was done and also changed over the years. 3 of these 13 interviews were follow-up interviews. Qualitative research by nature is vulnerable to bias as it is primarily based on the perceptions of reality by participants. In this respect, it is suggested by Remenyi (1998: 111) that one of the key issues in acquiring accurate and reliable data where qualitative research is involved, is to provide the informants with several key assurances such as:

- the researcher has no any hidden agendas;
- the researcher is open and honest;
- the researcher declares any conflict of interest that exist which may influence the data gathered; and the researcher does not gather evidence from informants that are under duress.

These assurances were kept in this study.

It has been ascertained that a typical reaction to thinking about qualitative data collection is to focus on the actual types of data and the procedures for gathering them. However, data collection involves much more and it means gaining permissions (e.g. at organisational and participant levels), conducting good qualitative interviews and developing means of recording information both digitally and on paper, storing the data, and anticipating ethical issues that may arise (Creswell, 2013).

An introductory and permission letter outlining the nature of the evaluative study, was therefore sent to the KZNSB's CEO for his endorsement for the study to be conducted at the Sharks

Board's premises during working hours (See Appendix 3: Approval Letter from CEO of KZNSB).

The type of information gathered from all participants depicted a long historical background in terms of how internal strategic communication within the structures of KZNSB has unfolded over a lengthy period of time since some of the staff members have had over 30 years of work experience within KZN Sharks Board itself.

It is important to mention that the researcher is part of KZNSB management such it was very important that his status in the organisation does not affect responses given by research participants. To ensure that participants were as free and open as possible, an independent person with knowledge of KZNSB was identified and trained to conduct interviews. The interviewer pilot tested the interview guide to ensure that the questions were clear to interviewees. Some questions were revised to simplify technical concepts such as vision which were not clear and difficult for some participants. More probing questions were added to allow research participants to exemplify their responses with concrete events, actions or behaviours. At the start of the interviewing sessions, the interviewer went through the respondent's consent letter (see appendix 4) with each and every participant in this study to get their voluntary consent.

Face-to-face semi-structured interview with each of the research participants was conducted in their respective offices or workplaces. This data collection method was preferable due to the fact that it enabled a researcher to get more verbal information and nonverbal clues. Face-to-face type of interviews provides greater flexibility and openness whilst interviews are in progress. Languages used for all interviews were both English and IsiZulu. These were used interchangeably between the research participants and the researcher. KZN Sharks Board has a huge number of Zulu speaking employees who are not very conversant in English.

An initial interview guide (see appendix 5) was tailor-made to cover the relevant aspects in this study. All interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy of data capturing. This was done with the consent of participants. The average duration for each interview was  $\pm 30$  minutes. Where necessary, follow up interviews were used to gather additional information or to clarify

developing themes. This process was also used to validate data gathered during the preceding interviews with the same or other participants.

Immediately after the interview data was transcribed, each research participant was given a chance to verify, validate and confirm the accuracy as well as meaning of what was captured

during a face-to-face interview. Data collection stopped when research participants became repetitive such that more interviews would not yield any new data.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data was manually coded and classified using constant comparison technique in order to establish meaningful patterns and obtain important themes which reflected how internal strategic communication was conducted at KZNSB, how effective or ineffective it was, but also how it has changed. Participants went through the draft report as part of member check of what is reported prior to a final report being compiled.

### **3.6 Research Quality Issues**

Credibility, dependability and confirmability are key issues in qualitative research. Schwandit (2015) assert that credibility refers to the degree to which a researcher is justified in concluding that observed relationship is true, and ensues from examining each possible clue, and attempting to rule out each rival explanation generated. In the language of quantitative research, credibility is parallel to internal validity. To achieve this, the current study has used corroboration and triangulation of the findings between research participants (data triangulation) and also member check which allowed participants to comment and clarify on the collected data

Furthermore, dependability is another key aspect of research quality in a qualitative study. Thus, dependability focuses on the processes of a research (Schwandit, 2015). To put it in other words, it places responsibility on a researcher to ensure that the processes that were followed were logical, traceable and documented (parallel to reliability in quantitative research). In this qualitative study, the researcher has provided the clear steps and processes used in this study. In that way, the researcher has created an audit trail for any researcher and/or any other person to be able to easily trace and repeat this study without any ambiguity.

Confirmability is also another key criteria of research quality in a qualitative study. In short, confirmability (parallel to objectivity in a quantitative study) is about evidence coming directly from research context and participants (Schwandit, 2015). This was achieved in this study by using direct quotes from interviews with top managers, middle managers and junior employees

who participated in the study to exactly convey their meaning and emotions as much as possible regarding internal strategic communication at KZNSB.

Another key issue is that of transferability (parallel to external validity) of findings in a qualitative study. In qualitative research, transferability places responsibility on a researcher to provide readers with sufficient information on the study such that readers could establish the degree of similarity between the context studied and to which findings may be transferred (Schwandit, 2015). It is noteworthy to indicate that transferability and generalizability are not the

same. As such, the researcher in this study has provided sufficient details to allow a reader to transfer the findings to a relevant and similar context, but not generalize them.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

As mentioned earlier on, the researcher is part of management at KZNSB. It is for this reason that an interviewer and not the researcher was used to collect data so that research participants would be free to express their views without any fear. Participants were assured by the interviewer of confidentiality in this study. It is only the researcher who had access to the anonymous raw data. No names have been used in this report. During research interviews, no names and titles of research participants were also not collected to ensure confidentiality. Informed consent was sought from each of the research participants. The permission for the research to be conducted at KZNSB's premises was formally sought from the CEO. It is part of ethical consideration that findings in this study have been reported using acronyms to enhance anonymity.

### **3.8 Limitations of the Study**

The sample size of the study was small and does not represent the stratum from where they were drawn. As such, the emphasis was on getting to the depth of issues in each interview but also a point where participants were repetitive and not giving new data despite extra efforts by the researcher. The use of interview data only is also a limitation. Documents as another source of

data would have been useful to complement what participants said or provided; what they omitted or avoided to talk about.

### **3.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the method used in this inductive study to evaluate how internal strategic communication has been done at KZNSB and evolved over the years. The study used purposive sampling to identify a variety of junior staff members top and middle managers within KZNSB.

Data collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews was transcribed and analysed using open coding and constant comparison technique to get themes. Research quality issues, ethical consideration and limitations of this qualitative study have all been discussed in this chapter. The next chapter focuses on findings of this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to present findings of this study which focused on evaluating how internal strategic communication was done at KZNSB and also changed over the years. The chapter begins by focusing on the effectiveness of internal strategic communication within KZNSB in South Africa. Thereafter, the chapter presents the various aspects which contributed to the ineffectiveness of internal strategic communication. Lastly, the chapter focuses on how internal strategic communication has changed over the years at KZNSB.

### **4.1 Effectiveness of internal strategic communication**

As highlighted earlier on, the first objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of internal strategic communication at KZNSB. In this regard, the study shows that top managers, middle managers and junior employees at KZNSB had different views which depict the effectiveness of internal strategic communication. Thus, their evaluation of internal strategic communication as effective was characterized by (1) interactive communication at different levels, (2) increased engagement of junior employees, and (3) structured line of management communication which allowed upward and downward flow of information on strategic issues at KZNSB. Each of these views is presented below.

#### **4.1.1 Interactive communication styles at different levels**

Direct and interactive communication style to all layers of employees at once by the Chief Executive, and also direct communication by other members of top management, specifically to those immediately reporting to them reflect the two ways in which internal strategic communication was done at KZNSB. One of the participants who is a junior employee highlighted instances of how the Chief Executive as a member of top management directly updated and informed employees of all levels (from top to the bottom) about the future and new developments at KZNSB, especially during company events.

*The future is communicated to us in meetings with the managements and when we have company events. Our CEO usually calls meetings and explain that this is what is going to happen and allows people to raise their issues. He is open and informs us of new developments .....Yes I am happy as they call meetings to inform us about everything whether it's bad news or if we need to improve...We ask questions. I have not seen a problem with communication although we do not meet every day (KZNSBE1).*

Another junior employee exemplified how direct interactive communication by top management to all employees was effective to clear misunderstandings and provide relevant information to employees to create shared understanding regarding the new idea of maritime school of excellence as a new part of their organisation.

*Our CEO [name withheld] called a meeting in our main hall, all staff were there. He informed us that we are going to become closely associated with maritime so we can get this marine time school of excellence off the ground...Yes...First, lots of junior staff did not understand because we thought how we can merge with maritime. But we learnt more about maritime.... the whole staff were invited from Richards Bay right down to Ramsgate... I can see the growth; I have seen people from disadvantaged areas. Top management communicated down to us what they wanted to achieve with the marine time school. The vision is wide and I think it will be achieved (KZNSBE 6).*

However, not all members of top management were communicating with all layers of employees at once to inform and share key messages and developments at KZNSB. In these instances, some members of top management were using management meetings in their respective divisions to cascade strategic messages from the top to lower levels of employees in distant base stations along the KZN coastline. One of the members of top management reflected how it was effective and practical for him to call face-to-face meetings with managers in his division that they later pass on key messages to different junior employees, although this was not his ideal way.

*.... We are spread out along the entire coast of KZN which makes communication often very difficult...so I get management together to explain what our vision is, what we would like to achieve in the future. They then disseminate it down to the base stations as they move on a daily basis. Ideally, one would like to speak to everyone at the same time.*

*Unfortunately, that's impossible for me, it would cost us thousands of rands to transport all staff from all base stations (KZNSBE8).*

Furthermore, the way internal strategic communication was done at KZNSB show that illiteracy was taken into consideration to ensure that everyone understood the messages. In this regard, a verbal style of internal strategic communication was effective as a vehicle to clearly get messages across to different types of junior employees. One of the top managers reflected how internal strategic communication was effective when characterized by two-way verbal communication where the recipients would easily ask questions and gain clarity.

*For me the best communication to communicate to my working staff...is not to write them a letter...If I write them a letter, they are going to take that letter and half of them are not going to read that letter; the other half can't read. So I use personal communication, one-to-one or one-on a group is always the best...they can see the emotions that you are speaking with, they can ask questions, so it's a two-way thing. It's not just a one way think where I am writing a letter saying this is what it is (KZNSBE8).*

#### 4.1.2 Increased engagement of junior employees

While internal strategic communication was used to inform employees about new developments in the organisation, there is also evidence that it was used to help employees to provide input and engage them in facilitating strategic change. One of the junior employees asserted that internal strategic communication was effective as it embraced employee input and was also participatory to create employee understanding and commitment to organisational growth at KZNSB.

*Yes, when it all started off building the sharks board to accommodate the marine time school of excellence; I got to sit at the committee when we started building up all the different departments. I was on the committee so I was aware and clearly understood what was going on. Being a junior member of staff, hearing about the school from the CEO first; and then getting involved was real change (KZNSBE6).*

Another junior employee specifically focused on how the CEO interacted with them which created a sense of belonging such that they would communicate back to management at KZNSB

*There has been change in the way the new CEO does things, when there is going to be change, he called on all staff and informed us about the change. We now feel part and parcel of the organization. He comes down to our level and talk to us and we are now allowed to have a voice or say anything we desire to communicate back to management (KZNSBE1).*

Alternatively, junior employees also reflected how increased participation in open communication, access to bosses and freedom to raise complaints at KZNSB made them to engage with a variety of employee-related issues and also felt connected to top management.

*We now have HR departments where we lay complaints so they speak to top management for us, and as I said before things have really improved because it is easy to speak to your boss directly whereas before you would not be able or even allowed to do that. We are involved more and more in this organisation now than before (KZNSBE4).*

#### 4.1.3 Structured line management communication

With a focus on internal strategic communication within a division, some of the top managers revealed that strategic communication flowed up and down through various layers of authority. One of the top managers reflected on how structured line of communication was effective in allowing communication and strategic problems to flow between him and lowest crew members.

*The lowest member of staff, the lowest crew member would go through his structures within his crew unit. From there the problem or matter would go to the assistant area manager from there to the area manager, from there to the ops manager and if failing all of that it will come to me in the end, and the same way down that information is passed down, it seems this communication lines seem to work very, very well (KZNSBE8).*

New organizational structures at KZNSB with people who are good to communicate with others and create commitment enabled internal strategic communication to be more effective. This is what one of the junior employees had to say with reference to corporate services division and communication which created a sense of commitment and unity.

*In the past we didn't have corporate service division. We were relying on the chain of command. But chain of command is not necessarily a person who has a skill to communicate or interact with others. You can have chain of command of people who are placed on position based on qualifications and experiences only. Communication needs other skills so in that regard things are communicated better because we have people who have necessary requirements for this job and interactions to make people feel committed and work as one(KZNSBE4).*

#### **4.2 Ineffective of internal strategic communication**

The second objective of this qualitative study was to assess the ineffectiveness of internal strategic communication within KZNSB in South Africa. Thus, top management middle managers and junior employees at KZNSB also revealed how internal strategic communication was ineffective. In this regard, internal strategic communication at UKZNSB was ineffective because it failed to create (1) common and shared understanding of strategic direction among most employees, (2) there were some members of middle management who were disengaged and unsupportive gatekeepers of internal strategic communication, (3) there were less effective ways of communicating to some groups of employees and also (4) sub groupings and internal differences within KZNSB which diluted shared responsibility for internal strategic communication, negatively affected perceived unity and lateral strategic communication.

#### 4.2.1 Lack of shared understanding of strategic direction

Internal strategic communication was ineffective as it failed to create a common and shared understanding of the strategic direction of KZNSB, especially the vision. Top managers, middle managers and junior employees at KZNSB reflected diversity, ignorance and confusion in their understanding of the vision of KZNSB. There were different views on the vision upheld by members of top management, middle managers and junior staff as organisational members of KZNSB. These diverse perspectives on vision include (a) KZNSB to be the best organisation in the world in terms of its mandate and be an important role player in marine research; (b) to be a leader in the protection of divers from shark attacks in non-lethal ways, (c) to be a global leader in shark related research, (c) achieve transformation at KZNSB, (c) and to work together with the community and educate them about sharks.

Within the top management team, there were three different types of perspectives which reflect diversity in their understanding of the vision of KZNSB. Firstly, one of the members of top management reflected how the vision of his organization had aspirations regarding global leadership in bather protection illustrated as follows.

*Firstly, my understanding of the Sharks Board's vision, is to be a global leader in bather protection and Sharks Board has recently established a Maritime Centre of Excellence as another mandatory wing which has not been promulgated as yet in the existing Act governing all the Sharks Board's operations (KZNSB12).*

Secondly, another member of top management added how the global leadership in the vision of KZNSB was not only regarding bather protection, but also shark-related scientific research as shown in the quote below.

*As Sharks Board.... our vision is to be the global leader in terms of bather protection (Through our sound scientific research background), in*

*conducting the scientifically related research mostly on different species of sharks, in making sure that, the general members of the public, tourists, students and school learners are educated/informed of all the dangers associated with shark's behavioral patterns and their anatomy, ...contribution towards beach tourism in KZN (KZNSB11).*

Thirdly, another member of the top management at KZNSB did not express the global aspiration as part of his understanding of the vision of the organisation. Instead, this particular member of top management at UKZNSB demonstrated lack of clarity and confusion about the vision of KZNSB especially between the two mandates, namely bather protection and maritime education.

This member of top management portrayed his confusion and lack of clarity regarding the vision of KZNSB in this way.

*What is the Sharks Board trying to achieve? Does it want to become the education centre or they are trying to stick to our mandate as Sharks Board*

*to service the nets which I think is taking the back seat. I think we should concentrate far more on servicing the net (KZNSBE8).*

While there was diversity in how top management at KZNSB expressed their understanding of the vision of their organisation, it was also notable that none of the middle managers expressed their understanding of global leadership aspiration of their organisation either in bather protection or scientific research. In this regard, most of the middle managers simply focused on local shark protection along the KZN coastline when asked to explain their understanding of the vision of KZNSB. For instance, one of them illustrated this common view as follows.

*Obviously to maintain a bright protection programme of sharks, I mean to have a very successful r... brighter protection...especially with environmental pressure that we are encountering at the moment you know (KZNSBE7).*

It is interesting that there were also some middle managers who were ignorant or not bothered about vision of their organisation. This is how one of the middle managers displayed ignorance, but also lack of interest when asked about the vision of KZNSB.

*I have no clue on the vision. Maybe the other departments are aware, but I am in the science department. I don't bother myself with vision and mission. I am not aware of it. Maybe other employees are aware but I am not aware of it. I am also not aware of how top management communicate to junior employees, I am not a junior staff (KZNSBE3).*

Some of the middle managers upheld the view that there was also lack of knowledge about the vision of KZNSB among junior employees, reported as follows.

*.... I think if you went down to mainstream and you picked on two group members and you say to them, guys, listen, what do you think is the vision of the KZNSB. I don't think they know that, as I've said a lot of people tend to pretend. They live within their little environments; they don't really worry about things like visions as long as they are getting paid their salaries... (KZNSBE7).*

The diversity in understanding of the vision of KZNSB was also evident among junior employees as some emphasized on bather protection while others focused on community and educational activities of KZNSB. One of the junior employees expressed his understanding of KZNSB vision mainly in terms of work with the community as illustrated below.

*I think Shark Board vision is to work together with the community and help the community of South Africa as a whole not only KZN and the main goal is to help communities and to educate the community about the things we are doing as an organisation (KZNSBE9).*

Another junior employee shared his view of how vision and mission were not only difficult, but also that employees in base stations were not fully aware of what KZNSB was all about, illustrated as follows.

*The vision and mission statement of an organisation is in most cases difficult. This is because employees living in our coastlands are not fully aware of what we are all about. So, I am not sure whether the current method which implies putting the organisation out there so that people understand what it stands for is really working well. It's 50/50 to say the mission was communicated well or not (KZNSB4).*

#### 4.2.2 Disengaged and unsupportive middle management

Some of the middle managers thought of themselves as passive rather than as proactive players in internal strategic communication to all employees under them. In this regard, middle managers disengaged from their responsibility for internal strategic communication to junior employees under them as they considered that the source of internal strategic communication was always elsewhere. This is how one of the middle managers portrayed his “passive” role in internal strategic communication which was seen as external to his department, but also top-down from the Chief Executive to primarily “tell” people what to do.

*He [CEO] needs to tell us what he wants us to do, you know... a newsletter once a month. You know it's not a friendly easy letter. These are goals for the next month. He needs to tell us. Also the next six months... Something just in writing and that email can't only be in English, it needs to be also*

*translated in isiZulu one hundred percent so that everybody understands it because I can't get to my English supervisor and tell him to explain it to my isiZulu speaking members...I mean my manager will often say ok this is our X goal...this has been our main goal. He is telling me all these stuff. But I am not sure whether he wants me to pass these on or not. So, if it came in an email, it would be easily forwarded. If it is important for middle management only.... or if it is important for all employees (KZNSBE7).*

Furthermore, another middle manager revealed how he was not able to advocate and pass on strategic communication to junior employees at KZNSB as he claimed he had no idea about the future and what was happening in the organisation. The middle manager reflected how he was not up-dated on what was happening but also not aware of the future of KZNSB. This is how this middle manager could not function as a reliable advocate of top management views, but also ensure that all employees under him were well-up dated on strategic issues.

*In the position that I am in as a manager, I often get questions. Our staff members in my area have no idea as to what is happening. This is very seldom communicated to us. It is communicated in a very poor manner. If it is a meeting, it ends in, there is future. What future? What are the parameters? We have no idea (KZNSBE13).*

While claiming not to be aware of what was happening at KZNSB, it is surprising that the same middle manager expressed not only his satisfaction with departmental communication up-dates, but also reflected his awareness of recent development to be able to pass his negative views on the new maritime school as part of the future of KZNSB. This is what he said:

*I always get fed information from him [name of divisional director withheld]. We are always kept up-to-date. We have just had a budget meeting today. We are in the picture, so constantly, there is leadership. But in my opinion with the very senior management within this organisation,*

*there is no leadership... We do not know where we are going especially with the maritime school we have started (KZNSBE7).*

It is notable that some junior employees revealed that meetings were held by top management with all employees regarding the maritime school of excellence. As such, it is surprising that some of the middle management employees claimed that employees were not involved. While

questioning the legality of a new school of maritime excellence, one of middle manager expressed lack of support, feeling of left out and less involved, and lack of commitment to align

own efforts and that of the subordinates towards the school as part organisational growth at KZNSB.

*The issue about maritime centre of excellence was not communicated well with us... We were just told that this is what is going to happen... Yes, and as far as I know we are operating illegally because it's not in our Act. We are not supportive of that (KZNSBE3).*

There were also instances where junior employees had to take their own initiative to get relevant and strategic communication on staff development as a result of some middle managers failing to perform as effective gatekeepers and source of cross functional communication to pass relevant information to employees under them, as illustrated in this quote:

*Within the field, staff members within the field at the Sharks Board want to further their education with the school. I don't know what the procedures are. There is no head of the school where we can send them to. What happens is staff members take this upon their shoulders to go through to corporate services. This in the field is breaking the channels of communication (KZNSBE7).*

#### 4.2.3 Less effective ways of communicating to some groups of employees

The views of top managers, middle managers and junior employees reflect ways in which internal strategic communication was not effective because of (1) limited discussion on vision and mission hanged on walls in the buildings of KZNSB, (2) key messages in written forms in

the newsletter was not getting to some of the intended target, (3) delays or absence of strategic communication to employees and also (4) dysfunctional communication equipment.

One of the top managers echoed how the vision and mission which were hanged in the various buildings at KZNSB head office and base stations were less effective without interpersonal

discussion and reflection on them by employees not only to understand what they meant but also buy-in.

*If you look at it and you think about it, the vision and mission are in a lot of places around this building and base stations...and all that, but it's a piece of paper on a wall. You would have to sit down and chat to people in small units and try to impart or try and get them to buy into the vision. If they do not buy into something, no matter what you put on the wall, people don't take notice of it...this is not a simple thing, I think you would have to go and sit with people and discuss with them to understand what it is, and why it is that, It's not a simple thing to do (KZNSBE8).*

Furthermore, the same member of top management added how lack of repetitive communication contributed to poor understanding of vision and mission which was easily displaced as a priority among the many competing priorities of employees:

*For all to gel, you have to spend time with staff, explaining it [vision and mission] to them, explaining why, and then probably after 3 months later if you were to ask them it will get a little bit scratchy so it's not simple. Communication is on-going; you got to keep communicating all the time. If you don't people, people forget. They have other things in their lives. They got poor rugby team at the moment...poor soccer team...that tends to take priority over understanding vision and mission. For staff, as long as they are doing what they have to do, then they are comfortable (KZNSBE8).*

A middle manager highlighted on how the erosion or distortion of meaning through translations to other languages created difficulties to retain meaning and have shared understanding of strategic issues among different types of employees where there was no common language.

*Often what would happen is, in my personal experience I found that often you'll find the translation of it into English, from English into IsiZulu is*

*sometimes a problem and language barriers cause things to be slightly interpreted in different fashions and when people interpret things in a different way the outcome is not always exactly what one would hope it to be, so that is an issue. It's something we do try and address but it's something that will be with us with all the different languages that are spoken within the organization (KZNSBE7).*

As some employees at KZNSB were illiterate, one of the members of top management questioned the effectiveness of a newsletter with key strategic information and up-dates written in English. This is what he uttered to reflect how this was less effective in terms of internal strategic communication and could be better if it was more pictorial.

*I forgot to add one thing. We have a newsletter but that newsletter goes in English. Let me tell you something that a large majority of this organisation may be able to speak a little bit of English, but they find it very hard to read English. So, maybe we should look at whether the newsletter could be more pictorial, put more pictures, because we can all see pictures. That is something that can help with communicating some of the strategic issues (KZNSBE8).*

In a similar way, one of the junior employees agreed how even those people who were able to read did not like the written form of internal strategic communication such that the message is not received by the intended target.

*People just take and toss booklets aside...they don't even attempt to read it. I am one of those who does not know what is happening in this organisation and when asked I am not able to answer. Senior management has to find away to inform people, but I strongly discourage the use of booklets. I am not sure how we can get everyone on the same page. May be the solution is to communicate constantly.... (KZNSB9).*

Some of the junior employees reported of bottlenecks and poor timing of strategic communication which contribute to less effective strategic communication at KZNSB.

*Sometimes we do not get communication. Sometimes we find out about stuff at the last minute. This is a challenge and needs to be addressed by using different communication tools...In the previous year's communication through emails was introduced but you find that we don't have working computers to access the emails. So this was sort of useless to us. I think the CEO is not aware of this lack of communication (KZNSB 10).*

Quantity but also timing of key information provided to employees affected employee behaviour and interpretation of things. One of the middle managers reflected how lack of communication affected his interpersonal interpretation and behaviour at KZNSB.

*More information should be available. We were informed on the day that the new CEO arrived that there was a new CEO. There was no communication with staff before that. Since we no longer have uniform, I almost mistook the new CEO for the auditors because there was no communication (KZNSB3).*

The effectiveness of internal strategic communication was also affected negatively by a variety of dysfunctional communication equipments as reported by the same middle manager as follows:

*Effective communication should start with channels. The channels should start with working phones, faxing machines and emails. This is not always the case at Sharks Board (KZNSB3).*

#### 4.2.4 Negative effects of sub groupings and internal differences within KZNSB

The results show that internal strategic communication at KZNSB suffered because of the sub groupings within KZNSB as some employees emphasizes on being different from others. This created the difficulty to have shared responsibility for and also a consistent pattern of strategic communication in all divisions of KZNSB

Top management were not advocating the same style of internal strategic communication to influence lower-level employees in their respective divisions which constitute a major

component of internal communication systems. While expressing satisfaction with strict lines of communication in his division, one of the members of top management also highlighted how internal strategic communication was done differently from other divisions within KZNSB.

*Once again, I can only speak for my division. I have been involved in it for the past [number of years removed]. We have improved our communication lines a lot I believe. We have a very strict operating structure within the division... unlike I think other divisions in this place (KZNSB 8).*

Similarly, another top manager reflected on differences in how internal strategic communication was done in each division, but also added the compromise and risks of the different approaches to the entire organization of KZNSB.

*I have spent time with my direct reports and taken them through what the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the Sharks Board are and as a [position deleted], I would briefly take them through the budgetary related information which I find to be more strategic.*

*Now, the risk associated with that, would be that, if different Divisions do this differently at different times, the intended message and outcome might be hugely compromised in the sense that, different people and Divisions might end up with the different visions, which might cripple the business intents in a long run(KZNSB12).*

The same member of top management also evaluated internal strategic communication at KZNSB as not effective such that there was need for change as illustrated below:

*Currently, if we talk about the effectiveness and/or ineffectiveness of the internal strategic communication at Sharks Board, I would comfortably say that, it is not as effective as it should be, the reason for that, you will find the different set of communication platforms, structures and committees working in silos (Independently away from each other)....If I were to decide what needs to be done, I would make use of the same system as that of my previous employer where, everyone/staff members together with the Board of Directors undergo*

*some kind of a workshop/seminar where all the strategic issues are being discussed at length in order for everybody to get to understand what the vision of the organization is and what would their role be in achieving that vision, goals and objectives.....Here, we are talking every rank with the Sharks Board structure e.g. from the Board down to a person swiping the floors and/or even the gardener....Unfortunately, at the moment, this is not what is happening at Sharks Board (KZNSB12).*

In particular, one of the middle managers who was a scientist was not bothered with vision and mission but also upheld the view that internal strategic communication was considered as a function of public relations department. A junior employee from corporate affairs agreed to the existence of differences and subgroups by reflecting on how she was only aware of what was happening in his or her department and not others, illustrated as follows:

*I do not know anything. All I do here is just cook for people. I only know about what is going in my department and they also know what is going on in their departments (KZNSB2).*

### **4.3 Changes in internal strategic communication at KZNSB**

Lastly, it was also an objective of this study to analyse how internal strategic communication changed over the years at KZNSB. The study shows that there were three noticeable changes in how internal strategic communication was conducted at KZNSB. These were (1) change in style of communication, characterised by a shift from InDuna transmission model to a more interactive model, (2) change in scope of those engaged in internal strategic communication, and (3) increased variety in the means used to communicate strategic issues.

#### **4.3.1 Shift from InDuna style to interactive communication**

Internal strategic communication was initially restrictive as not every employee had the freedom to present and discuss his or her complaints directly with a manager. The internal communication system was predominantly top-down, and less open to complaints as the only conduit to present

problems to management was through a designated employee called an InDuna. The InDunas had power and status invested in them by the whites of that time to transmit task-related instructions and orders.

*An InDuna was a black employee, very powerful and no one would argue or question him. He was a conduit between the blacks and the whites of that time who were managers. He carried instruction and*

*orders from white managers to lower level employees. We could not talk directly to our managers nor could our managers talk to us without going through the InDuna (KZNSB 9).*

The InDuna style of internal communication which focused on task-related issues recognized specific representatives as transmitters of messages between all employees to and from management which reinforced distance between junior employees and management. One of the junior employees highlighted that there were now more alternatives and open ways for any of the employees to register their complaints and also directly access management to get relevant and helpful strategic messages than in the past. This change from task-oriented to strategic communication was conducted at KZNSB was reported as follows:

*Back then there were people called Iziduna and if you had any message, you had to pass it on to InDuna. No one could talk to management without passing through an InDuna. Things have really changed because when the employer didn't want to hear any complaints, they wouldn't. But nowadays there are different channels of communication that are better than the system of Iziduna. For instance, we can talk directly to our supervisors...managers...have unions nowadays. Workers now are informed about things and the future (KZNSB 1).*

The InDuna system of communication did not create any climate for dialogue between employees and their managers as reflected by the following comment uttered by one of the junior employees:

*Back then, there wasn't even a union and you were not even allowed to say the word union. So, these are things that made it hard to communicate with the employers because we came only to work. There was nothing you were allowed to say. So currently, I think there has been a lot of change as we talk to supervisors...managers...CEO and others in management (KZNSB 5).*

Another junior employee illustrated how employees reacted to their exclusion arising from restricted avenues of internal communication in the past at KZNSB by using alternative means of enhancing bottom-up communication.

*Communication was not open to all, especially to black members of staff. We had to form a union and join a union called NEHAWU so we could be able to fight for our rights, seeing that there was some oppression to us. This was our way to talk to management (KZNSB4).*

In the past, KZNSB as the employer had a choice of whether to listen to a complaint from employees or not. This has changed as there are now many avenues which are direct and also indirect for employees to raise issues with management. While junior employees were happy with this change, there were some middle managers who thought that the opening up of bottom-up communication created a system where chain of command was sometimes disrespected and which negatively affected the organizational climate.

#### 4.3.2 Change in scope of those engaged in internal strategic communication

In addition to change in the style of internal strategic communication which predominantly hinged on an InDuna, top managers, middle managers and employees at KZNSB also highlighted a change in the scope of who were involved in the internal strategic communication. Internal strategic communication was also evident in rituals such as awards within KZNSB

which did not involve everyone but rather few selected employees in the past. Organizational events reflected how internal strategic communication was not directed at all employees in the past at KZNSB and created difficulties for some employees to have a sense of belonging. One of the junior employees contrasted his feeling of being excluded in the past events of staff performance awards and how it has now become more inclusive as everyone is welcome, illustrated in the quote below.

*We would not get even to the canteen in the past. We were not involved during staff awards ceremony. Our role would be to prepare the venue; only the selected few would attend. We ended up fighting for it. We*

*wondered if we were part of this organization or not since we could not attend the award events. But now everyone is welcome (KZNSB9).*

Internal strategic communication changed to start involving many actors at different levels at KZNSB. It was also acknowledged that the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was directly

accessible by junior employees, which was sometimes a source of discomfort to some middle managers. One of the middle managers expressed his views as quoted below:

*I think may be our new manager (CEO) is more accommodating to listen to junior staff; which does not always help you know. I have definitely seen that the union, you know I mean we have all joined a union. But I can definitely see the union has played a bigger role now than what it used to do in the past (KZNSB13).*

Another middle manager from the division which believed in strict lines of communication at KZNSB expressed displeasure at how employees were free to complain through alternative avenues even to his superiors and to the union, a pattern which was becoming common in his division. This is how he expressed his displeasure, and frustration with the emerging pattern of open communication which was in conflict with the old subculture in his division.

*So, if one of the guys has a problem he needs to go the supervisor, the supervisor brings the problem to me. But now at the moment we got junior*

*labourers going straight to Senior Staff...You hear things from your boss, its disrespectful you know.... some are running to Union. Half of these problems we don't even hear them. I could probably have solved them if I heard about them through my supervisors (KZNSB7).*

While recognizing the changes and progress in internal strategic communication, junior employees had the view that the changes that had occurred were not sufficient. One of the junior employees expressed this as follows:

*Now there is a little bit of change and openness. It's still not enough. It cannot happen overnight. There is some form of communication now between top management and junior staff. We know some of the policies, organizations systems. But there are still few things which are not in place (KZNSB 5).*

#### 4.3.3 Increased variety in the means used to communicate strategic issues.

New means of getting strategic issues across to or from junior staff were introduced at KZNSB. However, junior employees hold the views that the addition of email communication at KZNSB has not been effective partly due to lack of working computers.

*The communication has improved but still not satisfying as the communication tools are not used properly. The CEO is doing a great job but there are people who are not doing their job properly...*

*In the previous years, communication through emails was introduced but you find that we don't have working computers to access the emails. So this was sort of useless to us (KZNSB9).*

The increase in variety of means to communicate internal strategic issues to employees included face-to-face communication which entailed explanation to ensure proper understanding but also use of emails which had its own negative effects if not received or understood.

*I think ten years ago, a lot of our staff were uneducated so strategic issues had to be passed on by mouth... explain to employees properly. Now a lot of staff is educated and I think management expects the staff to understand English.... So the direct translation is not getting done. I think more interest need to be placed on explaining what needs to be done. You know not just sending an email out and hoping everyone got the email and or understands what's going on (KZNSB13).*

A member of top management reflected on the variety of means for strategic communication at KZNSB and how interactive means of communication made employees to feel valued.

*I am aware of other means and ways that the Board is currently using, such as the website, billboards etc., but those have not addressed the issue at hand as those tools are not always maintained, tested against their effectiveness. Whereas, focus groups do allow the interaction whereby people can even ask question and importantly, it makes them feel valuable that, they can contribute towards a common goal the Board has.*

*In closing, it must be understood the fact that, lack of ownership and knowledge usually result/leads in people resisting, which is not what the organization wishes/hopes to direct its staff members towards (KZNSB11).*

#### **4.4 SUMMARY**

This qualitative study has evaluated and highlighted a variety of ways or factors which contributed to effective and ineffective internal strategic communication between top management and junior staff at KZNSB. In presenting the results of the study, the chapter has begun by depicting the effectiveness of internal strategic communication at KZNSB, before focusing on how internal strategic communication was ineffectiveness. Lastly, the chapter has also revealed various changes in how internal strategic communication has been done at KZNSB. These changes include how the InDuna model of transmitting communication which was predominantly top-down, reinforced restrictive communication between management and employees but has changed to a more interactive and open communication with multiple avenues of internal strategic communication at KZNSB.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

### **5.0 INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this chapter is to discuss key findings of this evaluative study on how internal strategic communication between top managers and junior employees was done at KZNSB as the organization tried to achieve its strategic goals and objectives. These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and studies on internal strategic communication.

Firstly, the chapter begins by discussing how direct and interactive communication style contributed to the effectiveness of internal strategic communication at KZNSB.

Secondly, the chapter shifts to discuss key results regarding the different ways in which internal strategic communication was done in each division but also the diverse and incomplete understanding of the strategic direction by top managers, middle managers and junior employees at KZNSB.

Thirdly the chapter discusses key results reflecting how internal strategic communication positively influenced junior employee engagement while also created disengaged and unsupportive middle managers who affected the flow of strategic communication to junior employees and ultimately impeded collective understanding and commitment to strategic direction at KZNSB.

Fourthly, the chapter discusses results on how the shift from InDuna to interactive communication was considered as positive by junior employees at KZNSB.

#### **5.1 Direct interactive communication style**

One of the key finding reflects that internal strategic communication which was direct from the top managers to junior employees but also interactive was effective at KZNSB to inform, clarify misunderstandings and involve junior staff in shaping the future and growth of the organisation (e.g. the new idea of maritime school of excellence as a new part of their organisation).

Specifically, internal strategic communication direct from the Chief Executive to junior employees was less often at KZNSB. Notably, two-way interactive communication to

directly and simultaneously communicate strategic information to all layers of employees was used by the Chief Executive especially during company events. White and Vanc (2010) asserts that a Chief Executive is the chief communications officer in an organisation who should promote commitment, sense of belonging to the organisation, deepen employee awareness of the organisation's changing environment, and understanding of its evolving aims. Arguably, if a strategic message is intended for all employees, it can be sent from the top to all levels simultaneously. Employees believe receiving information directly from top management is a sign that they are respected, which in turn, creates a propensity to speak favourably about the organization. A study by White and Vanc (2010) examined how employees of a multi-campus university viewed information flow from top administrators in positions of personal influence to conclude that employees prefer to hear things first-hand, from the top. Furthermore, the study also concluded that the most important source of communication in a University was direct from the top of the organization. It is important to highlight that getting strategic communication directly from top management, particularly the Chief Executive, gives employees the sense that they are receiving full information and makes them feel important.

The study also found that another interactive style of internal strategic communication at KZNSB involved members of top management below the Chief Executive. Commonly, these members of top management were communicating and interacting with their direct reports through internal team meetings to cascade strategic communication. Effective internal communication to employees which successfully inform them of their organization's mission, strategic objectives, and the needs of its customers is helpful for them to become more focused on the satisfaction of those needs and, hence, contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness.

## **5.2 Divisional differences and diverse understanding of strategic direction**

This study also revealed that internal strategic communication was less effective partly because of differences in how each of the division at KZNSB communicated vision to lower levels. Top managers at KZNSB were not advocating the same style to communication strategic issues to influence lower-level employees in their respective Divisions. Notably, it was common for top managers to individually decide what was strategic but also determine the method and timing of strategic communication to their immediate reports and junior staff. In this regard, it was common for top managers to talk about internal strategic communication in their respective divisions rather than a common approach adopted by KZNSB to communicate strategic issues to various divisions but also hierarchical levels. A study on internal communication between managers and staff at the Daimler Chrysler South Africa head office in Pretoria conducted by Rooyen (2007) concluded that employees in units headed by an effective communicator with a propensity to share strategic communication were better informed than other employees at the same level who happen to be in units with less effective communication. Without a common and synchronized approach to communication on strong strategic intent, there is a risk of internal division especially among top managers based on specialization and also lack of strategic consensus. It is also possible that some of the top managers may inadvertently actually focus on non-strategic content such as task-related communication without centering on strategic intent (Hume and Leonard, 2015). Furthermore, coherence in strategic intent cannot be achieved through communication pursued by relying only on discretion by individual top managers as this reinforces differences or separation of various divisions or departments while maintaining their specialization (Duncan 2001:763). Collective strategic consciousness is key to help individuals and work groups interpret and implement the strategic intent within their own area of work. A cross-functional management orientation must be instilled to ensure consistency in strategic messages that are communicated at every point of contact. Notably, internal strategic communication need to look across and beyond functional departments as coordination across departments becomes more critical.

Without effective internal strategic communication in an organization, it is not possible for everyone to understand the organizational strategy and direction, current performance, growth being pursued but also know how he/she can help to create value. While the study highlighted

internal differences in how top managers pursued internal strategic communication, it also revealed a lack of common and shared understanding of the strategic direction of KZNSB, initially among the top managers themselves. Hume and Leonard (2015) asserts that clear strategic intent is important for the entire organisation to work towards a common goal. The diverse perspectives regarding the vision of KZNSB as expressed by top managers reflected global leadership in bather protection only, global leadership in both bather protection as well as shark-related scientific research, but also confusion between two mandates of bather protection and maritime education. Actually the official vision of KZNSB is “*environmentally sensitive*

*bather protection against sharks and a thriving maritime skills sector to enhance human and economic development*” while the mission is to be “*a leader in environmentally sensitive protection of bathers against sharks and capacity building in the maritime sector*” (KZNSB Marketing Strategy for 2014-2016:2). Concisely, this reflects inconsistency as the versions of vision for KZNSB as expressed by top managers are different from the official vision. It is notable that the official vision for KZNSB also adds capacity building in the maritime sector which was mostly omitted by research participants. Essentially, lack of clarity and uniformity in the understanding of vision at top management level has enormous influence on the effectiveness of the internal strategic communication to guide middle managers and lower level employees on what is important to implement as part of strategic intent. It is important that strategic co-ordination yield synergy through the co-ordination of complementary strategic messages.

The differences in understanding of vision were not confined to top and middle management levels at KZNSB. For instance, some junior employees expressed the vision of KZNSB as working with the community while others showed lack of awareness of the vision of their organisation. Internal strategic communication at KZNSB did not achieve strategic alignment as there was no clear and common awareness and understanding by all internal stakeholders about the vision. According to Hume and Leonard (2014) uniform but also complete understanding of vision and mission is one of the fundamental outcomes of effective internal strategic communication. It is further argued that strategic consensus or shared understanding among members of an organization about strategic priorities is critical not only in promoting a unified direction, but also increasing strategic commitment (Hume and Leonard, 2015). This resonates

with Watson Wyatt Worldwide's (2004) model of the hierarchy of effective communication which asserts that effective internal communication drives the behaviour of management and supervisors and develops a clear line of sight so that employees can understand how their jobs contribute to the organisation's goals and achievements. Consistent internal strategic communication is futile if there are differences not only in what top managers focuses on but also how they communicate to junior employees. It is essential that all contacts disseminating internal strategic communication at KZNSB be integrated to present a consistent and synergistic organizational strategic intent and identity. However, it should be noted that an integrated internal strategic communication approach does not mean that individual departments/divisions should not be allowed to produce planned strategic messages, but rather that they should

conform to a central positioning strategy and core values and coordinate their activities with other departments/divisions that interact with the same stakeholders (Tyler, 2011). At KZNSB, internal strategic communication did not have much effect in mobilizing employees around KZNSN's vision and strategic priorities which was a major barrier to ensure flow of strategic communication to low-level employees.

### **5.3 Junior employee engagement and unsupportive middle managers**

Another key finding of this study is that the opening up of channels for employees to communicate with their organisation, the communication of strategic direction to employees (New maritime school as part of growth) in the organisation, and employee involvement to provide input were effective to create employee engagement and sense of belonging. More specifically, junior employees also reflected how increased access to bosses and freedom to raise complaints at KZNSB made them to engage with a variety of employee-related issues and also feel connected to top management. An engaged employee is motivated, self-improving, and productive while aligning himself or herself with company culture and business strategy.

This finding resonates with Mellor and Dewhurst's (2008) framework for an effective internal communication function which recognises the role of engaged employees, but also an engaged employee as a result of effective internal communication. It is argued that effective internal

strategic communication creates an employee who has a positive attitude towards his or her job, believes and identifies with the organisation. This study has showed how internal strategic communication that creates dialogue between the employee and the organisation has potential to attitudinally and behaviourally move employees towards employee engagement and organisational ambassadors (Omilion-Hodgess and Baker, 2014; Raj and Jyothi, 2011). Employees who identify with their organization feel a sense of commitment and serve as brand ambassadors for their organizations (Raj and Jyothi, 2011). Notably, when employees are engaged, they advocate the organization to coworkers.

Notably, some middle managers were displeased with the opening up of bottom-up communication and increased access to top managers which created a system where chain of command was sometimes disrespected. On the other hand, some of the middle managers did not talk positively about new developments in their organization (e.g. new maritime school) while others were not aware and bothered about the vision of their organization. In this way, internal

strategic communications did not create a supportive layer of middle managers who recognised, actively and properly executed their gate-keeping role at KZNSB. Employees who are uninformed of events become demotivated, as communication is the key to motivation. Internal strategic communication need to provide employees with adequate information, with opportunities to speak out, to get involved, to be listened to and to participate actively. An important role of strategic internal communication is to generate buy-in for an organization's goals and strategies. By helping each top manager, middle manager and junior employee to gain a greater understanding of the organization's strategic intent, internal strategic communication may help them to see how the information they hold may be useful to other parts of the organization. It is vital that internal strategic communication address the challenge of employees who are "the disgruntled within" who may pose a significant bottleneck or threat to internal strategic communication by being bad ambassadors. Employees can be stewards or liabilities to

an organization (Omilion-Hodgess and Baker (2014:435). The failure of some middle managers to be familiar with strategic intent, increase their understanding, commitment and effort has a negative effect on internal strategic communication.

#### **5.4 Variety of internal strategic communication tools**

This study found that there was a variety of tools such as interpersonal (face-to-face), print (Newsletter, Vision and Mission statements hanged on walls) and electronic (emails) were used for internal strategic communication at KZNSB. It was revealed that interactive communication was more effective but also desirable by many junior employees at KZNSB. Furthermore, some of the junior employees were illiterate, others did not have working computers to use emails while some detested reading of strategic information. The potential benefits of internal strategic communication rely on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and acceptable to them. If the media which is carrying the message is not acceptable to employees, the message has little chance of being attended to or acted upon. To be effective, the communication methods need to be appropriate and acceptable to internal stakeholders. Employee preferences for amount, channels and types of information are central if internal strategic communication is to be effective.

The findings suggest that it would be risky for top managers to assume that employees share uniform preferences for internal strategic communication media. The findings support a need to consider employees as a multi-dimensional set of diverse internal stakeholders rather than a single entity. This suggests that provision of alternative formats is necessary to enable employees to choose media they find most acceptable, appropriate and usable.

The findings support the value of a stakeholder-centric approach to internal strategic communication which encourages a focus on varying employee communication needs (e.g. IsiZulu, face-to-face, frequency) and recognition of a variety of preferences held by different groups of employees. One consequence of this employee-centric approach is consideration of how media affect employees. Internal strategic communication needs to take into account not only the strategic content, but also insights on employee preferences regarding communication methods.

## **5.5 Shift from induna style to interactive communication**

Another key finding in this study reflect that junior staff were involved in task-related rather than internal strategic communication. The study revealed that izinDuna were the conduits of non-strategic communication between junior staff and managers in the past at KZNSB. Thus, internal communication at KZNSB mirrored traditional Zulu cultural life. Notably, an InDuna in Zulu culture often acts as a bridge between the people and the king. Similarly, an InDuna was a bridge between managers and junior staff in the context of KZNSB (Sutherland, and Canwell, 2004). Furthermore, an InDuna as a senior official appointed by the king or chief is a powerful figure who is able to acquire many cattle because of royal favours (Sutherland, and Canwell, 2004). The study has also highlighted how the izinDuna at KZNSB were given power by white managers as a conduit of instructions and orders. The InDuna model of communication resonates with the transmission model which does not allow for relationships between people as communicators (e.g. differences in power).

Junior staff at KZNSB highlighted their increasing involvement in interactive communication with Chief Executive and other top managers as a key change. Unlike in the past, junior staff engaged in interactive exchange on a variety of strategic issues at KZNSB. Two-way communication style involved feedback from the junior staff to top managers as the sender. This allows the sender to know the message was received accurately by the receiver. In addition to change in the style of internal strategic communication which predominantly hinged on an InDuna, top managers, middle managers and employees at KZNSB also highlighted a change in

the scope of who were involved in the internal strategic communication. Internal strategic communication. Internal strategic communication was later inclusive as izinDuna `s were no

longer acting as a barrier to open and interactive communication between top managers and junior employees. While feedback from junior staff was important, the power was not equally distributed between top managers and junior staff as stakeholders at KZNSB. Interactive mechanisms need to facilitate upward as well downward communications to clarify strategic intent to all organisational levels. It is posit that this is critical to help employees to internalize the shared purpose, commitment and collaboration within an organization. To this end,

stimulating the alignment between employees and an organization's strategic initiatives is very significant to ensure employee engagement. One way of facilitating alignment is through high-quality internal strategic communication to all employees rather than few selected employees.

Creating internal communication alignment is vital as companies depend on every employee for the achievement of their strategic objectives.

## **5.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the key findings of the study and also illuminated them in the light of existing literature but on internal strategic communication. Interactive communication style of internal strategic communication was effective in creating junior employee engagement while achieving the opposite among middle managers. Lack of common or shared understanding of vision especially among top managers has a serious impact on strategic consensus at lower-levels. Furthermore, the shift from InDuna model of internal communication to direct, interactive internal strategic communication which made junior employees to have a sense of belonging and feeling of being valued at KZNSB was a notable change.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION**

### **6.0 INTRODUCTION**

Having presented and discussed the findings of this qualitative study, the aim of this chapter is to summarize the main findings and to conclude the study. In this respect, the chapter begins by summarizing the main findings. Thereafter, the chapter presents conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research.

#### **6.1 Overview of the study and summary of findings**

Focusing on the views of a variety of internal stakeholders, namely top managers, middle managers and junior employees, this qualitative study focused on evaluating how internal strategic communication was conducted between top managers and junior staff at KZNSB and also changed over time. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that only those that had sufficient experience of internal strategic communication at KZNSB were selected in this study to share their experiences through semi-structured, in-depth and face-to-face interviews. As the number of interviews was limited, data was analysed manually using open coding and constant comparison to generate themes which reflected how internal strategic communication was done at KZNSB, how it was effective and ineffective but also changed over the years.

Firstly, this qualitative study found two styles of interactive communication which contributed to the effectiveness of internal strategic communication at KZNSB. The first was interactive communications by the Chief Executive officer who occasionally communicated directly and simultaneously to all employees. Another style was also direct and interactive but used by the other members of top management who directly communicated with their direct reports only and not everyone in their Division at the same time. Arguably, if a strategic message is intended for all employees, it can be sent from the top to all levels simultaneously. Employees believe receiving information directly from top management is a sign that they are respected, which in turn, creates a propensity to speak favourably about the organization.

Secondly, this study also found that differences in how each of the Division at KZNSB communicated vision to lower levels contributed to ineffective internal strategic communication

as there was no strategic consensus. This was because top managers at KZNSB decided individually on what was strategic but also determined the method and timing of strategic

communication to their immediate reports and junior staff which created differences in internal strategic communication to lower-level employees in the various Divisions.

Furthermore, this study has also found that there were diverse perspectives regarding the vision of KZNSB as expressed by top managers, middle managers and junior employees. One of the top managers expressed the vision of KZNSB in terms of global leadership in bather protection only. Another top manager stated that the vision of becoming a global leader was not only limited to bather protection but also global leader in shark-related research. Lastly, one of the top managers was confused as he was not clear on the focus of the vision between the two mandates of shark protection and maritime school of excellence. This reflects how internal strategic communication at KZNSB failed to create strategic consensus but also alignment among top managers in their understanding of strategic intent especially vision. Middle managers understood the vision of KZNSB not in terms of global leadership but rather simply local activities to protect bathers along the KZN coastline while others were not familiar with the vision at all. Some of the junior employees expressed their understanding of KZNSB vision in terms of work with the community while others were not aware of it altogether. Thus, there was also lack of common understanding of the strategic intent of KZNSB across the hierarchical levels.

Thirdly, the qualitative study found that while internal strategic communication resulted in increased employee engagement among junior employees, the opening up of bottom-up communication displeased some middle managers who were not happy as the chain of command was sometimes disrespected. More importantly, the study highlighted that middle managers were predominantly unsupportive of strategic developments and intent at KZNSB. In other words, middle managers were not good ambassadors but rather the disgruntled from within KZNSB.

Fourthly, this study revealed that while a variety of tools such as interpersonal (face-to-face), print (Newsletter, written vision and mission statements hanged on walls) and electronic (emails) were used for internal strategic communication at KZNSB, it is the tools with interactive

communication aspects that were more effective but also desired by many junior employees at KZNSB. Illiteracy, dysfunctional computers to use for emails and lack of interest to reading strategic information were some of the factors which negatively affected the effectiveness of strategic communication tools at KZNSB. The potential benefits of internal strategic communication rely on appropriate messages reaching employees in formats useful and

acceptable to them. As such, views of junior employees on appropriateness, acceptability and preferences in terms of amount, channels and types of communication is central if internal strategic communication is to be effective.

Lastly, this qualitative study also found that junior employees were only involved in task-related rather than internal strategic communication in the past through the powerful *izinDuna* who were the conduits and bridge between managers and junior staff at KZNSB. Increased involvement of junior employees in interactive communication with the Chief Executive but also other top managers on strategic issues was a key change in internal strategic communication at KZNSB. Instead of the *InDuna* communicating on behalf of all employees like in the past, it was revealed that individual employees had now access to managers to communicate with regarding both task and strategic issues. Thus, junior staff were now increasingly involved in internal strategic communication at KZNSB than in the past although this change was seen as not yet adequate.

## **6.2 Conclusions from the study**

Internal strategic communication at KZNSB was not effective as it failed to create a common understanding of the vision among the different types of employees. There were differences in the understanding of vision of KZNSB among the top managers. Furthermore, the study also concludes that each top manager at KZNSB used his or her own discretion to decide on what was strategic, but also method and timing of communicating to lower-level employees. This was problematic mindful of the lack of common understanding of vision among the top management team.

The study also concludes that internal strategic communication at KZNSB was characterized by interactive and predominantly top-down style which was seen as effective by junior employees

who had never been informed, involved and engaged with the strategic intent of their organization in the past. Notably, junior employee engagement was one of the positive results of internal strategic communication but it also created unsupportive middle management at KZNSB.

Another conclusion is that internal communication from managers to junior employees in the past was not strategic but rather confined to instruction and orders. Instead, internal communication focused on task-related instructions and orders from white managers to junior

staff usually through an InDuna. In this way, there was no direct communication between managers and junior employees as the izinDuna were bridges between the managers and the junior staff at KZNSB. As such, the shift from an InDuna style of communication to a more direct and interactive communication which involved junior employees in strategic communication is one of the key changes in how internal strategic communication was done at KZNSB. In this regard, it is important that internal strategic communication should not just be interactive but also open to include every employee to result in employee engagement.

A variety of methods such as interpersonal (face-to-face) electronic (email) and impersonal (e.g. mission and vision hanged on walls) were used at KZNSB to communicate internal strategic communication from the top to junior staff. However not all of them were effective as employees are not a homogenous group of people (e.g. some were illiterate, some had no access to computers, others dislike reading, others needed translations into isZulu). Interactive communication which involved dialogues and opportunity to seek clarity were more effective than those that did not have these aspects (e.g. Vision statement hanged on walls without employees engaging with what they mean). While the use of a variety of communication methods is helpful, it is important that the views of employees are taken into consideration to ensure that appropriate and adequate messages reach employees in formats that are useful and acceptable to them.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Five key recommendations are made based on the findings and discussion in this study. Each of the recommendations is presented below:

#### **(a) All-inclusive strategic dialogue**

It is recommended that there is a systematic dialogue at KZNSB with all employees to help them specifically understand the strategic intent (i.e. vision and mission) so that they translate its meaning in their respective work. The strategic dialogue will help not only junior employees, but also some middle and top managers to have common understanding of the content of the strategic intent and how to re-align their respective behaviours and actions to contribute effectively towards its achievement.

#### **(b) Synchronised internal strategic communication practices of top managers**

It is recommended that KZNSB synchronise internal strategic communication practices by top managers across Divisions to ensure strategic consistency not only in content, but also communication methods and timing. The practice of each top manager using his or her discretion to communicate strategic intent or strategic issues needs to stop and be replaced by a more synchronised approach to ensure that employees in each Division get consistent strategic messages from their respective Divisional heads directly and simultaneously.

#### **(c) Creating an engaged and more responsible middle management**

It is recommended that KZNSB enhance internal strategic communication by creating more engaged middle managers who are ambassadors of KZNSB and advocates of internal strategic communication from top management to junior employees. Middle managers need to appreciate and actively play their intermediary role of reinforcing internal strategic communication to create communicative culture.

(d) Enhance direct and interactive internal communication by top management

It is recommended that KZNSB encourage frequent and interactive internal strategic communication by members of top management to directly and simultaneously engage all employees on strategic issues. The Chief Executive as a Chief Communications officer regarding strategic intent needs to lead this by communicating directly and simultaneously to all employees at least twice a year. It is recommended that the direct reports to the Chief Executive also communicate directly and simultaneously to all employees in their respective Divisions twice a year on how they are progressing towards the vision, mission, strategic objectives and what this means to each division and its employees.

(e) Tailored internal strategic communication

It is recommended that KZNSB tailor internal strategic communication to the respective communication needs of different employees (e.g. illiterate employees, those disinterested in reading, employees from Head office and Base stations, different hierarchical levels) to ensure that strategic message is received in an appropriate, acceptable and user friendly way. Translations of strategic messages into isiZulu (e.g. vision, mission, up-date on organizational growth) to accommodate those employees that do not understand written English and use of visual communication in the existing Newsletter are some of the recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of internal strategic communication at KZNSB as not all employees are the same.

## **6.4 Areas of future study**

There are two areas suggested for further research to enhance our understanding of internal strategic communication in South Africa. The current study selected participants with more than five years only which reduced the number of people at KZNSB who were eligible to participate, especially among top managers as they are employed on contractual basis. Future researchers may do the same study by using a selection criterion that is not restrictive but rather more embracing so that more people in top management with experience of internal strategic

communication participate in the study. It is proposed that three years of experience would be enough for this research purpose.

It is important to indicate that future researchers also increase the size of the sample but also adopt a stratified purposive sampling to ensure that the full variety of perspectives from many employees at the same levels are included. Relatively, this study involved very few employees from the largest stratum of employees, namely junior employees as such it is exploratory rather than representative of the views. In other words, future researchers need to use a more representative rather than purposefully selected sample for the findings to be generalizable.

Secondly, future researchers may compare and contrast the views of internal strategic communication as viewed by top managers with those of junior staff rather than combine them as it has been done in this study. It is also interesting if some future researchers only focus on junior employees to evaluate internal strategic communication primarily from the view point of the intended receiver rather than the source or intermediary.

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## APPENDIX 1: KZNSB STRATEGIC GOALS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

<i>Strategic Goals</i>	<i>Strategic Objectives</i>
<p>1. Good corporate governance promoted and sustained.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic leadership and effective and efficient administrative support provided;</li> <li>• Financial sustainability of the entity improved;</li> <li>• A safe, healthy and high quality working environment for all employees ensured;</li> <li>• Effective and efficient human resource management ensured;</li> </ul>
<p>2. Bathers protected from sharks in an environmentally sensitive manner.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shark attacks on bathers at all protected beaches on the KZN coastline prevented;</li> <li>• Modified methods of bather protection that minimize catch of none target species implemented at selected beaches;</li> </ul>
<p>3. Skills in the maritime sector enhanced.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 450 learners admitted into sectorally and occupationally-directed maritime learning programmes by 2016/17;</li> <li>• Average graduation level of 85% of all enrolled learners achieved by 2016/17;</li> </ul>
<p>4. Service delivery enabled through scientific capacity and knowledge generation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A research facility with emphasis on sharks and shark repellent technology</li> </ul>

	<p><i>maintained;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Scientific support provided to the entity and external bodies assisted;</i></li> <li>• <i>Non-lethal shark repellent cable developed, installed and evaluated;</i></li> </ul>
<p><i>5. Tourism in KZN promoted through raised awareness about bather safety in relation to sharks.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Public education and awareness programmes about bather safety, sharks and their environment provided, and public misconceptions countered</i></li> <li>• <i>The activities, services and expertise of the KZNSB marketed and promoted nationally and internationally.</i></li> </ul>

Source: Annual Performance Plan (APP) 2016/17.

10 November 2016

Mr VM Mbambo (207527967)  
Graduate School of Business & Leadership  
Westville Campus

Dear Mr Mbambo

Protocol reference number: HSS/0584/08D

New project title: AN EVALUATION OF INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AT KZN SHARKS BOARD  
IN SOUTH AFRICA

**Approval Notification – Amendment**

This letter serves to notify you that your request for an amendment received on 10 November 2016 has now been approved as follows:

- **Change in Title**

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

You

.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
/pm

cc Supervisor: Dr Abdulla Kader  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr M Hoque  
cc School Administrator: Ms Zarina Bullyraj

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