

SOLVING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY ENTERPRISES IN THREE NORTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Ineta Luka

Language Department, Turība University

Graudu iela 68, Rīga, LV-1058, Latvia

E-mail address: ineta.luka@turiba.lv

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4706-1663>

ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of the research is to analyse goals, practices, and challenges of internal organisational communication in tourism and hospitality enterprises and offer teaching/learning methodologies to further smooth internal organisational communication.

Methods. Twelve semi-structured expert interviews to analyse organisational communication from various aspects were conducted with top level management representatives in 2020–2023. The data was analysed applying content analysis. The themes elicited were grouped into three contextual categories to conduct in-depth analysis. Additionally, SWOT analysis was conducted.

Results. The findings indicate that the main goals of internal organisational communication depend on the type of the company. E-mail is the most frequently used written communication channel by tourism companies. WhatsApp or FB group is equally popular among all companies. Face-to-face communication remains the preferred oral internal communication channel in all businesses, regardless of the company location and size.

Conclusion. The challenges discovered in the research may be addressed through non-formal and informal learning activities derived from real-life situations and problems to engage adult learners in active, participatory learning encouraging them to collaborate and contribute to the common organisational goals and shared values.

Practical application. The suggestions on teaching/learning methodologies to improve internal organisational communication may be practically applied in workplace learning as well as in teaching/learning languages in formal and non-formal adult education.

Cognitive value. The article provides an analysis of how adult learners' communication skills may be developed by incorporating Natural Approach of language learning, Cooperative Learning and game-based learning to secure contextualised participatory learning to improve internal organisational communication.

Keywords: organisational communication, internal communication, tourism and hospitality enterprises, teaching/learning methodologies and approaches, adult learning

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, with the development of innovative technologies, organisational communication has changed. Time has become an asset valued more than ever before. Hence, "effective communication is essential in both personal and professional contexts" (Kimani & Scott, 2023, p. 11).

Recent research defines communication as "a process of sending and receiving a message between two parties" (Kumar et al., 2023, p. 2), "the process of exchanging information, ideas, and emotions between individuals or groups through a variety of channels, such as verbal, nonverbal, and written" (Kimani & Scott, 2023, p. 9), and "the activity of conveying information through the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, visuals, signals, writing, or behaviour" (Velentzas & Broni, 2014, p. 117). Although the definitions vary, all of them emphasise interaction involving two parties – the sender of the message (information) and the recipient. However, the process is not a simple one, as certain factors impact this interaction. Marianne Dainton and Elaine Dawn Zelle (2022), Handini Trisasanti et al. (2020) emphasise cultural factors in communication. Fred Edmund Jandt (2021) even argues that communication and culture cannot be separated one from the other. John Kimani and James Scott (2023) highlight cultural, social, and technological factors.

Furthermore, technological development has brought changes to communication. Communication tools such as social networks, blogs, YouTube, have become an inseparable part of people's daily life. It must be highlighted that artificial intelligence (AI) has impacted communication significantly since new modes of communication are developing. AI technologies, e.g., chatbots, AI writing and text generation tools and voice-based assistants must be mentioned therein. These latest technological innovations have already demonstrated the benefits of their use in a business setting. According to Dimitros Buhalis (2007) the use of technologies has transformed tourism globally leading to the development of a new paradigm comprising "a range of opportunities and threats" (Buhalis, 2007, 6).

Communication influences company performance, fostering or hindering the attainment of organisational goals. Efficient organisational communication "helps to build relationships, resolve conflicts, and facilitate understanding between individuals and groups" (Kimani & Scott, 2023, p. 11). In service industries, such as tourism and hospi-

tality, it consequently impacts customer satisfaction with the tourism product received, therefore it is essential to develop employees' communication skills to foster smooth organisational communication.

Organisational communication may be divided into internal and external communication. Since nowadays it is difficult to attract and retain successful, motivated employees, providing a supportive positive work environment is important (Santos et al., 2023) and, therefore, internal communication is a crucial factor in ensuring employee satisfaction and long-term loyalty to the company. This research focuses on internal organisational communication in tourism and hospitality enterprises in three Northern European countries – Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden, which has been a less researched topic in organisational communication so far.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A theoretical Framework is formed by the theory of organisational communication focussing on internal organisational communication in order to select the most suitable teaching/learning methodologies and approaches to foster learners' internal organisational communication.

Organisational Communication

Communication is the core of any organisation. Slavka Kraljević and Andrea Russo (2022) find that organisation and communication are interrelated. In literature, organisational communication has been defined as “the process of creating and negotiating collective, coordinated systems of meaning through symbolic practices oriented toward the achievement of organisational goals” (Mumby & Kuhn, 2018, p. 11). It “covers a wide variety of communicative activity across several different types of senders and receivers – as individual, groups, or teams – and the organisation as a whole” (Keyton, 2017, p. 506).

Organisational communication is a comparatively new field of study as it originated in the 1940s and developed during the 1950s–1970s (Keyton, 2017). Prior research has discovered that organisational communication significantly impacts organisational performance. The better the organisational communication, the more efficient organisational performance (Haroon & Malik, 2018). Kirti Rajhans (2009) finds “correlation between organisational management and employee work motivation” (p. 145) which consequently improves company performance.

To manage effective organisational communication, it is essential to consider these factors: a) the noise, b) the channel, c) the content of the message, and d) redundancy (Mumby & Kuhn, 2018). The surrounding noise may prevent the interlocutor

from hearing and receiving a message, whereas the channel refers to the medium of communication (phone call, one-to-one communication, a written source, etc.). Redundancy involves the repetition of the same idea or information in a phrase or sentence. Although redundancy is usually considered negative, in organisational communication such a repetition may lead to better memorising of the information and passing it to other recipients.

Structural elements of an organisation such as hierarchy (vertical levels of an organisation), differentiation and specialisation, formalisation (existing rules and regulations) as well as time management also impact communication and the information flow in the organisation (Cheney et al., 2010). Hierarchy may be exposed in management dominance over other members of the organisation. Hence, upward transmission of bad news might be hindered to some extent, therefore, it is very important for the management to respond in a supportive manner. Rajhans (2009) concludes that both upward communication (the information passed from employees to the management) and downward communication (the information passed over by the manager to the employees) is significant. Efficient downward communication fosters employees' teamworking, improves relationship in the company and decreases miscommunication possibilities, whereas upward communication improves the organisational culture and involves employees in solving the problems arisen.

Differentiation and specialisation refer to work distribution among different departments. Employees of the same specialisation may use professional slang unknown to others which impacts internal communication in the company. Formalisation relates to the dominance of formal language use in organisational communication (Cheney et al., 2010). Interrupting the speaker, not observing cultural and business etiquette are the signals of a low level of formality in organisational communication. Due to the lack of time, when working on projects, formalisation may be brought to minimum.

Dainton and Zelle (2022) identify nine contexts of communication, among them the organisational context, the group context, and the mediated context related with the use of technologies in communication. This article deals with internal organisational communication which covers the three above-mentioned communication contexts.

Internal Organisational Communication

Literature defines internal organisational communication as “the initiation of social exchange between an employee and the organisation” (Verčič & Men, 2023, p. 2), “a formal effort aiming for a clear purpose” (Hodorogea & Cășvean, 2021, p. 310), “a dynamic process that encompasses the formal and informal communication occurring internally at all levels of an organisation” (Yue & Thelen, 2023, p. 4). According

to Yufan Sunny Qin and Linjuan Rita Men (2023) it comprises formal and informal organisational communication, and they both impact employees' attitude towards work and influence employees' psychological wellbeing. Therefore, it is essential to manage internal communication efficiently and provide accurate information at all organisational levels, listen to the employees, and involve them in horizontal and vertical organisational communication. Horizontal communication is associated with communication among teammates and among different departments of the company, whereas vertical organisational communication is upward and downward communication as mentioned above.

Internal organisational communication comprises four constructs: a) communication climate (message-related activities in the organisation), b) quality and reliability of information (trustworthiness of the sender of the information and the communication channel used), c) leadership communication (members of an organisation share the same aims and interests), and d) two-way symmetrical communication (a dialogue between the members of an organisation). All of them influence employee engagement (Balakrishnan et al., 2024). The more positive the four constructs are, the more interested employees are in common organisational goals. Qin and Men (2023) also share an opinion that quality and reliability of information and two-way symmetrical communication further employee organisational trust since two-way communication has two functions: a) inform employees about the organisational activities and b) involve employees in decision-making. Hence, "listening, providing feedback, demonstrating care and support, and creating connections and community" (Verčič & Men, 2023, p. 7) are significant aspects therein.

Recently, social media channels have gained paramount importance in internal communication ensuring two-way communication. Prior research points to the extensive use of intranet, blogs, e-newsletters, social media platforms (Santoso et al., 2023), videoconferencing, instant messaging, e-mails (Santos et al., 2023) during the Covid-19 pandemic. These internal communication channels may successfully be used in organisations not only during the crisis period but on a regular basis as well since they save time and target all employees. Hence, the use of communication channels that enable dialogic interactions ensuring two-way symmetrical communication is crucial.

Furthermore, the seven Cs of communication have to be considered: a) clarity (the message has to be exact, appropriate vocabulary has to be used), b) conciseness (the idea has to be communicated without verbosity), c) concreteness (the message has to be specific and definite, factual), d) correctness (the message without grammar mistakes and using correct spelling), e) coherence (logical and consistent message), f) completeness (the message has to include all the facts), and g) courtesy (the speaker has to show respect to the audience, speak politely and friendly) (Gomes et al., 2023). These seven communication principles must be practised, and corresponding skills developed.

To manage efficient internal organisational communication, it is important to understand which employees' knowledge and skills should be developed to further successful

communication that would correspond to the 7 Cs principles. Table 1 summarises the most significant knowledge and skills mentioned in the latest research on communication (Arif et al., 2023; Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020; Yue & Thelen, 2023) required to ensure efficient internal communication.

Table 1

The most significant knowledge and skills for efficient internal organizational communication

Category	The important knowledge/skills
Knowledge	Understanding organisational goals
	Understanding internal communication and its role within an organisation
	Organisational culture
	Crisis management
	Strategic use of digital media
	Understanding multicultural and global issues
Skills	Oral communication
	Listening
	Empathy
	Flexibility to change
	Teamworking
	Interpersonal communication
	Leadership

Source. Adapted from Arif et al., 2023; Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020; Yue & Thelen, 2023; .

Developing listening comprehension is especially significant since listening forms the basis of the development of speaking skills which, in turn, impact employees' other competences. As pointed out by Anikó Ficzere et al. (2024) it is crucial to consider recipient's personality when developing listening skills as a learner faces new information, possibly unfamiliar lexis and unknown content while listening to a message.

Recent research conducted in the hospitality industry points to the multidisciplinary nature of internal communication research which comprises four communication concepts: a) business communication (employees' communication skills are applied for business development), b) management communication (refers to the communication skills of the managers), c) corporate communication (formal communication when performing various organisational functions) and d) organisational communication (people's perception of verbal and nonverbal messages in the organisation) (Ortega et al., 2023). Since communication in tourism and hospitality industry is multidisciplinary, the knowledge and skills mentioned in Table 1 are relevant in this context as well.

Therefore, it is essential to apply such teaching/learning methods that would increase the employees' essential knowledge and develop competences mentioned above in various contexts, practising symmetrical and asymmetrical communication situations. Integration of digital and analogue learning methods and tools may be beneficial therein (Orr et al., 2020). It is especially important because in the future the contrast between physical and virtual space will become less and less important, the two spaces will merge.

Globalisation, digitalisation, and economic crises will impact the way how internal communication will develop in the future (Verčič et al., 2024), therefore it is essential to analyse the prospects and challenges of internal communication during the crisis period and implement initiatives to eliminate the existing challenges.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to analyse goals, practices, and challenges of internal organisational communication in tourism and hospitality enterprises and offer teaching/learning methodologies to further smooth internal organisational communication.

Research question. What teaching/learning methodologies may be applied to further smooth internal organisational communication in tourism and hospitality enterprises in the three Northern European countries?

Research paradigm. The interpretivism paradigm applied enables studying the context, activities, and feelings of informants in-depth (Oliver, 2021).

Research methods. Data were collected from twelve in-depth semi-structured expert interviews held face-to-face or on video conferencing applications during the Covid-19 crisis in Latvia, Lithuania, and Sweden. The semi-structured interviews enabled participants "to openly express their opinions" (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019, p. 117). Conventional coding approach having no pre-set codes often used to "describe a communication event" (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019, p. 62) was applied enabling researchers to create categories and elicit themes for further qualitative analysis. SWOT analysis (Leiber et al., 2018) to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of internal organisational communication was applied.

Research tool. The interview guide comprised: a) introductory part; b) participants' socio-demographic data and organisational data; c) internal organisational communication; d) external organisational communication; e) communication problems encountered. This paper analyses the relevant data gathered during the second, third and fifth parts of the interview.

Research sample. The purposive sample (see Table 2) created involves the key informants according to pre-determined criteria (Oliver, 2021), namely, their work positions, the company type, size and founding year.

Table 2
Research sample

Code*	Country	Tourism sector	Work position	Company established	No. of Employees
PLT1	Lithuania	Accommodation	Personnel manager	2015	8
PLT2	Lithuania	Tour operator	Director	1992	3
PLT3	Lithuania	Tourist information	Manager	2002	6–7
PLT4	Lithuania	Catering	Co-owner	2021	4
PLV1	Latvia	Tour operator	Managing director	2011	23
PLV2	Latvia	Accommodation	Owner, Board member	2010	2
PLV3	Latvia	Tourist information	Manager	2018	6
PLV4	Latvia	Tour operator, travel agency	CEO, head of the Board	2007	4–6
PLV5	Latvia	Accommodation	Director	1993	13
PSE1	Sweden	Tourist information	Owner	2018	3
PSE2	Sweden	Accommodation, catering	Co-owner	2016	4
PSE3	Sweden	Accommodation	Owner	2010	3

Note. * P – Participant, LT – Lithuania, LV – Latvia, SE – Sweden.

Source. Own research.

Research ethics. The participants signed the informed consent of confidentiality, anonymity, and their voluntary participation in the research (Oliver, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This paper analyses the findings according to three categories: a) the goals of internal organisational communication, b) internal communication channels used in the organisation, and c) internal and external factors impacting internal organisational communication.

The Main Goals of Internal Organisational Communication

Findings indicate that horizontal style of internal communication prevails in tourism enterprises – tourism information centres/points (TIC), travel agencies (TA) and tour operator companies (TO) – in the countries under research. Participant PLV3 is even very categorical in supporting the horizontal style of internal communication by saying: “I hate vertical communication because vertical communication never leads to good results.” Another reason is that most tourism companies are small, they are “a close-knit team” (PLT2)

and quite often “all employees are shareholders” (PSE1). It is evident that these companies apply a two-way symmetrical communication. Since it is “open communication” (PLV1), “everybody is involved” (PLV2), communication ensures “effective cooperation between colleagues” (PLV5) and they “share the work equally” (PLT2), everyone feels committed and contributes to the organisational goals which is a significant factor for employees’ psychological wellbeing.

The participants from hospitality enterprises (accommodation and catering sector) admit that they apply both ways of communication – horizontal and vertical, and vertical communication is upward and downward. Participant PLV5 explains: “Both types of communication are important. As to the information that comes from above, I pass it on to my employees and it is important for me that the employees also pass me information about what has happened, whether there have been any problems, conflicts, accidents.”

Since hospitality enterprises employ more employees than tourism companies and they work in shifts, both upward and downward communication is more typical to them (PLV4, PLV5, PLT1, PLT4, PSE3) than to tourism companies. The shiftwork may be a cause for misunderstandings, too.

The findings indicate that the main goals of internal organisational communication depend on the type of the company.

Hospitality enterprises (accommodation and catering sector). A common trait for all hospitality enterprises is that in every enterprise there is a person responsible for internal organisational communication. In most cases it is the hotel manager (PVL5, PLT1, PLT4, PSE2, and PSE3). However, in a small guest house it is the receptionist (PLV2). This confirms the above-mentioned fact that hospitality enterprises apply both vertical and horizontal internal organisational communication. The hospitality enterprises also share similar internal organisational communication goal – to ensure that everyone is involved, knows their duties, and works as a united team in providing a quality tourism product. The following keywords characterise the goal: passing “the necessary information from one employee to another” (PVL2), managing “efficient flow of information” (PLV5), ensuring “effective cooperation” (PVL5), securing “operational transfer of information” (PLV5). This is in line with the cognitions of Ana Tkalac Verčič and Men (2023), and Qin and Men (2023) that timely and quality information passed to the employees ensures organisational trust.

Participant PLT2 confirms that their internal organisational communication goals comprise “communicating management expectations and decisions to employees, getting feedback from employees about their job satisfaction and needs.” This indicates that the given organisation cares for their employees’ wellbeing which according to prior research (Santos et al., 2023) contributes to staff satisfaction.

To ensure smooth running of an enterprise, it is essential that internal organisational communication matches the seven Cs as discussed above (Gomes et al., 2023). However, it must be highlighted that two (PSE2 and PSE3) out of the six participants of hospitality enterprises noted that their internal communication goal is to manage internal communication in a language that every employee could understand. The problem lies in the fact that

some employees do not speak Swedish while the other English, which makes it difficult to manage smooth communication among employees. Positively, the company managers have defined the development of employees' language skills among their organisational goals to ensure efficient communication.

Tourism enterprises (TIC, TA, TO). Contrary to the management of hospitality enterprises, only participants from two tourism enterprises (PLV3 and PLV4) admitted that they are responsible for internal organisational communication. Other participants said that everyone is responsible: "I would say that everyone who is located in the office is responsible" (PLV1), "all colleagues" (PLT2), "no one specifically is in charge of internal communication" (PLT3). Tourism enterprises are small, there is no staff turnover, and employees know each other and their duties very well, therefore they may consider that they do not need anyone responsible for informal organisational communication. However, presuming that the companies faced challenges this might cause problems.

Participants mentioned the following internal organisational communication goals: "to have a clear vision what steps to take" (PLV3), "to have the same understanding about the service standard we want to provide" (PLV1), "to keep track of information" (PLV4), "to communicate to make a good product" (PLT2). However, two participants (PLT3 and PSE1) could not even define their internal organisational communication goals. They mentioned external communication goal (PSE1) and the overall organisational goal (PLT3) instead. Participant PLV4 mentioned also a secondary internal communication goal – "brainstorming about new projects, ideas." It is recommended to participants PSE1 and PLT3 to organise a brainstorming session at their company to discuss internal communication and the relevant goals. This may be done by applying a game-based approach or a simulation of a problem situation connected with their field to see if they can discuss it as a unified team. According to Andy Goldhawk (2023) game-based learning increases learner motivation and secures their engagement in active learning activities.

To sum up, workplace learning targeted at developing employees' skills and increasing their knowledge mentioned in Table 1 could be applied to evaluate internal communication goals and their correspondence to the principles of the 7 Cs mentioned above.

Internal Communication Channels Used in the Organisation

The findings indicate that certain communication channels are used more frequently than others. Most frequently communication happens face-to-face (nine participants), followed by social media (eight participants) and phone conversation (seven participants). In turn, none of the participants mentioned writing letters, having a newsletter for internal communication, and using bulletin boards. This may be explained by the fact that these are formal communication tools, whereas the work climate in the organisations researched is informal.

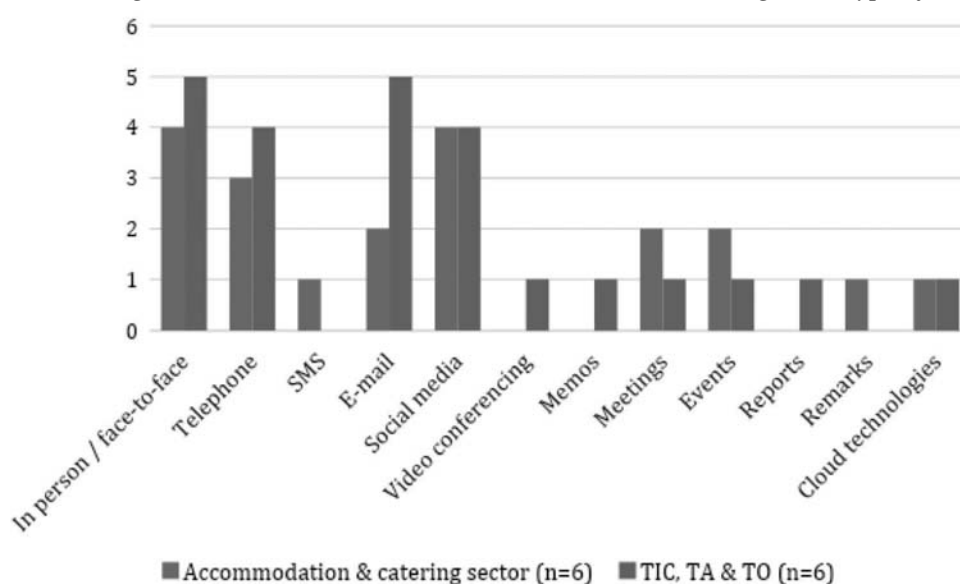
Since most enterprises are not big, they also do not use Intranet for passing messages to each other. They have a social media group, most often a WhatsApp group (PLT3, PLV1, and PLV3) or a Facebook chat group (PLT1, PLT2, PLT4) instead.

Although a majority of the participants claim that their internal communication is highly effective (PLT4, PLV2, PSE1) or effective (PLT2, PLT3, PLV1, PLV5, PSE2, PSE3), they also mention certain communication challenges concerning the use of social media. For example, participant PLV1 recalls a situation when essential information was sent out in a group chat, and no one knew who should deal with it, which resulted in two staff members working on the same problem.

To see the differences in the use of communication channels for internal organisational communication among hospitality and tourism enterprises, the participants' answers are analysed according to the type of business – a) accommodation and catering sector, and b) TIC, TA, TO (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Internal organisational communication channels used according to the type of the enterprise



Source. Own research.

As both groups are identical in size, the participants' answers are comparable. According to *Figure 1*, the largest difference in the use of communication channels concerns e-mail. Participants from tourism enterprises use e-mail more often than the other group to avoid missing any significant information. The following expressions confirm this: “Most of the time, an email is followed by a call to make sure everything is clear” (PLT2), “E-mail is the main means of communication because all information has to be in writing” (PLT2), “Usually, I send out the information using e-mail” (PLV4).

This finding corresponds to prior research on e-mail use in organisational communication conducted by Ruoyan Kong et al. (2021) wherein they conclude that e-mail plays a significant role in organisational communication as a communication channel used to pass information, such as announcements, summaries of meetings, information about various events and other relevant information to the employees.

Both groups use face-to-face communication. This is the most frequently used option of oral communication, e.g., “Daily communication and transmission of information normally takes place orally” (PLT1), “Employees usually get all the information orally, face-to-face” (PLT4), “We communicate with each other verbally, face-to-face” (PLT3). Face-to-face conversation often leads to team meetings or events (PLT1, PLT4, and PLV4). Such “meaningful manager internal communication” (Arif et al., 2023, p. 3) positively impacts employees’ behaviour and commitment to work and the support received from the organisation “reduces employees’ withdrawal intentions” (Duarte & Silva, 2023, p. 2).

The findings also revealed that internal communication is a complicated process, and each participant may perceive it differently, based on their previous experience, prior expectations, and other factors. For example, the participant PLV4 evaluated their internal communication as ineffective. She explained that she had thought that it was efficient but once asking her employees what to improve in their work, one of the suggestions was to improve internal communication. Other problems concerning internal communication were related to miscommunication (PLT1, PLT3, and PLT4), generational differences in communication (PLT2, PLV4), cultural differences (PLV1), language barrier (PLV2, PLV5, PSE2, and PSE3), having staff with hearing disabilities (PLV2), and “lack of feedback and communication barriers with the direct manager” (PLV3).

Collaborative groupwork on problem-solving tasks, communication games, and situation analysis may be applied to develop the relevant skills and knowledge of both employees and company management to further successful internal communication. These tasks comply with the principles of Natural Approach of language learning wherein “learning is facilitated by a relaxed learning environment and may involve realia (authentic materials)” (Goldhawk, 2023, p. 80) and Cooperative Learning, which is characterised by individual accountability of each learner being responsible for their contribution to the group work (Goldhawk, 2023).

Reciprocal questioning is of utmost importance as well. In practice, learners are trained to ask generic questions of each other, following the teaching of a piece of content. For example: What is the main idea here? How would you compare this with ...? Jigsaw groups, cha-trooms, concept mapping, problem-solving tasks are other opportunities (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Internal and External Factors Impacting Internal Communication in the Organisation

To define benefits and challenges of internal organisational communication, participants had to analyse their company’s internal communication in the form of a SWOT

analysis which “identifies the internal and external factors that can affect the investigated process or structure” (Leiber et al., 2018, p. 352). In this case it shows the main factors influencing internal organisational communication. Strengths and weaknesses highlight internal factors, whereas opportunities and threats – external factors impacting internal organisational communication. Theodor Leiber et al. (2018) explain that strengths are internal factors that help attaining company objectives, whereas weaknesses are internal factors preventing the company from attaining its objectives. These internal factors are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3

Internal factors impacting internal organizational communication

Factors	Hospitality sector	Tourism sector	Codes (n)
<i>Strengths</i>			
F2F communication	PLT1, PLT4		2
Good atmosphere	PLT1, PLT4, PLV5, PSE2	PLT2, PLV1, PLV4	8
Teamworking and mutual support	PLT1, PLT1, PLT4, PLT4	PLT3, PLT3	6
Openness and trust	PLT1, PLT1	PLT2	3
Organised information	PLT1, PLT1, PLV2, PSE3	PLT2, PLT2, PLT2	7
Flexibility	PLT1, PSE2	PLV1	3
Timely information	PLV2	PLT2	2
Use of several languages	PSE3	PLV1, PLV4	3
Use of the same language		PLV3	1
Different information transfer channels	PLV5, PSE2		2
<i>Weaknesses</i>			
Lack of digital skills	PLT1	PLT2	2
Inefficient top-down internal organisational communication	PLT1, PLT1, PLV2, PLV5	PLT2, PLT3, PLV3	7
Inefficient horizontal organisational communication	PLT1, PLT4, PLV2		3
Communication barrier because of the lack of foreign language skills	PLV5, PSE2		2
The use of multiple channels for communication		PLT3	1
Nonverbal organisational communication problems	PSE3		1
Formalisation levels		PLV1, PLV1	2

Source. Own research.

The ten factors of strengths are in line with the four constructs of internal communication – communication climate, quality and reliability of information, leadership

communication and two-way symmetrical communication mentioned above (Balakrishnan et al., 2024). As it may be seen from Table 3, the most frequently mentioned factor is “good atmosphere.” Participant PLT4 mentioned it even twice explaining that good organisational atmosphere is “friendly atmosphere” in which employees feel safe as they are “understood, listened to by an empathetic manager.” Similarly, PLT1 considers that their enterprise ensures “good psychological climate and an atmosphere of trust.” Good atmosphere is linked with openness and trust (PLT1, PLT2). PLV1 stresses that his enterprise strives to ensure “a very informal atmosphere which encourages to speak about different aspects, issues”, which, as emphasised by PLV4, is an advantage of a small organisation as its employees “theoretically are able to talk over everything and anything.” The remark “theoretically” is in place therein, since the manager acknowledged that she had had communication barriers between her and the employees. As a result, it has led to miscommunication. Furthermore, PLV1 adds that “informality is both strength and threat at the same time because it gives place for misunderstandings”.

Miscommunication and misunderstandings may be eliminated in problem-centred discussions wherein a group analyses real communication problems of other companies to offer the best solution in the given situation thus preparing for prospective problems in the future. Such problems may be derived from various online sources, such as blogs, chatrooms, social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn – social media site for professional community) and others.

Another option is a specifically tailored communicative problem-solving board-game that may be played during company teambuilding events. The primary goal of the game is to provide adult learners with an opportunity to learn creatively solve real-life communication problems arisen among different generations (<http://www.nordtournet.com/game.html>).

Another frequently mentioned strength is “organised information” which is “detailed information” (PLT2, PLV2), shared information uploaded on the Google Drive (PLT1), “writing information in necessary detail, in an efficient way” (PLV2). “Templates for presenting information” (PLT2) may be useful therein.

Business writing tasks applying specially created templates, using rapidly developing technologies (Guffey, 2019) may develop learners’ productive writing skills. The use of AI tools, e.g., ChatGPT, DeepAI, QuillBot, Type Droid, Polite Post, Writei (<https://easywithai.com/free-ai-text-generators/>) and Internet forums, collaborative writing in self-directed work groups and virtual teams may also contribute to the skills’ development.

Participants refer to their organisation’s weaknesses eighteen times. A common trait is that most weaknesses are connected either with insufficient language skills or inappropriate use of organisational communication, or the lack of employees’ digital skills.

“Fear and technological inflexibility of some employees” (PLT1) and “unsystematic checking of e-mails of some staff” (PLT2) are examples pointing to the need of updating employees’ digital skills. Recent prior research (Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020;

Waititu & Barker, 2023; Yue & Thelen, 2023) highlights the increasing role of digital tools in communication as well. Seminars and workshops on using traditional social media and the countless opportunities created by the AI are useful as well.

Inefficient horizontal and top-down vertical communication may be improved by developing employees' listening skills, empathy, and interpersonal communication. Apart from different roleplays and simulations, employees may fill in a specially designed self-assessment questionnaire (Drozdova, 2023) to evaluate the company and their role in it. The given questionnaire comprises questions on cultural differences while communicating and the employees' awareness of their exposure, questions on communication styles and modes and the preferred communication style by colleagues. In accordance with the employees' wishes, they may do it anonymously. At the next stage, the manager must summarise the results and analyse them during company teambuilding events. Such an approach secures all employees' engagement and their involvement in decision-making.

Communication barriers may concern both verbal and non-verbal communication. A verbal communication barrier is caused by employees' insufficient language skills. Language skills may be developed in language courses, workplace seminars, autonomous learning using various learning platforms (e.g., <https://e-culture.eu/> and <https://esolams.eu/unity/>). A non-verbal communication barrier identified in the interviews refers to proxemics. Another language barrier may be the level of formalisation. PLV1 singles out two weaknesses related with formalisation: a) "using chat too much" and b) "lack of the system to balance privacy and efficiency". PLV1 mentions the latter one as a threat, too.

Opportunities are "external conditions that are helpful to achieving the objective" (Leiber et al., 2018, p. 353) whereas threats are "external conditions which could do damage to the objective" (Leiber et al., 2018, p. 353) – in this case to smooth internal organisational communication (see Table 4).

Table 4

External factors impacting internal organizational communication

Factors	Hospitality sector	Tourism sector	Codes (n)
<i>Opportunities</i>			
Use of the latest technologies in communication	PLT1		1
Sharing knowledge within the organisation	PLT1	PLV1, PLV4	3
The need for the person responsible for internal communication	PLT4		1
Staff training in technologies	PLV2	PLT2, PLT3, PLV1	4
Use of other communication channels	PLV5, PSE2	PLV4	2
Staff training in languages	PSE3		1

Factors	Hospitality sector	Tourism sector	Codes (n)
<i>Threats</i>			
Not improving digital skills	PLT1		1
Misunderstandings	PLT4, PLV2, PLV5, PSE2		4
Technological problems	PLV5, PSE2, PSE2	PLT2, PLT2, PLT2	6
Incomplete information or loss of information	PLV2	PLT2, PLT3, PLV1, PLV1	5
No desire to improve communication		PLT3, PSE1	2
Formalisation levels		PLV1	1

Source. Own research.

The author identified six factors of opportunities mentioned twelve times in the participants' interviews. Additionally, it was possible to identify six factors of threats mentioned nineteen times. Comparing Table 3 and Table 4 it is evident that external factors are contextually connected with the internal ones, and they point to the knowledge and skills required for efficient internal organisational communication (see Table 1). The participants, especially in tourism sector, associate opportunities with a much wider use of the latest technologies and therefore the need of staff training in technologies is visible. The main threats mentioned relate to the use of technologies as well, since two codes "technological problems" (six answers) and "incomplete information or loss of information" (five answers) relate to technologies.

Positively, the participants are ready to learn and improve their communication: "aiming to improve communication" (PLT3), "systematise existing know-how, add some structure" (PLV1). PLT3 highlights that the biggest threat may be "no desire to improve communication." Misunderstandings based on cultural and language background are another threat. This emphasises the necessity of having knowledge in multiculturalism and global environments, as shown in prior research by Cen April Yue and Patrick D. Thelen (2023), and Paul Waititu and Rachel Barker (2023) and it highlights the need of advanced interpersonal communication skills (Yue & Thelen, 2023).

Case studies from the industry may be applied to improve communication. Alternatively, the course/seminar participants in pairs/small groups may create a structured case study. As suggested by Mátyás Bánhegyi and Balázs Fajt (2023) a structured case should comprise the following components: "introduction, background, problem description, problem analysis, suggestions for the solution of the problem, and conclusion" (p. 61). Problem situation may also involve a conceptual problem in digital environment (Harangus & Kovács, 2022). The scheme may be applied in developing the knowledge and skills required for successful internal organisational communication as well. Afterwards, the learners may swap the cases and solve them. During the next stage they explain their solutions to the other group – the case creators – and finally they must come to a common conclusion. Such a framework would enable learners to develop communication skills, digital skills, and mutual collaboration at the same time resulting in the development of interpersonal communication skills.

CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed the internal organisational communication goals, the main communication channels used for internal communication as well as introduced the results of SWOT analysis conducted to define internal factors eliciting strengths and weaknesses of internal communication and external factors pointing to future opportunities and threats of successful internal organisational communication.

The results showed that the main goals of internal organisational communication depend on the type of the company. The aim of hospitality enterprises relates to providing a quality tourism product and they have a person responsible for internal communication in each organisation. In tourism enterprises the goals are less clear and mostly concern day-to-day communication on sharing information with their team members about the events going on. They usually do not have a person responsible for internal organisational communication.

It was discovered that although the horizontal style of internal communication is most frequently used in the organisations researched, the vertical upward and downward communication style is used in hospitality enterprises as well.

Most companies use similar communication channels for internal communication, but they differ according to the business sector. E-mail is the most frequently used written communication channel by tourism companies. WhatsApp or FB group is equally popular among all companies. Face-to-face communication is the preferred internal oral communication channel in all businesses, regardless of the company location and size. It is followed by telephone calls.

The participants mentioned more strengths than weaknesses for their internal organisational communication. Good atmosphere, which includes team working and mutual support, is the key factor to secure efficient internal communication. Opportunities and threats relate to the current level of employees' skills, especially insufficient digital and language skills, and employees' readiness to learn.

This finding is in line with the recent theory pointing to the most required knowledge and skills to successfully operate in service industries in the future. It would be beneficial to address these shortcomings through non-formal and informal learning activities such as teambuilding events, game-based learning, simulations, problem-solving discussions, writing and analysing field case studies in participative groupwork, developing writing skills in collaborative writing applying AI tools created and other activities. Such an approach complies with contextualised adult learning as it uses real-life situations and problems to engage adult learners in active, participatory learning encouraging them to collaborate and contribute to the common organisational goals and shared values.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current qualitative research, conducted in three Northern European countries, could be expanded to other regions of the European Union in the future. It would also be useful to collect quantitative data to support the findings of the qualitative research.

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