Influences on intra-company communication satisfaction:

working location and communication transparency.

National College of Ireland

Stephen Connolly

MSc in Management

National College of Ireland

Abstract

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Stephen Connolly, MSc in Management, National College of Ireland

Internal communication is seen as a critical component in organisations due to the effect it has on employee engagement, organisational culture, and employee behaviours. The recent outbreak caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way organisations operate and in most cases altered the working location for many of their employees. This shift in working location has altered communication practices in organisations and changed how they communicate with their employees.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction and communication channel satisfaction. Additionally, the study will explore the relationship between transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction. Quantitative research was undertaken through an online survey. The survey was conducted with 781 employees in the Department of Social Protection during the last week in March and first week of April 2021.

The findings from this research indicate that there is a difference between working location groups in relation to internal communication satisfaction and communication channel satisfaction. The results gathered also show that there is a strong positive relationship between transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction.

Key words: internal communication satisfaction, communication channel satisfaction, transparent communication practices, working location.

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List of Abbreviations

AO: Administrator Officer

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

AP: Assistant Principal

ASEC: Assistant Secretary

CO: Clerical Officer

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

DSG: Deputy Secretary General

DSP: Department of Social Protection

EO: Executive Officer

HEO: Higher Executive Officer

ICS: Internal Communication Satisfaction

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

MANOVA: Multivariate Analysis of Variance

NCI: National College of Ireland

PO: Principal Officer

SG: Secretary General

UPZIK: Internal Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale for the Study

Internal communication is one of the fastest growing areas in public relations and communication management due to factors such as globalisation and restructuring of firms. These factors have decreased trust between employees and management in firms, which has resulted in organisations viewing internal communication as a critical component (Tkalac Verčič, Verčič and Sriramesh, 2012). Internal communication research has increased substantially over the last number of years, and has focused on a wide variety of topics (Lee and Yue, 2020). These topics include the role internal communication has played on organisational culture, employee behaviours, and leadership to name just a few. There have been 223 published articles worldwide on internal communication since 1970, of which only 29 examined internal communication in a single organisation. Although extensive research has been carried out on internal communication globally, only a handful have looked at it from an Irish perspective and no study has focused on a Government Department in Ireland.

The recent outbreak caused by the global SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic has changed the way in which organisations operate with more employees now working from home. This shift has altered communication and interaction with employees within each organisation. To date there has been minimal research conducted on the impact of altered working locations as a result of the pandemic, on internal communications within organisations. As such, the author views this as an opportunity to gain further insight into internal communication in a Government Department in Ireland during a pandemic. In addition to this, the author has a keen interest in internal communication satisfaction, namely communication channels, as a large part of their role involves the dissemination of information through particular channels, and they are interested to see how satisfied their colleagues are with specific channels. This study will research

internal communication in the Department of Social Protection (DSP) by investigating employee satisfaction with internal communication, and it will focus on transparent communication practices during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

1.2 Research Objectives

There are two main aims to this study. Firstly, the research will investigate the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction and communication channel satisfaction in the DSP. Secondly, the research will investigate the relationship that transparent communication practices have on internal communication satisfaction. Additionally, the research aims to identify particular areas where internal communication satisfaction is low across the Department and to identify the preferred communication channels of employees.

The objective of the research is to add to the limited research that has been published on internal communication in Ireland. This will be achieved by focusing on internal communication satisfaction levels of employees in an Irish Government Department. The research will primarily be focused on satisfaction levels with internal communication and practices and if they differ based on working location. In order to answer the research objective, an online survey was conducted with employees of the Department of Social Protection involving a series of questions regarding their internal communication satisfaction during the past year.

1.3 Chapters Overview

This dissertation comprises of seven main chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Methodology, Organisational Context, Results and Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion and Recommendations.

1.3.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter will set the basis and rationale for the study and outline the main subject topic of this research – Internal Communication Satisfaction. The research objectives and chapters outline will also be discussed.

1.3.2 Literature Review

This chapter will begin by reviewing the current literature on internal communication, internal communication satisfaction, communication channels, and lastly transparent communication practices. It will include the background to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the current state of internal communication research whilst also providing a foundation for the current research study.

1.3.3 Research Methodology

This chapter will outline the methodology used for collecting and analysing data for this research study. The research philosophy that underpins this research study will be discussed. This chapter will conclude with the limitations of this particular research methodology before addressing the ethical considerations identified by the author.

1.3.4 Organisational Context

This chapter will provide a conversation around the organisational context in the Department of Social Protection. It will discuss the Department's background, the reasoning of why this Department was selected and present the hierarchical structure of the Department.

1.3.5 Results and Analysis

This chapter will provide the findings from the Internal Communication Satisfaction and Practices survey that was disseminated to all employees of the Department of Social Protection.

1.3.6 Discussion

The sixth chapter will include a discussion of the findings presented in the previous chapter with reference to the research objectives and hypotheses. Additionally, the published literature presented in chapter two and the findings presented in chapter five will be discussed in the context of the current research study.

1.3.7 Conclusion and Recommendations

The final chapter will provide a conclusion for this research study, outline limitations from the research study, and put forward recommendations for future research. Recommendations for the Department of Social Protection regarding internal communication will be outlined.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Internal Communication

Internal communication is the flow of information among all individuals of an organisation. It involves the producing and delivering of organisational messages, the inclusion of all employees, and provides a way for leadership to engage and motivate employees. Researchers define internal communication in many ways. Men and Bowen (2017) define it as "a central process in the organisation through which employees share information, meaning, and emotions". Welch and Jackson (2007) define it slightly differently by stating that internal communication is the sum total of all stakeholder interactions and relationships at all levels in an organisation. Each definition views internal communication from a different viewpoint; one describes it as a process in an organisation with employees being the only stakeholders, whilst the other views it more from a point of view involving a relationship with all stakeholders. According to Coric, Vokić and Verčič (2020), the main goal of internal communication practices within organisations, both formal and informal, is to disseminate information to audiences in an upward, downward and horizontal way. The quality of internal communication is crucial for organisations as it has an impact on organisational effectiveness by improving relationships and communication between managers and employees (Welch, 2012).

2.2 Internal Communication Satisfaction

Satisfaction with internal communication is a direct result of the internal communication practices used in an organisation (Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). Research into communication satisfaction has increased with several articles published recently which have shown that satisfactory and effective communication can contribute to an organisation's performance (Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). On one hand, employees that are satisfied with internal communication tend to greater influence the effectiveness of the organisation. On the other hand, when internal communication satisfaction is low it can lead to

increased employee turnover, larger amounts of absenteeism and reduced commitment to the organisation (Verčič, 2021).

According to Jacobs *et al*. (2016), there is an association between internal communication and employee satisfaction. Typically, internal communication tends to be either symmetrical (two-way) or asymmetrical (one-way). Symmetrical communication is used in organisations to help facilitate communication between the organisation and all employees. Asymmetrical communication follows a more top-down approach and is used as a method of informing and influencing employees in what they need to do (Men, 2014b). Jacobs *et al*. (2016) indicate that communication is predominantly one-way taking a top-down approach. They suggest that there is growing awareness among managers that employees at all levels should be informed about key issues and given the opportunity to contribute and help achieve organisational objectives, which in turn improve satisfaction levels of employees. Welch and Jackson (2007) also believe that internal corporate communication is predominantly one-way but state that if the message is clear and consistent it can help build employee engagement. The authors comment that two-way communication is considered ideal, however, face-to-face communication is not always practical and one-way communication is best used when message consistency is important. Verčič and Vokić (2017), suggest that internal communication satisfaction plays a significant role in employee engagement. The most relevant elements of internal communication on employee engagement were found to be an employee's satisfaction with feedback, informal communication, and communication during meetings. These findings highlight the importance that internal communication satisfaction has on other elements in an organisation.

Downs and Hazen (1977) describe communication satisfaction as a multidimensional construct and they developed a seven dimension questionnaire to measure communication satisfaction. Verčič, Vokić and Coric (2009) are of the

same opinion and consider internal communication as multidimensional, however, they argue that there are eight constructs. Along with most multi-dimensional constructs, there are particular dimensions that are more important than others in internal communication. Research has shown that communication with your supervisor (Knezevic *et al.*, 2019; Vokić *et al.*, 2020), the communication climate (Downs and Hazen, 1977; Mehra and Nickerson, 2019; Vokic, Bilusic and Najjar, 2020), and the quality of communication media (Knezevic, Mijatov and Nedeljkovic, 2019; Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020) are the most strongly correlated to overall internal communication satisfaction. Therefore it is necessary for organisations to understand these three important constructs and to determine if their employees are satisfied with these three constructs in particular.

2.2.1 Communication with Immediate Supervisor

The first of these important constructs is an employee's satisfaction with the communication between them and their immediate supervisor. An employee's communication satisfaction towards their supervisor can be determined by their openness to new ideas, their ability to listen to their concerns, how they care for them, and how they help them deal with problems in the workplace (Knezevic, Mijatov and Nedeljkovic, 2019). Research has shown that when employees are satisfied with the communication between them and their supervisor it is positively related to building both an employee and organisational trust atmosphere (Vokić *et al.*, 2020). Whilst communication with an employee's immediate supervisor is an important driver for building trust, other elements of communication satisfaction are important for building and maintaining trust. Vokić *et al.* (2020) argue that employees need to be satisfied with feedback, informal communication, and communication in meetings as these drivers, while less important, are still needed to build trust in the organisation.

2.2.2 Communication Climate

Another important construct for internal communication satisfaction comes from the communication climate. An organisations communication climate is made up of both organisational and individual communications. To one extent, it looks into employee's satisfaction with communication and its influence on them to achieve the organisations goals. To another extent, it looks at the manager's level of awareness and understanding of the issues faced by their employees (Downs and Hazen, 1977). There are two categories of communication climate – a cooperative climate and a defensive climate. A cooperative climate is flexible, and task-focused while being based on mutual respect. A defensive climate is rigid, and individual-focused and lacks trust between the employee and the organisation. The climate is influenced by several factors including culture, traditions, workplace relationships, and communication networks (Pirjol and Radomir, 2017). An organisations communication climate is key in building overall organisational trust, mainly when the organisation is open and honest with employees, and is reliable by acting on what it says and does (Vokić *et al.*, 2020). A positive communication climate is one in which employees of an organisation view both interactions with other employees and the quality of communication in a positive way (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). Additionally, a positive communication climate can enhance organisational efficiency and can reduce employee turnover. Neill, Men, and Yue (2019) suggest a communication climate that is open and encourages everyone to take part is one where employees identification with the organisation is increased. When this occurs, employees are more likely to be accepting of change when it arises by becoming more cooperative and championing the change.

2.2.3 Quality of Communication Media

The third most important construct for communication satisfaction derives from the media quality in an organisation. The quality of communication media stems from an employee's satisfaction with the overall process of communicating information in an organisation (Knezevic, Mijatov and Nedeljkovic, 2019). Daft and

Lengel (1984) proposed a model for describing communication media in terms of media richness. They suggest that communication channels fall into a media richness hierarchy (or medium) based on four characteristics – immediacy of feedback, the type of cues used, natural language, and personal focus of the message. According to the authors, face-to-face communication is the highest information medium and highest in information richness. This is the case as face-to-face communication facilitates the use of immediate feedback, a variety of cues, the use of natural language and it enables the message to be directed at the right person (personal focus). It is considered the most appropriate channel to use when the information being communicated is complex in nature (Crescenzo, 2011; Men, 2014b; Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). Lean channels include written documents, newsletters, reports, and posters, whilst phone, email, and instant messages are considered moderate communication channels (Daft and Lengel, 1984; Lee, 2018). Research has shown that from a managers communication satisfaction perspective, they tend to have increased levels of satisfaction when the communication media available to them is easy to use and effective in reaching the intended audience (Mehra and Nickerson, 2019). Men and Bowen (2017) suggest that although research has shown time and time again that face-to-face communication is the most preferred and trusted communication channel, it has limitations. One of these limitations is the challenge of using this type of channel when the organisation is widely dispersed. As such, it becomes clear that organisations should be aware of the levels of satisfaction employees show towards certain communication channels, especially when employees are working in various locations.

2.3 Communication Channels

Over the last number of decades, the landscape of internal communication has changed immensely due to new technologies and communication preferences. As such, organisations now use an increased variety of channels to reach their audience. These range from the traditional face-to face meetings and print media to the more modern methods such as electronic media and social media

(Crescenzo, 2011; Men and Bowen, 2017). The choice of channel used in organisations depends on a variety of factors which include the size of the organisation, the culture and the level of technical development (Lee, 2018; Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). Regardless of the type of channel used in organisations, all will engage the audience in different ways and will determine the scale and pace which the intended message will reach the audience (Men, 2014b).

Crescenzo (2011) suggests that organisations need to ensure that they select the right communication channel for their message, as information overload can occur if multiple channels are selected to disseminate the same message. They suggest that certain channels can be used in conjunction with each other to help build a better user experience, such as merging print channels with an organisations intranet. This can help build a sense of community in an organisation and encourages more two-way communication. Research undertaken by Verčič and Špoljarić (2020) found that employees are predominately satisfied with internal communication when rich media channels are used and less so when an organisation uses certain lean media channels. These findings are generalisable as a large sample size was used and 10 organisations participated in this research. The study also found that all generations of employees preferred discussion with managers using traditional media (forums and meetings) rather than through newer social media channels. Understanding the communication channels favoured by employees can help organisations to build an honest, open and transparent communication culture (Springboard Communications, 2020). Welch (2012) suggests that organisations show little regard to their employees communication preferences by continuing to use channels that are a source of annoyance for employees. This disregard can result in the message not being acted upon as employees may dislike the channel used to deliver the message. Unfortunately, the sample used in this study was small and amounted to an over-representation of female participants (80% female). Although this is the case, the

study gives a good insight into employee perspectives on communication channels used in an organisation. Importantly, communication preferences may not be uniform in an organisation. A one-size fits all approach is unsuitable and it falls on management to evaluate the preferences of employees whilst taking into account their demographic characteristics (Marques, 2010).

The pandemic has increased the use of certain communication channels, namely email and conference calls (Institute of Internal Communication, 2020). Email, video meeting/virtual, company intranet, and internal social networking channels have all seen an increase in use during the pandemic, whilst in person meetings and print publications are now being used far less than before the pandemic (PoliteMail, 2020). A survey of 483 respondents carried out in the United Kingdom during the early stages of the pandemic found that the most used channel for communication was through email with 99% of respondents stating this was the case. The same survey found that the most effective channel used in their organisation was video/conference calls (Institute of Internal Communication, 2020). Results from a survey conducted in Ireland are similar with three quarters of respondents answering that email was the most used channel during the pandemic (Springboard Communications, 2020). Respondents indicated that they want two-way communications to improve, with 85% wanting the opportunity to give feedback to their employer (Springboard Communications, 2020). While both surveys give insight on the communication channels used in organisations, they don't specify the industry the respondents came from, the positions that they hold (i.e., entry level, middle management, etc.), or their working location (working from home or working in the office). Research from these perspectives would be of interest to organisations to determine if there are differences between groups in relation to satisfaction with current communication channels.

Research by Kovaitė *et al*. (2020) focused on digital communication channels used during a change process in an organisation. This research is particularly key during

the current pandemic in which digital communication channels have risen in popularity due to the necessity of large cohorts now working from home. The researchers found that two-way digital communication channels are powerful during stages of change, especially during the understanding (stage 2), acceptance (stage 3), and follow-up stages (stage 5). While this is the case, they report that email is an important channel to use during the initial stage of change when employees only need to know that a change is needed. The authors conclude that no one digital communication channel is more important than another and that a mix of channels is key during a change process. As such, the study would have been more interesting if it had included non-digital communication channels and investigated if they were as powerful during the different stages of change as digital channels.

2.4 COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is a disease that has been caused by a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that was first identified in China in 2019 (World Health Organisation, 2020). The outbreak of this disease has triggered a global health crisis and with that a prolonged global recession (De Brun, Monaghan and Yakut, 2020). This pandemic has not just disrupted the daily lives of millions throughout the world but it has impacted the way workplaces function (Li *et al.*, 2021). Organisations have had to introduce social distancing in workplaces, deal with travel restrictions, work with skeleton crews in some offices and deal with a much larger percentage of employees now working from home. As such, organisations had to change the way they work and communicate with employees during these unprecedented times. Research suggests that employee wellbeing and performance are improved when an organisation facilitates clear communication between employees and their supervisors (Gigi and Pavithra, 2020). With these advantages in mind, it is vital to investigate the effect of the pandemic on communication satisfaction, namely through the shift to remote working.

2.5 Working from home

Working from home has risen in popularity over the last decade and has become routine for many employees. Whilst this is the case, many employees that never worked from home have been forced to do so as a result of the current pandemic. This shift to working from home has moved the effectiveness of internal communication into the spotlight along with fundamental shortcomings. These shortcomings include a decrease of internal communication effectiveness and lack of managerial experience in delivering successful communication in an online environment (Svec and Mura, 2020). Many organisations have increased the volume and frequency of communication with their employees due to the move to remote working. A survey conducted by Springboard Communications of 200 employees throughout Ireland found that over 70% of employees have seen the volume of internal communication increase over a six month period during the pandemic (Springboard Communications, 2020). While this can be seen as a positive, over 30% of respondents from this survey indicated that the communication they received was not useful to them (Springboard Communications, 2020). This volume of communication and the idea of quantity over quality can lead to important messages becoming lost in their delivery. The move to working from home has resulted in remote workers relying on information and communication technology (ICT) to communicate with colleagues and supervisors. This reliance has reduced the number of face-to-face communications between employees and their supervisors to online communications. As a result, remote workers can experience low productivity levels due to ineffective communication during the pandemic (Wang *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, remote workers might feel that their privacy has been impacted due to the lack of separation between work and home. Whilst this may be the case, Chamorro-Premuzix and Buchband (2020) comment that clear communication can be key in building employee trust and corporate transparent communication. Taking this into consideration, the need to investigate the effect of remote working and communication transparency on internal communication becomes apparent.

2.6 Transparent Communication

Communication is considered a key component for the successful implementation of organisational change as it can prepare people for the transition and improve their understanding of the change. Positive communication decreases resistance to change and reduces confusion that arises due to the change (Kitchen and Finbarr, 2002). Scholars suggest that positive communication should be frequent and authentic whilst ensuring that all relevant information is delivered and feedback is sought from employees as this will encourage understanding of why change is necessary (Li *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, organisations should adopt a two-way participatory practice with employees, over that of a traditionally top-down approach to communication. This will allow employees to voice their opinions during the change process resulting in reduced anxiety, increased acceptance of the change, and greater satisfaction with the organisation (Lewis and Russ, 2012).

Transparent internal communication is one such model that organisations can use during a change process which can determine how employees react towards change. Men (2014*b*) refers to transparent internal communication as all communication in an organisation being made available to employees in a timely manner, regardless if it is positive or negative in nature, so employees can begin thinking and evaluating the information and holding the organisation to account. Several scholars suggest that there are three aspects or dimensions to transparent internal communication: accountable, participative, and informational (Rawlins, 2009; Men and Stacks, 2014; Li *et al.*, 2021). To be accountable, an organisation needs to disclose all substantial information including information relating to problems or weaknesses and open itself up to criticisms of the words, actions and decisions made by the organisation (Men and Stacks, 2014). To have participative transparency, an organisation needs to invite employees to participate in the collecting of information needed to make organisational decisions (Rawlins, 2009). Lastly, informational transparency can be achieved when organisations provide

truthful and valuable information to their employees in order to avoid confusion and improve clarity of the message (Lee and Li, 2020).

Men (2014*b*) investigated the link between transparent communication on employees perception of an organisation. Results from that study showed that organisations developed a favourable reputation with their employees when they adopted transparent communication practices. Additionally, employees were found to establish a sense of ownership towards the organisation. Research by Wang (2020) suggests that transparent communication helps in building trust while also increasing an employee's relational satisfaction with an organisation once the information provided is truthful and employees are given the opportunity to provide feedback. Several scholars have researched transparent communication practices in organisations and found that they are associated with employee trust, employee engagement, employee communication behaviours, and an organisation's internal reputation (Li *et al.*, 2021). A study by Li *et al*. (2021) into transparent internal communication, during the early stages of the pandemic, showed that transparent communication has an impact on how employees cope with change and the study revealed that it can reduce employee uncertainty around the change. Additionally, the researchers found that when such practices were adopted and used by organisations, they were able to foster healthier relationships with their employees.

Some scholars suggest that internal communication satisfaction is a crucial part of internal communication practices (Sincic Coric, Poloski Vokic and Tkalac Vercic, 2019) whilst others suggest that there is a significant and positive relationship between the two (Hargie, Tourish and Wilson, 2002; Carriere and Bourque, 2009). Although this is the case, research on the relationship between internal transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction appears to be sparse. Therefore, this study will investigate the relationship between the two variables.

2.7 Research Questions and Objectives

The research question for this paper is – What influence does working location and communication transparency have on internal communication satisfaction?

2.7.1 Research Objectives

As stated previously, the main objectives of this study are to gain insight into how internal communication satisfaction of employees may be impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically with respect to working location and communication transparency. Moreover, the objectives will aim to address the gap in internal communication literature from an Irish context and to improve understanding of internal communication during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to answering the main objectives, this research will also examine if satisfaction with the following constructs differs by working location.

1. Feedback

2. Communication with manager

3. Horizontal communication

4. Informal communication

5. Information about the organisation

6. Communication climate

7. Communication in meetings

8. Communication media

This research aims to understand if employees of the Department of Social Protection scored any dimension of internal communication satisfaction poorly in the survey as this could be of concern to the Department. An analysis of these findings could highlight an area that the Department may need to review further. For example, if employee's satisfaction levels with communication media is low, perhaps a review of the current communication channels used throughout the Department is required, which could result in a positive change. Another aim of

this study is to gather insight into the eight dimensions of internal communication satisfaction and how they impact on particular groups of employees in the Department. This information could assist the Department in tailoring a target-specific approach to a certain group of employees that scored elements of communication satisfaction poorly. For example, should the results find that a particular working location group are unhappy with communication in meetings then it may be beneficial for the Department to investigate this further and possibly structure meetings differently in the future for that particular group.

2.7.2 Hypotheses

Below are the research hypotheses that aim to support the main objectives of this study.

H1: There is a significant difference in internal communication satisfaction based on the respondent's working location

H2: There is a significant difference in communication channel satisfaction based on the respondent's working location

H3: Internal transparent communication practices will be positively related to internal communication satisfaction

2.8 Conclusion

When the COVID-19 pandemic became widespread, businesses began changing the way that they work and communicate with employees. As such, several studies have investigated internal communication satisfaction and how it relates to employee engagement and employee behaviours, however, few, if any, have looked at this topic during the pandemic. Research has shown that the quality of communication media, communication with an employee's supervisor, and the communication climate in an organisation are the biggest and most important drivers of internal communication satisfaction. Some researchers comment that

transparent communication practices are key during organisational change whilst others suggest that communication practices directly influence communication satisfaction. Again, minimal research has looked into the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

According to Kumar (2015), research methodology can be defined as a scientific way of conducting research leading to obtaining a researchers goals and objectives. The author suggests that research methodology is important to researchers as it will aid them in identifying and selecting the most appropriate research method for achieving their research objectives. For that reason, this chapter will begin by outlining the research philosophy and research approach before discussing the chosen data collection method and analysis. Additionally, limitations and ethical considerations for the study will be discussed.

3.2 Research Philosophy

An important element for any research project is to identify the research philosophy that guides the researchers beliefs and assumptions throughout the duration of the project (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A useful framework developed by Saunders *et al*. (2019) sets out a pathway for researchers to follow when undertaking research. This framework titled 'The Research Onion' suggests that the philosophy (most outer layer) should be considered first before determining the research approach to be used during the research project. Subsequently, the methodology, strategy, and procedures should then be considered.

Saunders *et al*. (2019) propose that a researcher's assumptions can fall under one of three groups – ontology, epistemology, or axiology. In the case of this research project, assumptions will be made from an epistemology perspective as the researcher is concerned with the nature of knowledge and methods of gaining this knowledge. Once an assumption perspective has been determined, researchers generally take a positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, or pragmatism position. This research will adopt a positivism position as the researcher intends on observing and measuring facts in order to produce generalisations from the data collected. This position will allow the researcher to

remain neutral and detached from the research and prevent undue influence on the research findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.3 Research Approach

Saunders *et al*. (2019) suggest that there are two contrasting approaches a researcher can select. The first being an inductive approach which begins with collecting data around a particular phenomenon before formulating a theory or framework. The second being a deductive approach which begins with a theory and involves testing propositions or hypotheses against that theory. This approach tends to be the most common approach selected in natural sciences research. As such, a deductive approach is best suited to this research as it will be highly structured and allows for the researcher to make generalisations from the selected sample. Additionally, a deductive approach is in keeping with a positivist philosophy.

At this stage of 'The Research Onion' it is important to decide on the research approach which is most suitable to answer and address the research question. The literature acknowledges that there has been an equal share of quantitative and qualitative methods utilised in the study of internal communication, with most of these studies using a large sample size from multiple organisations (Lee and Yue, 2020). Quantitative data is numeric in nature and is viewed by many as being more objective and scientific when compared to qualitative data. Quantitative data tends to be linked to more natural scientific approaches whilst qualitative data is generally categorical and is the method of choice when the phenomena being researched cannot be quantified (Lancaster, 2005). Walsh *et al*. (2015) suggest that there is a positive link between positivism, deduction, and quantitative research design. Therefore, this study will adopt a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between variables and allow the researcher to gather a large sample of data in a short period of time.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis
3.4.1 Research Instrument (Online Survey)

An online survey was used to collect quantitative data in order to test the hypotheses and answer the research question. This research design is appropriate to use when the research question will explore the preferences of employees (Welch, 2012). The online survey was made available to the sample population via an announcement on the Department's intranet platform and through an email issued to all staff members. The survey was open during the last week of March and first week of April 2021. The survey was created using an enterprise account on SurveyMonkey which allowed the researcher to gather a large amount of responses.

To investigate the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction, the researcher selected a survey that has been applied multiple times by several researchers and has proven to be both reliable and valid (Vercic and Vokic, 2017; Coric, Vokic and Vercic, 2020). The Internal Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (UPZIK), developed by Tkalac Vercic *et al*. (2009), was used to assess internal communication satisfaction. This instrument is a series of 32 items measuring internal communication satisfaction on eight four-item dimensions (Table 1). Participants evaluated their satisfaction with each item using a seven-point Likert scale. Responses ranged from 1-7 with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 7 being extremely satisfied.

Construct	Sample item
Satisfaction with feedback	Information on the consequences of poor performance
Satisfaction with communication with manager	Availability of immediate manager
Satisfaction with horizontal communication	How successfully I communicate with colleagues
Satisfaction with informal communication	Usefulness of information transferred through informal channels

Satisfaction with information about the organisation	Information about changes in the Department
Satisfaction with communication climate	Volume of communication in the Department helps me to identify with it
Satisfaction with communication in meetings	Usefulness of information obtained at meetings
Satisfaction with the quality of communication media	The way others choose to communicate with me

Table 1: Eight ICS constructs with sample item

In order to investigate the effect of working location on communication channel satisfaction, communication channels were categorised into lean, moderate, and rich based on Daft and Lengel's classification (1984). Originally, email was considered a lean media channel, however, a study by Byrne and LeMay (2006) determined that email was used frequently in organisations and therefore should be classed in the moderate media category. Therefore this study proceeded with email in the moderate media category. Participants were asked to state their level of satisfaction with nine communication channels (three for each media category) on a scale of 1-7 (1- extremely dissatisfied, 7 – extremely satisfied). Communication channels for this study included newsletters, information boards, meetings (all employees), email, intranet, Lync/Skype, phone, team meeting, and video chat.

With a view to investigating the relationship between transparent communication practices and ICS, the researcher adopted the Transparent Communication Practices Questionnaire from Jiang and Men (2017). Communication practices were divided into three areas with five items in each. Accountable transparency included an item such as 'The Department is open to criticism by employees', participative transparency included 'The Department asks the opinions of employees before making decisions' and substantial transparency included 'The Department provides reliable information to employees'. Originally, it was expected to ask participants to answer the questions in the context of 'During the

COVID-19 outbreak" as proposed by Li *et al*. (2021), however, this statement could illicit biased responses due to the pandemic. Instead, items were asked in the context of 'During the past year' to avoid bias. A seven point Likert scale was used which ranged from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (7) 'strongly agree'.

3.4.2 Population and Sample

The sample population for this research project involved all 6597 employees in the Department of Social Protection (DSP). In total, 991 responses were received of which 781 were complete and 206 were partial responses. These 206 responses were excluded from the data analysis. The author used self-selection sampling and opened the survey to all grades from Clerical Officer up to Secretary General. This sampling method was selected as the author had access to employees in the DSP.

3.4.3 Validity and Reliability

Surveys are a popular data collection method as they ensure that respondents are subjected to the same set of questions, they allow for a more efficient way of collecting data over other methods (e.g. interviews), and large sample sizes can be used (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The validity and reliability of collected data is primarily dependant on question design, questionnaire layout, and pilot testing outcomes (Bourke, Kirby and Doran, 2016). As such, all three instruments used in this research are adopted from previous literature as they have undergone rigorous testing and they have been applied multiple times by several researchers.

Further testing was undertaken on these scales which began with a reliability analysis of the internal communication satisfaction scale comprising of 32 items. Cronbach's α showed that the survey reached an acceptable reliability of α = 0.965. All eight internal communication dimensions varied between 0.866 and 0.964 implying internal reliability of the eight sub-scales. Similar reliability results were reported by Verčič and Špoljarič in their study of 1524 participants which showed that Cronbach's α varied from 0.757 to 0.984 (Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020).

A second reliability analysis was carried out on the communication channel classification scale comprising of nine items. Cronbach's α showed that the survey reached an acceptable reliability of α = 0.901. All three communication channel classifications varied between 0.755 and 0.825 implying internal reliability of the three sub-scales. These results are slightly higher than those reported by Byrne and LeMay where they achieved a Cronbach's α of 0.66 and 0.72 (Byrne and LeMay, 2006).

A final reliability analysis was carried out on the transparent communication practices scale comprising of 15 items. Cronbach's α showed that the survey reached an acceptable reliability of α = 0.953. All three transparent communication practices sub-scales varied between 0.852 and 0.946 implying internal reliability of the three sub-scales. Li *et al*. (2021) reported a Cronbach's α of between 0.85 and 0.88 in their study which further highlights the reliability of this scale.

3.4.4 Pilot Test

A pilot survey was conducted with a sub-set of the study population and consisted of five participants, three females and two males. The pilot survey was used to evaluate the length of time it took participants to complete the survey, to ensure that the questions and instructions were clear, and to provide the researcher with an opportunity to determine the value of each question in relation to the overall research aim. Following the pilot survey, the researcher made minor adjustments to the research instrument. These changes included tailoring the terms used in the questions to terms more applicable to those used in the DSP.

3.4.5 Data Analysis

This study used IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 for data analysis. The first part of the data analysis focused on the scores of the three core areas of internal communication satisfaction, communication channel satisfaction, and lastly

transparent communication practices. Following this, an analysis was conducted to review the results by demographics, namely working location with a view to understanding if working location had an impact on internal communication satisfaction and communication channel satisfaction. Finally, the relationship between internal communication satisfaction and transparent communication practices was analysed.

Hypothesis one used a MANOVA to test satisfaction with eight constructs of internal communication satisfaction based on working location. These tests were followed up with Tukey post hoc tests to determine where differences appeared between groups. Tukey post hoc analysis was chosen to control for Type 1 error, and it is a powerful analysis to use when testing a large number of means (Field, 2009). Normality in the data set was evaluated using the skewness and kurtosis values, with no issues being identified (Table 2). Orcan (2020) suggests that this method is widely used for checking normality. Skewness and kurtosis values up to an absolute value of 1 indicate normality.

Communication Construct	Skewness	Kurtosis
Feedback	-.145	-.925
Information about the organisation	-.086	-.769
Communication with manager	-.921	-.355
Horizontal communication	-.862	.424
Communication climate	-.034	-.852
Informal communication	-.210	-.377
Communication media	-.511	-.298
Communication in meetings	-.509	-.522

Table 2: Skewness and kurtosis values on eight communication satisfaction constructs

Hypothesis two used a MANOVA to test satisfaction with nine communication channels based on working location. Tukey post hoc tests were also run to identify differences between groups. Normality in the data set was checked using the

skewness and kurtosis values and all scales presented no issues (values were between -1 to +1).

Hypothesis three was analysed using a Pearson correlation test to determine the relationship between internal communication satisfaction and transparent communication practices. No significant outliers were detected and all variables appear to be normally distributed (skewness and kurtosis values were between -1 to +1).

3.5 Limitations

All research methodologies have limitations and it is important that these are understood by the researcher. One of the main limitations of this study is the use of self-selection sampling. Responses could be biased by an over-representation of respondents that have strong feelings, either positive or negative, regarding the research topic.

Additionally, the use of an online survey for data collection presents some challenges. This collection method allows for participants to complete the survey at a convenient time for them. However, there is an increased risk that participants completed the survey in a distracting environment which may have affected their full concentration.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are of utmost importance in research, especially when human participation is involved, as they protect participants safety, mental health, and privacy (Albon, 2007). Prior to commencing primary research, an ethics form was completed and submitted for ethical review, along with a research proposal, to the National College of Ireland (NCI) outlining the study and proposed methods to be used. Additionally, consent was sought from the DSP to allow the researcher to conduct research in this organisation.

3.6.1 Informed Consent

Albon (2007) states that researchers must provide participants with detailed information regarding the study and they should outline what the participant can expect to experience if they take part. Therefore, before participants committed to participating in this research study, they were informed of the nature of the study, the topics that would be covered, and they were provided with instructions. This allowed for every participant to make an informed decision on whether they wanted to participate in this study. Every participant was presented with a consent form page when they clicked on the survey which outlined the research topic, objectives, and expected duration (Appendix 1). They were then presented with an option to consent to taking part and if they opted in, they were then able to proceed with the survey. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

3.6.2 Confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants

In addition to ensuring that participants had provided informed consent, it was prudent to ensure the participants were informed that they would remain anonymous throughout the process. Moreover, participants were informed that responses would only be collected for use in this research study. Upon completion of the research, all responses will be destroyed in line with NCI's data retention policy.

3.7 Conclusion

It has been identified that this research will be guided from an epistemology perspective and positivism philosophy. The researcher opted to use a deductive and quantitative approach through the use of an online survey in a single organisation. Both the limitations and ethical considerations for this research were also addressed.

4. Organisational Context

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the context of the organisation of study. It will include a background of the Department, provide an overview of the scale of the Department, and touch on the hierarchical structure within the Department of Social Protection. Additionally, and most importantly, it will outline the reason for conducting this research within this Department.

4.2 Background

The Department of Social Protection is an Irish Government Department that has responsibility for Ireland's social welfare system. It was established in 1947 and it is currently led by the Minister of Social Protection with the assistance of two Ministers of State. It's main functions include formulating social protection and social inclusion policies, developing and delivering income supports for customers, and reducing fraud in the social welfare system.

The Department has a presence in every county in Ireland and currently administer more than 80 schemes and services that serve a wide range of people from families, to the employed or unemployed, to individuals with illnesses or disabilities, to the elderly, and to employers. It is one of the largest Government Departments in Ireland and it accounts for approximately 34% of all Government expenditure. The vast scale of the Department and its operation across the country provide a reason for why this Department was chosen for research purposes. Internal communication is key for organisations that are widely dispersed, and ensuring employees are satisfied with internal communication during a time of uncertainly is vitally important. Additionally, the Department has various strategic objectives planned for the upcoming years in which communication will play a fundamental role in ensuring that these objectives are achieved.

4.3 Organisation of the Department

The Department is hierarchical in nature which is typical of Irish Government Departments. There are seven levels that make up the hierarchical structure in the Department. At the end of February 2021, the Department had a total of 6597 staff members which comprised each of the seven levels of the hierarchical structure. The top of the hierarchy includes the Secretary General (SG) and Deputy Secretary General (DSG). Assistant Secretaries (ASEC) make up the next level and are generally the head of a specific division in the Department. Below them, Principal Officers (PO) make up the first level of senior management. Assistant Principals (AP) are the second level of senior management and usually report directly to a PO. Middle Management consists of Higher Executive Officers (HEO) and Administrative Officers (AO) who support high level management in the pursuit of organisational goals. Executive Officers (EO) make up entry level management and report to middle management. The final level of the hierarchy include Clerical Officers (CO) who provide clerical support to the Department.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief summary of the Department's background, operation, and structure. The next chapter will present the results and analysis of the internal communication satisfaction and practices online survey.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present the results and analysis that was carried out on the survey responses. The chapter will begin by presenting the five demographic characteristics of the respondents, followed by the MANOVA which investigated the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction (ICS). The chapter will then cover the MANOVA and Tukey post hoc tests that examined the effect of working location on communication channel satisfaction. Finally, the results of a Pearson correlation analysis that explored the relationship between transparent communication practices and ICS is presented.

5.2 Demographics

There was a total of 781 responses across 61 items, which comprised of 32 items from the UPZIK scale, 15 items from the transparent communication practices scale, nine communication channels, and five demographic questions. As depicted in Table 3, 67.2% of respondents were female, 30.6% were male, and 2.2% preferred not to identify their gender. The majority of respondents fell within the 45-54 age group (39.1%), followed by the 55 or older (29.2%), and then the 35-44 age group (23%). In total, 38.7% of respondents were working from home full time, 38.3% were doing blended working (i.e. working from home and in the office), and 23% were working in the office full time. A full demographic breakdown is presented in Table 3.

Variable	Value	Count	Percent
Gender	Male	239	30.6%
	Female	525	67.2%
	Other	0	0.0%
	Prefer not to say	17	2.2%
Age Group	Under 25	6	0.8%
	25-34	62	7.9%

	35-44	180	23.0%
	45-54	305	39.1%
	55 or older	228	29.2%
Grade	CO	257	32.9%
	EO	211	27%
	HEO	224	28.7%
	AO	6	0.8%
	AP	67	8.6%
	PO or above	16	2.0%
Work Area	Customer Service External Front Facing	384	49.2%
	Customer Service External	188	24.1%
	Customer Service Internal	97	12.4%
	IT	32	4.1%
	Policy & Legislation	50	6.4%
	Communications	20	2.6%
Working Location	Working from home	302	38.7%
	Office working	180	23.0%
	Blended working	299	38.3%

Table 3: Summary demographic information of survey respondents

5.3 Investigation of the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction

The first objective set out to determine if there is a significant difference in the dimensions of ICS based on the respondent's working location. In order to answer this, a MANOVA was carried out and was then followed up with a number of one-way between subjects' ANOVAs to compare the effect of working location on eight constructs of ICS. The eight constructs included satisfaction with feedback, communication with manager, informal communication, horizontal communication, information about the organisation, communication climate, communication in meetings, and lastly, communication media. All three working

location groups reported that they are somewhat satisfied with internal communication in general (M = 4.56, SD = 1.20).

Altogether, there is a significant difference in ICS between groups based on working location (F (16, 1532) = 2.329, p = .002). Respondents working from home reported higher levels of internal communication satisfaction than those based in the office and respondents of blended working. Therefore, hypothesis one is accepted.

Respondents were mostly satisfied with horizontal communication (M = 5.33, SD = 1.29), communication with my manager (M = 5.26, SD = 1.78), and communication media (M = 4.84, SD = 1.45), whilst they were least satisfied with the communication climate (M = 3.89, SD = 1.70), feedback (M = 4.11, SD = 1.58), and communication about the organisation (M = 4.11, SD = 1.51). Figure 1 shows an average of respondent's satisfaction levels across eight constructs of ICS based on their working location.

Of the eight internal communication constructs tested, six revealed that there was a significant difference between groups. Both satisfaction with communication with my manager (F (2, 778) = 1.823, p = .162) and satisfaction with informal communication (F (2, 778) = 1.966, p = .141) resulted in no significant difference between groups.
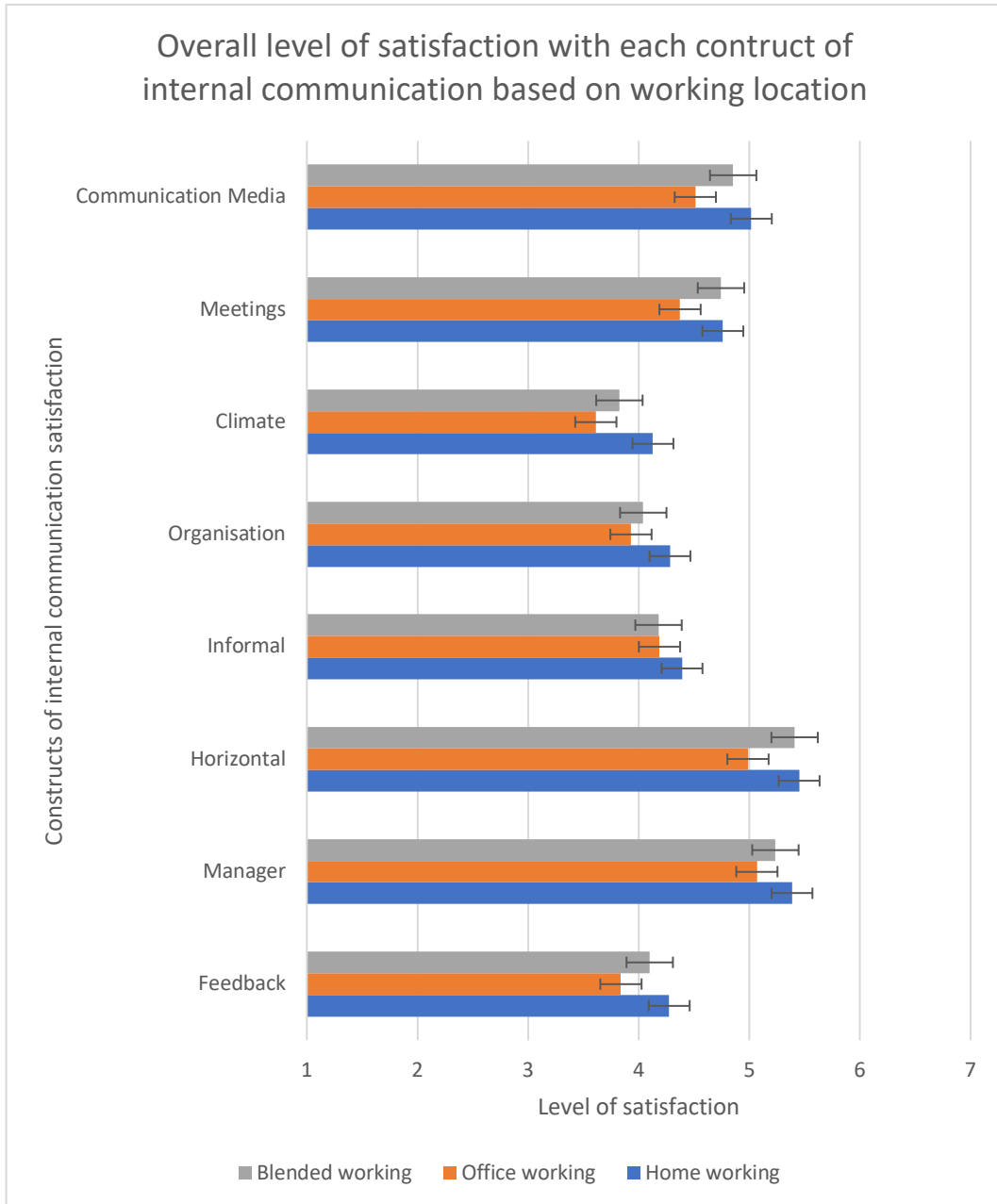
Figure 1: Overall satisfaction levels with each construct of ICS based on working location. Data is presented as mean values. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

5.3.1 Satisfaction with Feedback

On the whole, respondents working from home (M = 4.28, SD = 1.54), blended workers (M = 4.01, SD = 1.58), and respondents working in the office (M = 3.84, SD = 1.65) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with feedback.

As determined by one-way ANOVA, there was a significant difference between groups (F (2, 776) = 4.296, p = .014). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that satisfaction with feedback was significantly different between the groups that were working from home full time and working in the office full time (p = .010). The results showed that there was no significant difference between the working from home full time and blended working groups (p = .359) or for the groups that worked in the office full time and blended working (p = .190).

5.3.2 Satisfaction with Horizontal Communication

Altogether, respondents working from home were slightly satisfied with horizontal communication (*M* = 5.45, *SD* = 1.21), followed closely by blended workers (*M* = 5.41, *SD* = 1.23), and then by workers based in the office full time (*M* = 4.99, *SD* = 1.46).

There was a significant difference between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA (F (2, 777) = 8.324, p < .001). A Tukey post hoc test was carried out and revealed that satisfaction with horizontal communication was significantly different between the groups that were working from home full time and working in the office full time (p < .001) and for groups working in the office full time and blended working (p = .001). There was no significant difference detected between the working from home full time and blended working groups (p = .919).

5.3.3 Satisfaction with Information about the Organisation

Overall, respondents working from home (*M* = 4.28, *SD* = 1.44), blended workers (*M* = 4.04, *SD* = 1.54), and workers based in the office full time (*M* = 3.93, *SD* = 1.55) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with information about the organisation.

As determined by a one-way ANOVA, there was a significant difference between groups (F (2, 777) = 3.582, p = .028). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that satisfaction with information about the organisation was significantly different

between the groups that were working from home full time and working in the office full time (p = .035). There was no significant difference between the working from home full time and blended working groups (p = .121) or for the groups that worked in the office full time and blended working (p = .714).

5.3.4 Satisfaction with the Communication Climate

In general, working from home (M = 4.13, SD = 1.63), blended working (M = 3.83, SD = 1.72) and working in the office (M = 3.61, SD = 1.77) groups were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the organisation's communication climate.

There was a significant difference between groups as determined by a one-way ANOVA (F (2, 776) = 5.614, p = .004). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that satisfaction with the communication climate was significantly different between the groups that were working from home full time and working in the office full time (p = .004). The test revealed that there was no significant difference between the working from home and blended working groups (p = .074) or for the groups that worked in the office and blended working (p = .378).

5.3.5 Satisfaction with Communication in Meetings

For the most part, both the working from home (M = 4.76, SD = 1.61) and blended working (M = 4.74, SD = 1.61) groups were slightly satisfied with communication in meetings, whilst the working in the office (M = 4.37, SD = 1.70) group were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with communication in meetings.

There was a significant difference between groups as determined by a one-way ANOVA (F (2, 778) = 3.739, p = .024). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that satisfaction with communication in meetings was significantly different between the groups working from home full time and working in the office full time (p = .032) and for the those working in the office full time and blended working (p = .043). There was no significant difference between the working from home full time and blended working groups (p = .991).

5.3.6 Satisfaction with the Quality of Communication Media

By in large, working from home (M = 5.02, SD = 1.37), blended working (M = 4.85, SD = 1.46) and working in the office (M = 4.51, SD = 1.52) groups were slightly satisfied with the quality of communication media.

There was a significant difference between groups as determined by a one-way ANOVA (F (2, 778) = 14.532, p = .001). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that satisfaction with the quality of communication media was significantly different between the groups working from home full time and working in the office full time (p = .001) and for the those working in the office full time and blended working (p = .032). The test showed there was no significant difference between the working from home full time and blended working groups (p = .343).

5.4 Investigation of the effect of working location on communication channel satisfaction

The second objective set out to determine if there is a significant difference in communication channel satisfaction based on the respondent's working location. A MANOVA was conducted that used working location as the independent variable and satisfaction with nine different communication channels as the dependent variables. The nine communication channels were newsletters, information boards, meetings with all employees, email, intranet, instant messaging, phone, team meetings, and video chats. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in communication channel satisfaction between groups based on working location regardless of communication channel (F (18, 1446) = 1.823, p = .019). Therefore, hypothesis two is accepted.

Overall, all three working location groups were slightly satisfied with the nine communication channels used in the Department (M = 4.76, SD = 1.25). A further breakdown shows that the three groups are mostly satisfied with email as a communication channel (M = 5.31, SD = 1.57), followed by instant messaging (M

= 5.18, *SD* = 1.60), and then by intranet (*M* = 5.15, *SD* = 1.56). These top three channels are all classed as moderate communication channels based on Byrne and LeMay (2006) classification (originally proposed by Daft and Lengel 1984). All three groups had the lowest level of satisfaction with newsletters (*M* = 4.45, *SD* = 1.54), information boards (*M* = 4.43, *SD* = 1.53), and meetings with all employees (*M* = 4.30, *SD* = 1.84).

Figure 2 depicts respondents level of satisfaction with each internal communication channel based on their working location.
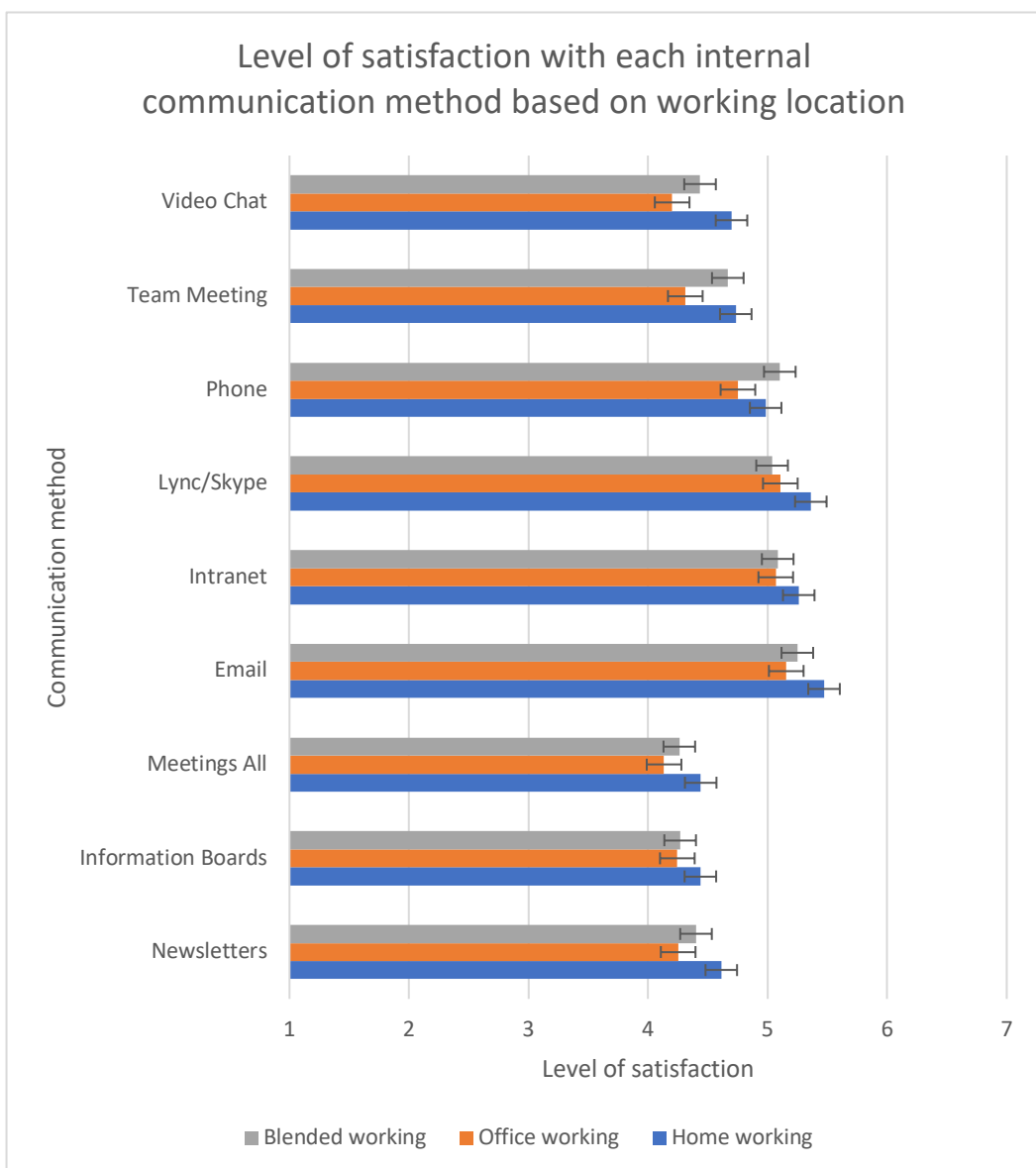

Figure 2: Satisfaction levels with each communication channel based on working location. Data is presented as mean values. Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Further analysis was conducted using Wilk's Lambda statistic which shows that there is a significant difference in satisfaction with all nine communication channels based on an employees working location. Results of analysis are reported in Table 4.

Variable	Wilks' Lambda	F	df	Error df	P
Newsletters	.984	3.16	4	1534	.013
Information boards	.982	3.46	4	1524	.008
Meetings with all employees	.983	3.25	4	1542	.012
Email	.983	3.36	4	1550	.010
Intranet	.981	3.63	4	1540	.006
Instant messaging	.977	4.41	4	1542	.002
Phone	.976	4.67	4	1532	.001
Team meetings	.983	3.30	4	1546	.010
Video chats	.982	3.52	4	1546	.007

Table 4: Summary statistics of communication channel satisfaction based on working location

Separate univariate ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed that three of the channels showed working location as having a significant effect on communication channel satisfaction, whilst six of the channels did not (Table 5). A series of Tukey post hoc tests were conducted on the three channels that showed a significant effect.

Dependent Variable	Between-Subjects Effects
Newsletters	$F_{(2, 767)} = 3.30$, p = .037
Information boards	$F_{(2, 763)} = 1.25$, p = .286
Meetings with all employees	$F_{(2, 772)} = 1.67$, p = .189
Email	$F_{(2, 776)} = 2.70$, p = .068
Intranet	$F_{(2, 771)} = 1.26$, p = .284
Instant messaging	$F_{(2, 772)} = 3.31$, p = .037
Phone	$F_{(2, 767)} = 2.47$, p = .085
Team meetings	$F_{(2, 774)} = 2.91$, p = .055
Video chats	$F_{(2, 774)} = 4.39$, p = .013

Table 5: Summary statistics of separate univariate ANOVAs

5.4.1 Satisfaction with Newsletters

Satisfaction with newsletters is significantly different between groups working from home and those that work in the office (p = .035), but not between working from home and blended working groups (p = .217), and working in the office and blended working groups (p = .563). The results suggest that respondents working from home full time are slightly more satisfied with newsletters when compared to respondents of blended working and respondents based in the office full time.

5.4.2 Satisfaction with Instant Messaging

Satisfaction with instant messaging is significantly different between groups working from home and those that work in the office (p = .001), but not between working from home and blended working (p = .166), and working in the office and blended working (p = .116). Altogether, the results suggest that respondents working at home full time are slightly more satisfied with communicating through instant message, such as Skype and Lync, than respondents based in the office full time.

5.4.3 Satisfaction with Video Chat

Satisfaction with video chat is significantly different between groups working from home and those that work in the office (p = .001), but not between working from home and blended working (p = .192), and working in the office and blended working (p = .100). These results suggest that respondents working from home full time are more satisfied with communication through video chat than office based workers.

5.5 Relationship of transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction

The third objective set out to determine if internal transparent communication practices are positively related to internal communication satisfaction. Descriptive statistics were conducted on the three constructs of transparent communication and are presented in Table 6. A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between transparent communication practices and internal

communication satisfaction. Results are shown in Figure 3, which indicate that there is a strong positive correlation between transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction, which are statistically significant (r = .811, n = 781, p < .001). Therefore, hypothesis three is accepted.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
TransparentComsComposite	781	1.00	7.00	3.6834	1.30982	.061	.087	−.537	.175
AccountableComposite	780	1.00	7.00	3.8487	1.32045	−.139	.088	−.367	.175
ParticipativeComposite	781	1.00	7.00	2.9366	1.52334	.516	.087	−.649	.175
SubstantialComposite	781	1.00	7.00	4.2617	1.51322	−.380	.087	−.534	.175
Valid N (listwise)	780								

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of the three transparent communication practices constructs
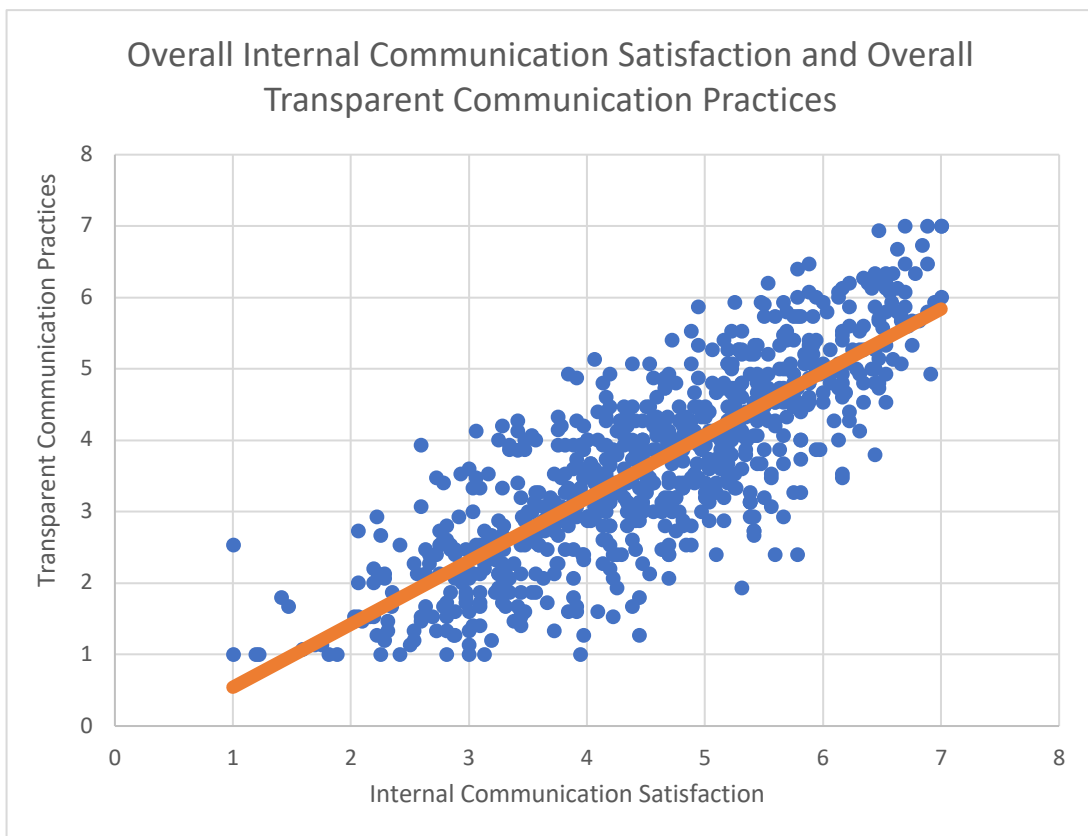

Figure 3: Scatterplot of transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction with line of best fit

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the statistical tests carried out to explore the three hypotheses developed by the researcher. The first objective aimed to determine if there was a difference in internal communication satisfaction based on working location. The findings show that there is a significant difference in six of the eight internal communication constructs based on working location, and hypothesis one was accepted.

The second objective set out to determine the effect of working location on communication channel satisfaction. The results indicate that there is a significant difference in communication channel satisfaction between groups based on working location regardless of communication channel, and hypothesis two was accepted.

The third objective set out to determine if transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction are positively related. The findings show that there is a strong correlation between the two variables, and hypothesis three was accepted.

6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher will relate the findings detailed in chapter five to the literature discussed in chapter two. The researcher will approach each of the three hypotheses individually in order to discuss the findings separately. The main findings show that working location has a significant impact on internal communication satisfaction and communication channel satisfaction. Additionally, transparent communication practices strongly impact the communication satisfaction of employees in the Department of Social Protection (DSP).

6.2 Investigation of the effect of working location on internal communication satisfaction

The first objective set out to determine if there was a difference in internal communication satisfaction (ICS) between groups that worked from home, worked in the office, and had a mix of working in both locations (blended working). The findings show that all employees, regardless of working location, were somewhat satisfied with overall internal communication, although this difference is minor across each ICS construct. When ICS is examined, working location has an impact across different groups with employees working from home having slightly higher ICS than other working location groups, in particular the office based group. Even though this difference is minor, it is important to understand where the differences are between groups so that improvements for specific cohorts of employees can be addressed. For instance, the results suggest that those working in the office are less satisfied with feedback than those employees working from home. Therefore, it is crucial for the DSP to investigate this difference and put in place procedures and processes that will help improve the feedback process for the office working group.

Research shows that organisations are more effective when ICS is high, whilst, problems such as increased absenteeism can occur when satisfaction is low

(Verčič, 2021). As groups in this study appear to be somewhat satisfied with overall internal communication, it would suggest that minor changes may be required to improve overall satisfaction. In this study, all three working location groups were mostly satisfied with horizontal communication and communication with their manager when compared to other ICS constructs. The overall findings of this study, mirror the results of the Verčič and Vokić (2017) study which found that respondents were mostly satisfied with these two constructs. Although the findings of the current research study suggest that there is no difference between group satisfaction with communication with their manager, the overall satisfaction levels are still high with all three working groups stating that they were slightly satisfied. This finding is in contrast to the researcher's expectations. Wang *et al.* (2021) suggest that the move to remote working has increased the use of online communications whilst also reducing face-to-face communications for employees with their colleagues and supervisors. The authors indicate that remote workers can experience ineffective communication, however, as all groups in this research study are satisfied with these types of communications, this appears to not be the case in this organisation.

Interestingly, the findings in this research show that the communication climate was the least satisfactory ICS construct among all three working groups. When examined further, there appears to be a difference between the group working from home and the office based group. The results suggest that employees working at home are neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the communication climate whilst the office based group are leaning towards being somewhat dissatisfied with the communication climate. According to the literature, the communication climate is considered to be one of the most strongly correlated factors to overall communication satisfaction, and key for building organisational trust and improving the acceptance of change (Mehra & Nickerson, 2019; Neill *et al.*, 2019; Vokić *et al.*, 2020). Low satisfaction levels within this study could be a result of the unplanned change to working locations at the beginning of the

pandemic. When this occurred, organisations had little to no time to consult with employees which likely increased anxiety and uncertainty. This may have increased the possibility of damaging the communication climate in the DSP.

6.3 Investigation of the effect of working location on communication channel satisfaction

The second objective set out to determine if there was a difference in internal communication channel satisfaction based on working location. Altogether, the results show a difference in communication channel satisfaction based on working location with the working from home group exhibiting higher satisfaction levels than the employees of the other groups. Previous research has shown that the quality of communication media is one of the main constructs that is strongly correlated to overall internal communication satisfaction (Knezevic, Mijatov and Nedeljkovic, 2019; Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020) and the results of this research study corroborate those findings.

All in all, the three working groups were slightly satisfied with the nine communication channels used in the DSP. These results draw similarities with the findings of Verčič and Špoljarič's research study which found that respondents were moderately satisfied with communication channels (Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). Communication media (i.e. communication channels) was the third highest satisfaction construct for the respondents in this research study, only slightly behind horizontal communication and communication with my manager. This indicates that the findings of this research complement the findings of previous studies which suggest that communication media is strongly related to overall ICS (Knezevic, Mijatov and Nedeljkovic, 2019; Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). Interestingly, the findings of this study suggest that employees that work from home full-time have higher satisfaction levels with newsletters, instant messaging, and video chat than employees that are based in the office. This result provides insight into the difference between working groups and highlights the need to target these groups through specific channels when selecting a

communication method. As suggested by Welch (2012), organisations tend to ignore their employees communication preferences, however, the results of this study suggest that it may improve communication satisfaction if organisations target groups through their preferred channels.

Men and Bowen (2017) state that face-to-face communication has shown time and time again that it is the most preferred and trusted communication method within organisations. Whilst this is the case, they acknowledge that communicating this way can be difficult when an organisation is widely dispersed. In the case of this research study, all three groups could be considered widely dispersed across Ireland, especially those employees working from home and those doing blended working as a result of the pandemic. As such, face-to-face communications has likely been impacted and reduced throughout the Department. As found in the literature, the use of email, intranet and video meetings has increased during the pandemic, whilst face-to-face channels have decreased (PoliteMail, 2020). Of the nine channels reported on in this study, respondents from all three working location groups stated that they were most satisfied with email, intranet, and instant chat (moderate channels). The rise in use of moderate communication channels, as a result of altered working location, could provide a reason for why all groups, in particular those working from home, appear to be most satisfied with moderate communication channels as opposed to rich communication channels (face-to-face). This is in contrast to previous research studies that found employees are mostly satisfied with rich communication channels, followed by moderate channels, and lastly lean communication channels (Byrne and LeMay, 2006; Tkalac Verčič and Špoljarić, 2020). Although this is the case, Byrne and LeMay (2006) comment that communication channels have different impacts on satisfaction depending on the type of communication being conveyed through that channel. Therefore, organisations need to select the channel that best conveys their intended message. Additionally, organisations need to consider that some groups prefer

communication through some channels over that of others such as in the case of this study where working from home employees favoured newsletters, instant messaging, and video chat more than their colleagues that worked in the office.

6.4 Relationship of transparent communication practices and internal communication satisfaction

The third objective set out to discover if transparent communication practices were positively related to internal communication satisfaction (ICS). Several researchers have reported that communication practices and ICS are strongly related to one another (Hargie, Tourish and Wilson, 2002; Carriere and Bourque, 2009), whilst others suggest that ICS is a crucial part of internal communication practices (Sinčič Ćorić *et al.*, 2019). It is for that reason that the researcher of this dissertation set out to determine if specific communication practices, in this case transparent communication practices, were related to ICS.

The findings of this study suggest that transparent communication practices are strongly and positively related to ICS. These findings complement the research of Hargie *et al*. (2002), Carriere and Bourque (2009), and Sinčič Ćorić *et al*. (2019) to suggest that transparent communication practices, adopted by organisations in times of change, have an effect on ICS in a similar way to other communication practices. Therefore, it is important for organisations to disclose all substantial information related to organisational problems to their employees (accountable), invite employees to gather information to make organisational decisions (participative), and provide truthful and clear information to their employees (informational). In doing so, organisations can focus on encouraging positive ICS, which in turn should improve working relationships, increase organisational efficiency, and reduce employee absenteeism and turnover (Welch, 2012; Verčič, 2021).

6.5 Conclusion

Ultimately, this research set out to determine if working location had an effect on internal communication satisfaction and satisfaction with communication channels. It is clear that there is a difference between groups, although this difference is minor in most cases. The findings of this research complement those of several previously published articles, and in some cases suggest a contrasting view to that of others. In addition, this research study set out to determine if there was a relationship between transparent practices and ICS. The findings suggest that these two variables are strongly related, with transparent practices having a positive effect on employees ICS.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

Internal communication satisfaction is a topic that has been widely researched from several perspectives and it has shown time and again the importance it has on an organisations success. After examining the current literature, the researcher discovered that only a handful of studies had researched internal communication in Ireland and none were conducted during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Following this review, the researcher determined that the purpose of this study was to investigate the effect that working location had on ICS and communication channel satisfaction, and to uncover the relationship between transparent communication practices and ICS. Following an online survey with employees of the Department of Social Protection, and analysis of the results, the key findings of this research study are presented below:

1) The first objective determined that there was a difference in ICS between different working location groups. Of the eight ICS constructs examined, six of them found a difference between groups, with the majority of these differences showing employees working from home having higher ICS than employees that are working in the office and employees that were blended working.

2) The second objective determined that there was a difference in communication channel satisfaction between working location groups regardless of communication channel. Three of the channels, namely newsletters, instant messaging, and video chat showed a significant difference between the groups working from home and working in the office with the former being most satisfied with these channels.

3) The third objective determined that there was a strong positive correlation between transparent communication practices and ICS. This result is significant for the Department of Social Protection and other organisations as it indicates that in times of change, when transparent practices are adopted, they can have a

strong impact on ICS and fundamentally, the relationship between the organisation and their employees.

7.2 Limitations

Due to time constraints, the researcher limited data collection to an online survey. One major drawback of this approach is that the researcher is unable to access specific feedback from respondents regarding why they feel a certain way about the topic. Another drawback with this method is that it relied on the self-reports of employees in the DSP. As with other studies that use self-reports, concerns are raised about bias in reporting and the honesty of the respondents. The researcher tried to reduce this bias by using established scales to minimise measurement error and ensure that questions were clear and easy to understand.

The research clearly illustrates that there is a difference in ICS and channel satisfaction based on working location. There is a possibility that employees opinions on the pandemic influenced their decision when partaking in this research. This raises the question of satisfaction levels post pandemic when employees working location may differ and their opinions may have changed.

7.3 Future research

A number of opportunities for further research into internal communication satisfaction emerge from the findings of this study. One such avenue would be to conduct a qualitative investigation utilising interviews or focus groups to delve into the topic further. Another such avenue would be to expand the research to include other Government Departments and private organisations in Ireland.

Additionally, future research would benefit from investigating internal communication satisfaction during and after a global pandemic using a longitudinal approach. This would help organisations to understand if ICS levels change for employees working in different locations during the pandemic compared to after the pandemic.

7.4 Recommendations

From the results, it is clear that working location has an effect on employees internal communication/communication channel satisfaction, and that transparent communication practices, adopted by organisations in times of change, feed into employee ICS. Therefore, the findings of this study present a number of recommendations for the Department of Social Protection (DSP).

According to the literature, the communication climate is a key construct in building and maintaining overall communication satisfaction in an organisation. The findings of this research study suggest that employees were least satisfied with the communication climate, which had a negative effect on overall communication satisfaction in the DSP. A key recommendation for the DSP would be to work towards a positive cooperative climate which is more open and flexible and encourages horizontal, upward, and downward communication.

A second recommendation is to consider conveying communication through various channels, depending on working location, as working location groups appear to have different satisfaction levels with different communication channels. Tailoring the delivery of messages through different channels for different groups can help engage employees and improve their overall communication channel satisfaction by selecting their preferred channel for receiving communication.

A final recommendation for the DSP comes from the findings of the relationship between transparent communication practices and ICS. As practices have a direct influence on ICS, it is prudent for the DSP to become more accountable, participative, and informational with their employees. In doing so, the DSP can improve their employee's perception of acting ethically, honestly, and with integrity.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Dear participant,

I am currently undertaking a Master's in Management at the National College of Ireland having been awarded the Department's Scholarship Programme in 2020. I am nearing the end of my Masters and I am carrying out research for my dissertation.

The aim of my research is to determine the internal communication satisfaction levels of employees working through the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, I intend on discovering if internal communication satisfaction is positively related to internal transparent communication practices. The research is being carried out independently by me and has not been commissioned by the Department.

The questionnaire is open to all employees in the Department and participation is entirely voluntary. The questionnaire is divided into three sections. Section one will ask you about your internal communication satisfaction over the past year. Section two will ask you about transparent communication practices. Lastly, section three will ask you about your demographic information.

Data will be collected anonymously and will only be used for the specific purpose it was collected. It will be stored securely and only for the duration of my Masters. Demographic information will be collected to identify trends between different groups based on demographic characteristics.

The survey will take approximately 6-10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Stephen Connolly

Internal Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (UPZIK)
7 point scale (1 extremely dissatisfied to 7 extremely satisfied)

During the past year, please state your level of satisfaction with:

1) Information on the consequences of poor performance
2) Information on how much I contribute to our common success
3) Information on how much my job is valued within the organization
4) Feedback on how I do my job

5) Availability of immediate manager
6) How familiar my manager is with the problems I face at work
7) How much my manager understands the work problems I have
8) How much my immediate manager recognizes my potential

9) Availability to colleagues
10) How successfully I communicate with my colleagues
11) The results of communicating with colleagues
12) Readiness of my colleagues to accept critical feedback

13) The number of decisions made on the basis of informal communication
14) The amount of informal communication in the organization
15) The amount of time I spend in informal communication
16) Usefulness of information transferred through informal channels

17) Information on work regulations
18) Information on the financial situation of the Department
19) Information about changes in the Department
20) Information about legal regulations that affect the Department's operations

21) Volume of communication in the Department helps me feel an important part of it
22) Volume of communication in the Department helps me to identify with it
23) Volume of communication in the Department promotes organisational values
24) Volume of communication in the Department encourages me to achieve organisational goals

25) How well organized the meetings I attend are
26) Usefulness of information obtained at meetings
27) The information I receive from meetings is relevant to getting the job done on time
28) The length of meetings

29) The possibility of communication through new media (digitally)
30) The quality of communication through new media
31) The way others choose to communicate with me
32) Communication media (written notices, intranet, oral communications, etc.)

Communication channel satisfaction
7 point scale (1 extremely dissatisfied to 7 extremely satisfied)

Please state your level of satisfaction with:

Lean
33) Newsletters
34) Information boards
35) Meetings (all employees)

Moderate
36) Email
37) Intranet (Stór)
38) Lync/Skype

Rich
39) Phone
40) Team meeting
41) Video chat

Transparent communication Questionnaire
7 point scale (1 strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree)

During the past year,

Accountable
42) The Department presents more than one side of controversial issues caused by the outbreak.
43) The Department is open to criticism by employees.
44) The Department is forthcoming with information that might be damaging to the Department.
45) The Department is accountable for information it provides.
46) The Department provides information that can be compared to industry standards.

Participative
47) The Department asks the opinions of employees before making decisions.

48) The Department asks for feedback from employees about the quality of its information.
49) The Department involves employees to help identify the information they need.
50) The Department takes the time with its employees to understand who they are and what they need.
51) The Department makes it easy for employees to find the information that they need.

Substantial
52) The Department provides information that is relevant to employees.
53) The Department provides information that is complete.
54) The Department provides accurate information to employees.
55) The Department provides reliable information to employees.
56) The Department provides information in a timely fashion to employees.

Demographic variables
57) Gender – Male, Female, Other, prefer not to say
58) Age Group – Under 25, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55 or older
59) Grade – Clerical Officer, Executive Officer, Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer, Assistant Principal, Principal Officer or above
60) Work Area – Customer Service External – Front Facing, Customer Service External, Customer Service Internal, IT, Policy & Legislation, Communications
61) Working location – (working from home, working in office, mix of both)