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Internal Strategies for Assessing Organizational Communication Channel Effectiveness

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2017

Abstract

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2009

BA, American University, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Evolving communication technology, the increased volume of information needed by businesses, and the intensified competitive environment have made internal company communication more critical to business success. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies used by managers and leaders of 3 law firms in the Commonwealth of Virginia for assessing the effectiveness of their organization's internal communication channels. The participating firms were recognized by their peers as being exceptionally well-managed. Data from interviews and company documents were analyzed through the conceptual lens of the channel expansion theory and the use of software coding to identify patterns and themes. Three important themes emerged: informal assessment strategies, indirect assessment strategies, and efficient versus timely assessments. The first theme suggested the effectiveness of an informal assessment strategy, depending on the size and complexity of the organization. The second theme reflected the effectiveness of an indirect assessment for organizations that lack the resources to support a more direct and specific assessment process. The third theme reflected the participants' perceptions of informal and indirect assessments may be more efficient, the feedback from the assessments are often less timely. Managers may consider these themes in formulating communication policies. The findings of this case study may have implications for positive social and economic change. Small professional service firms, such as legal firms, provide important services to individuals, families, and businesses in their community.

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Dedication

      To my parents, Vernell W. Murphy and William C. Murphy, SSGT (ret.) and my eldest brother, William A. Murphy III, who passed while I was on this educational journey, I know they would be proud of me. I love and missed you dearly.

Acknowledgments

The idea for this journey started with the encouragement of my leadership professor, Dr. Alvin Stewart, III. On the first day of class, Dr. Stewart walked in class put his briefcase on the desk, wrote his name on the board, turned and said, in paraphasing all of you will go and get your PhDs, and his words accompanied the words of a newly elected President Barrack Obama. While giving his acceptance speech for winning his first election, President Obama said, in paraphrasing, all Americans are encouraged to continue challenging themselves, and from those powerful words, my doctoral journey began.

There are so many people to thank and express my sincere appreciation and gratitude, too many to name. I want to give special thanks to: Christian Daubert, for being the wind beneath my wings. I want to thank to my chairperson and mentor, Dr. Douglas Campbell, my committee member, Dr. Denise Land, and my university reviewer, Dr. Diane Dusick. Your support, encouragement, expertise, patience, and guidance in helping me complete this journey have been immeasurable and valuable. This journey has ended. I am no longer standing on the shoulders of scholars and business scientists who traveled this road before me; instead I stand with them and lend my shoulders to support those who will follow me. I am beginning a new journey of building my business scholarship.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In this study, I explored employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of six internal organizational communication channels with respect to the distribution of internal organizational communications. Organizational communication channels explored in this study were (a) cloud technology, (b) conference calls, (c) corporate e-mail systems, (d) social media, (e) internet marketing, (f) physical town hall meetings, and (g) in-person and electronic manager-and-staff meetings.

Background of the Problem

Organizational communications encompass both internal and external communications (i.e., sending and receiving messages both within an organization and with parties outside an organization) and include (a) strategic communications, (b) internal communications, (c) corporate communications, (d) internal marketing, and (e) marketing communications (Christensen, 2014). The focus of the study was on internal organizational communications, specifically exploring employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of specific intra-organizational communication channels and how certain types of organizations (medium-sized law firms) assessed such effectiveness. Ineffective communication channels inhibit information flow within organizations and, therefore, relationships between managers and staff (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Intra-organizational communication channels not only disseminate information to employees; if effective, internal communication systems can promote employee engagement and contribute to organizational efficiency (Christensen, 2014).

The organizational communications literature suggested technical problems associated with communications channels can inhibit their effectiveness. For example, conference calls may be subject to connectivity problems, network outages, and unforeseen security breaches, as well as background noise, poor voice quality, or employees multitasking while attending conference calls (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Corporate e-mail, social media, and cloud technology could be compromised by security breaches, network threats, and employees' violations of security policies, all of which may diminish communication effectiveness and can affect employee productivity (Zerfass & Franke, 2013).

Christensen (2014) found a measurable reduction in the flow and effectiveness of internal communications in organizations lacking a formal internal communications strategy. Christensen further found that executives in organizations with large communications departments often required communications managers to disseminate communications through multiple channels. Meng and Berger (2012) indicated that executives do not always actively support initiatives to improve internal communications because such initiatives are not perceived as directly related to the organization's profitability.

Problem Statement

As suggested in Figure 1, ineffective communication channels negatively influence the flow of information within an organization and can negatively affect both employee performance and organizational effectiveness (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Meng and Berger (2012) found 73% of small- and medium-sized organizations had no formal

initiatives for assessing the effectiveness of their communication channels. The general

business problem was that some managers of law firms do not assess the effectiveness of

their organizations' internal communication channels, which results in costly

inefficiencies and lost business opportunities. The specific business problem was that

some medium-sized law firm managers lack internal strategies to assess the effectiveness

of their organizations' internal communication channels.
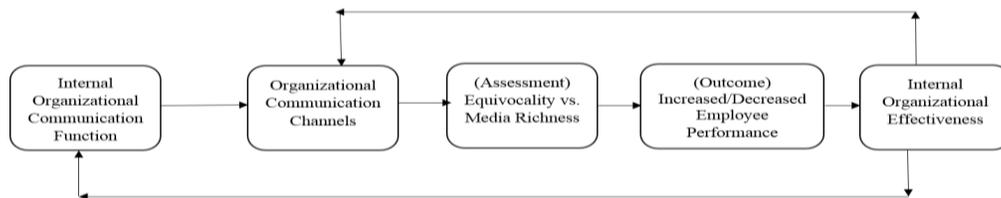
Figure 1. Internal communication as an (Isolated-Circuit) path model on organizational communication channel effectiveness.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this current qualitative multiple case study was to explore what

internal strategies that medium-sized law firm managers use to assess the effectiveness of

their organizations' internal communication channels. The selected population included

two medium-size law firms, each having approximately 50 employees and located in the

Commonwealth of Virginia. Both lawyers and administrative staff employed in the law

firms participated in semistructured interviews designed to elicit their insights and

experiences with respect to their firms' strategies for accessing their internal

communication channels. In addition, other forms of data collected from the firms

included written documentation and direct observation. Implications for positive social change included improved business change associated with a higher sense of self-worth and dignity among employees resulting from higher quality, more effective communications within organizations (Ocasio, Loewenstein, & Nigam, 2015).

Nature of the Study

Channel expansion theory (CET), as discussed in more detail later in Section 1, was used to guide this qualitative multiple case study in a general way. Because CET was not clear with respect to explaining and predicting communication channel effectiveness in medium-sized organizations, it was not feasible to derive testable empirical hypotheses for this study directly from the theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). Moreover, the intent of this study was not to develop or test the theory, but rather to simply explore how medium-sized law firms use and assess the effectiveness of internal communications channels in a real-world explorative setting.

Quantitative and mixed quantitative-qualitative research methods are appropriate for use in empirical hypothesis testing. By contrast, Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013) and Naidu and Patel (2013) noted that qualitative research methods were suitable for exploratory studies where there was a need to describe or explain events. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that researchers commonly use four qualitative research designs: case study, ethnography, historical, and narrative.

Miles and Huberman (1994) further noted that the ethnographic design was appropriate for investigations of cultural characteristics using direct observation of and interaction with subjects. An ethnographic research design does not accord with the

nature of the current research because this study does not revolve around cultural characteristics. A phenomenological design is a suitable choice for qualitative research if the intent is to describe personal experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A phenomenological design was not, however, considered appropriate for this study because its focus was on collective organizational experiences rather than individuals' personal experiences. A historical research design is appropriate for studies exploring past events (Sundarmurthy, Musteen, & Randel, 2013). The focus of this inquiry was on current, rather than on the historical development of communications practices.

Because the intent of this study was to explore how smaller organizations assess internal communications effectiveness at a holistic, organizational level and because CET perhaps represented an incomplete explanation of communications effectiveness in such organizations, a qualitative multiple case study design was appropriate. Case analyses of *subjects* and *objects* aligns an analytical frame of the phenomena and explicates the cases studied (Thomas, 2011). Specifically, the qualitative multiple case study design was chosen because an in-depth, holistic analysis of organizational communication effectiveness in two medium-size law firms was likely to provide insights into how an important class of organizations manage their internal organizational communications.

Research Question

The central research question explored in this study was the following: What internal strategies do managers of medium-sized law firms use, if any, to assess the effectiveness of their internal communication channels? Interview questions used to elicit answers from participants related to this question were grounded in CET (Carlson &

Zmud, 1999), which extends the more or less static media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) to incorporate the effects of communication media users' perceptions of the *media richness* (i.e., effectiveness in transmitting information) of a communication channel developed over time. The basic idea of CET in this context was that users' perceptions of the media richness of a communication channel leads the users to change how they use the channel over time, which under certain conditions leads to the users expanding the use of the communications channel to achieve more effective communications (Carlson & Zmud, 1999).

Interview Questions

The following general interview questions were used to conduct semistructured interviews with employees in the selected case firms:

1. Internal communication channels include cloud technology for retrieving stored information, conference calls, corporate e-mail systems, social media, internal marketing, town hall meetings, manager, and staff meetings. What communication channels do your managers use to communicate to employees?

2. How do managers assess the effectiveness of each of the internal communication channels used in your organization?

3. What strategies have your managers used to improve the effectiveness of internal communication channels (i.e., how does your firm plan, organize, direct, and control the use of communication channels)?

4. How does the use of various communications channels influence your firm's overall firm effectiveness, including its effects on your firm's culture and employee performance?

5. In your firm, how do working relationships affect individuals' choice of a communication channel for business communications?

6. What additional information or strategies would you like to share about assessing the effectiveness of your firm's internal communication channels?

Such interview questions are generally based on the explanations and predictions of CET with respect to communication channel effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework

Channel Expansion Theory

CET was the conceptual framework for this study. Carlson and Zmud (1999) introduced CET, which centered on how individuals select, use, and perceive communication channels. CET represented a potential explanation and prediction of how employees' perceptions about communication channel effectiveness, as well as how users chose and assessed the effectiveness of communications channels. According to Carlson and Zmud, the four fundamental constructs underlying CET are employees' perceptions of and experience with (a) media use experience with a company's communication channels, (b) understanding of disseminated business messages, (c) experience with the internal culture of the company, and (d) working relationships with other managers, staff, and users of communication channels. This study was about strategies to assess the

effectiveness of an organization's internal communication channels. The interview

questions gave the participants the opportunity to address anything relevant to the four

fundamental constructs.

Carlson and Zmud (1999) claimed that understanding CET helped communication

managers develop an improved strategy for selecting communication channels that

influenced media richness and mitigated equivocality in communications. In a telephone

interview regarding CET, J. R. Carlson, the codeveloper of CET, discussed how

companies use media and how companies can get better at using communication media.

For example, Carlson noted that an exploration was lacking in determining the *richness*

reach, which referred to how and when the effectiveness of a communication degrades

after sending a message (J. Carlson, personal communication, September 22, 2015);

however, this subject did not meet the parameters of this inquiry for exploration. Carlson

and Zmud asserted that CET explained the use of communication channels and the

information received through a particular communication channel. The purpose of this

current study was not to test CET. Instead, this current study was an exploration of

assessment strategies. As the conceptual framework of this current study, CET informed

the development of the interview questions and served as the lens through which I viewed

and analyzed the data. Figure 2 extends Figure 1 illustration of the CET conceptual

framework as a graphical representation.
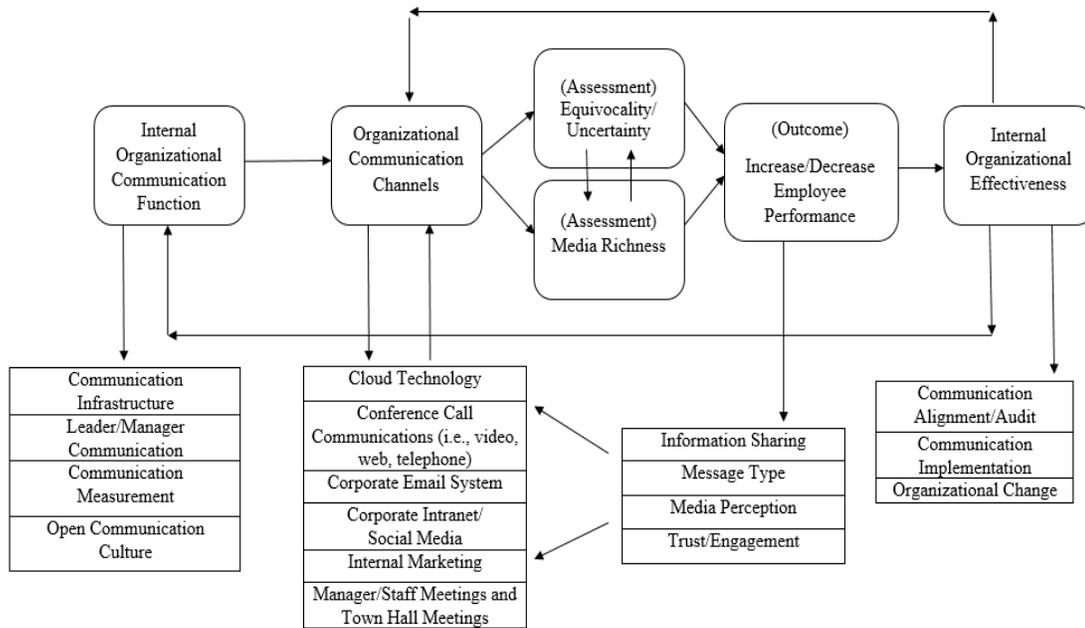
Figure 2. Internal communication (Isolated-Circuit) path model on individual elements of organizational communication channel effectiveness.

The central aspect of CET in the context of this study was that a users'

perceptions of communication channel effectiveness leads the users to change how the

channel is used over time, which under certain conditions leads to the users expanding

the use of the communications channel to achieve more effective communications

(Carlson & Zmud, 1999). As such, CET represented an appropriate conceptual

framework to explore organizational communications effectiveness.

Operational Definitions

This section presents operational definitions of key CET concepts for this study.

Communication alignment: The pattern of usage of communication channels resulting from employees' choice of channel(s) for the interdepartmental transmission or exchange of information (Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Ruck, 2015).

Communication measurement: The organizational investment in communication and the effectiveness of communication channels (Xiang, Yan, Bo, Xuefeng, & Qi, 2015).

Communication infrastructure: Hardware and software used for internal corporate communications (Willi, Melewar, & Broderick, 2013).

Equivocality: The context of internal organizational communications defined as the ambiguity or a lack of understanding or confusion concerning a message, or to the significance of a message (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Lo, 2013).

Internal communication: The dissemination or sharing of information among organizational members (David, 2011).

Media richness: The quality with which communication channels deliver messages (Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Chang & Yang, 2013).

Organizational communication: The internal function of communications within a business environment (Miller, 2015).

Strategic communication: The process intended to achieve the strategic communication goal of an organization using specific communication methods (Macnamara & Zerfass, 2012).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions in a study are factors or relationships that are either unobservable or beyond a researcher's control and are assumed to be true even though unverifiable (Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). There are three basic assumptions in this study. The first assumption was that the participants could articulate their experiences. The second assumption was that the participants would respond honestly and truthfully to the interview questions (Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). The third assumption was that the participants possessed experience in dealing with organizational communication channels.

Limitations

The limitations of a research study are the bounds of the validity or generalizability of the results or implications of the study (Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). This study had two basic limitations. First, Yin (2014) argued that participants might respond to questions in accordance with what they believe a researcher wants to hear. The same holds true for the participants recruited for this study. Second, CET suggested participants' perceptions about communication channel effectiveness reasonably depended on their experiences with communication channels in their organizational context, which represented limitations on the extent to which the results of the study are valid for other organizations.

Delimitations

The delimitations of a study are the boundaries of the study selected by the researcher (Kelleher & Peppard, 2011). This study was delimited to two medium-sized law firms each having approximately 50 employees, a communications department, and located in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Participants included executives or marketing managers, communication managers, and office managers. Each participant had varied levels and types of experiences and a minimum of 1-year employment with the firm. Each participant had a responsibility of disseminating company communications through internal communication channels.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

The reason for this qualitative case study was to explore the internal strategies that law firms use to assess the effectiveness of their organizations' internal communication channels. Exploring the internal strategies used to assess the effectiveness of organizations' internal communication channels produced findings that enabled managers to thoroughly understand the processes and standards involved in assessing internal organizational effectiveness. Mishra, Boynton, and Mishra (2014) argued that the growing responsibilities of internal communications managers were (a) to build trust and employee engagement for enhancing organizational culture, (b) increase productivity, and (c) improve company revenue. David (2011) found that internal communications in daily company operations were important to achieving improved organizational effectiveness.

The absence of a strategy for assessing organizational communication channel effectiveness by internal communication managers could negatively influence the effectiveness and culture of the organization (Weichun, Sosik, Riggio, & Baiyin, 2012). The findings of this study may contribute to some managers' understanding of how to use new communication strategies.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study may assist some managers in taking action likely to result in the efficient and effective communications necessary to create a culture of open communications. Mair, Battilana, and Cardenas (2012) contended that social improvement and valuable change in a company correlated with the social development models and communications adopted by the company. Ahlquist (2014) suggested that implications of research on social change included influencing values on the consciousness of self, commitment, purpose, collaboration, and organizational citizenship; all of which can lead to responsible leadership. This study potentially fosters positive social change by (a) influencing the attitudes and behaviors of company employees so that they can adapt to the external environment; (b) contributing to the understanding of internal communication channels and the effects on the organization; and (c) providing practical data on communication efficiency, transparency, and understanding channel effectiveness that may contribute to positive social change amongst individuals and throughout the community.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The intent of this literature review was to (a) present this study in the context of the organizational communication channel effectiveness literature, (b) justify the need for the research, and (c) ensure that this study builds on the existing research literature. The review of the literature included various research studies on internal strategies for assessing organizations' internal communication channel effectiveness, online databases such as the Business Source Complete and ABI/Inform Complete and the Bureau of Vital Statistics, which were the primary research resources for identifying references for this study. Key terms used for the literature database search were *internal communication*, *organizational communication*, *organizational communication channels*, *equivocality*, *media richness*, *strategic communication, communication policy, communication theory, communication channels, communication structure,* and *internal organizational effectiveness*. Table 1 provides a synopsis of the types and publishing dates of the literature used as references in this study.

Table 1

Synopsis of Sources for the Professional and Academic Literature

Reference type	More than 5 years old 1987-2011	Less than 5 years old 2012-2016	Total
Total literature used in current study	61	119	180
Seminal books	5	10	15
Dissertation/doctoral studies	0	0	0
Peer-reviewed articles	56	109	165
Equivalent percentage numbers peer-reviewed articles	33%	67%	100%

The literature referred to in Table 1 represented literature on organizational strategies for assessing the effectiveness of an organization's internal communication channels. In general, research regarding organizational communication channels was multidisciplinary and, accordingly, concept definitions, explanations of organizational communication channels, and theories of communication channel effectiveness vary substantially within the literature. The challenge of understanding this literature review was made more difficult by the complex relationships between communication channels, communications functions, and communication channel effectiveness. Finally, much of the literature was silent on the importance of and methods for assessing communication channel effectiveness, which seemed to suggest incorrectly that such assessment was unnecessary to achieve organizational communication objectives. These aspects of the

literature suggest that a holistic, qualitative multiple case study would likely represent both a meaningful contribution to the literature and perhaps the most appropriate research design to gain insights into how actual organizations achieve internal communication effectiveness.

Organization of the Literature Review

The remainder of this literature review is organized as follows: Literature relating to each major component of the conceptual framework of CET is reviewed: (a) internal organizational communication function, (b) organizational communication channels, (c) equivocality, (d) information richness, (e) employee performance, and (f) internal organizational effectiveness. Then literature on organizational communications channel effectiveness is reviewed in connection with literature on strategies for assessing communication channel effectiveness. Finally, a summary of the literature review completes this section.

Internal Organizational Communication Function

Internal organizational communications channels and the related literature have grown rapidly in recent years as an outcome of innovations in information and communications technology. There were, however, significant gaps in the literature on internal strategies for assessing organizational communication channel effectiveness. Frandsen, Johansen, and Pang (2013) argued that the function of organizational communications had a vital role in public and private companies, especially when executives and managers needed to reach organizational goals. Jimenez-Castillo and Sanchez-Perez (2013) found that the function of organizational communication was

essential for corporations. Many company leaders and managers do not understand the role and responsibilities of the organizational communications function (Jimenez-Castillo & Sanchez-Perez, 2013). The importance of the organizational communication function affords management the opportunity to have communicative approaches for distributing company information (Jimenez-Castillo & Sanchez-Perez, 2013).

Having a communications department dedicated to the distribution of information was an important factor in organizational communications effectiveness, but how an internal communication was produced to gain and retain a reader's attention and interest was perhaps a more important aspect. In addition to this messaging quality issue, making sense of large amounts of information was essential to the retention and potential action by the reader (Jimenez-Castillo & Sanchez-Perez, 2013) and, hence, the effectiveness of the message.

The general definition of *media richness* in the organizational communications literature involved the positive association between the information capacity of the communication channel (i.e., the communication *medium*) and communication effectiveness. In their exposition of CET, Carlson and Zmud (1999) argued that the communication effectiveness of a message depended on the selection of the communication channel(s) used in transmitting the message. It followed that disseminating information through ineffective communication channels negatively influenced a user's ability to infer the purpose and meaning of a message.

Communication Infrastructure

In the information and communications technology literature, the term *communication infrastructure* refers to various types of electronic hardware and software used as part of a communications system. Similarly, in the organizational communications literature, Willi et al. (2013) presented the notion that an organizational communication infrastructure consisted of a framework of systems and processes that communicated information to employees including hardware (e.g., digital signage screens) and software (e.g., web applications) for transmitting information throughout an organization. Their definition does not, however, include so-called *town hall meetings* and other face-to-face communication channels.

Sharma and Kamalanabhan (2012) pointed out that organizations with strong communication infrastructures were likely to be more efficient when transmitting information throughout the organization. Mishra et al. (2014) suggested that the use of efficient communication channels was important to communications effectiveness because it increased the ability of organizations to ensure that information was transmitted to all employees. Literat and Chen (2014) argued that having an efficient communication infrastructure influenced the employee's perceptions of the validity and media richness of communications.

Executive and Manager Communications

Mahajan, Bishop, and Scott (2012) suggested that having adequate communications from executive management does not necessarily encourage employee engagement. In addition, Mahajan et al. claimed that having effective communications

does not necessarily promote trust among employees. In contrast, Bronn (2013)

emphasized that executive and manager communications were critical to employee

engagement at various levels of an organization because the prompt delivery of

information was essential to daily operations. Figure 3 illustrates how company messages

flow through a communications channel to reach organizational effectiveness.
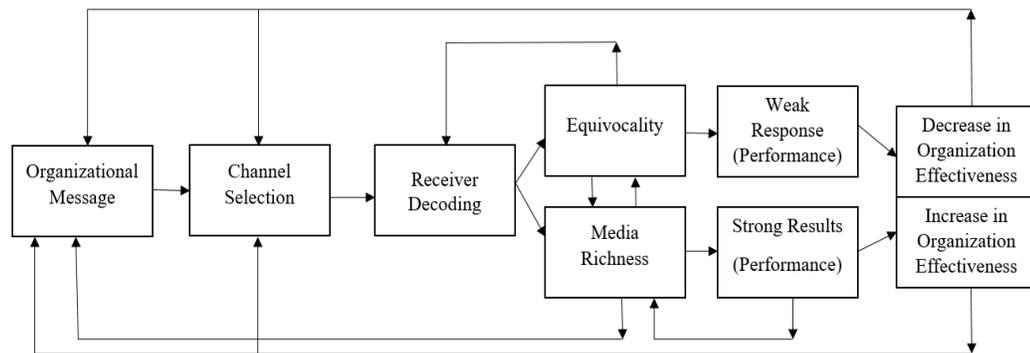
Figure 3. Message Flow (Isolated-Circuit) model for internal organizational communication channel effectiveness.

Bruno and Subbiah (2014) found that the underlying challenge for organizational

executives was to develop and execute communications strategies that align with the goal

of conveying communicative information.

Communication System Evaluation and Data Analytics

Evaluation of how information was transmitted, retrieved, and used in an

organization was critical in assessing communication channel effectiveness. Executives

and managers who used data analytics with respect to their organizations'

communications tend to have more effective communications with their employees (ROI

Communication, 2014). When employees receive a request to participate in assessing

internal communications, however, employee negativity often increased if employees believed the real purpose of measuring channel effectiveness was to estimate excess staffing and, therefore, represented information for employee layoff decisions (Raymond, Swygert, & Kahraman, 2012). Adding to this argument, Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi (2013) concluded that the media richness problems in the distribution of information originated from managements' failure to assess communication channels regularly. Executives and managers that do not recognize the need for improved communications were indicative of those who do not understand how to evaluate organizational communications channel effectiveness. Carlson and Zmud (1999) emphasized that, in CET, managers who were more experienced with selecting, using, and assessing communication channels were more effective in the management role. Also, that the lack of knowledge about communications effectiveness measurement and data analytics inhibited the ability of executives to appropriately assess communication channel effectiveness.

The use of communication measurement and data analytics in assessing communications effectiveness continues to grow. Schweizer (2012) posited that the benefits resulting from such measurements and assessments were illusory whereas Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, and Johnson (2013) asserted that such assessments were useful tools; invalidating, for example, the use of social media and the Internet. Another contrasting view was that of Jenkins-Guarieri et al., who maintained that the effects of measurement threatens the communication processes; noting that an important distinction was that one does not have to measure to assess, especially when managers lacked

experience in identifying the difference between implementing measurement and assessing channel effectiveness.

Open Communication Culture

An *open communication culture* exists when there is the free flow of accessible information throughout an organization using efficient communication channels. An office culture characterized by open communication enabled employees to share information and feedback without fear of retaliation or adverse consequences from management (Campbell & Goritz, 2014). Campbell and Goritz (2014) explained that when employees are comfortable in sharing and receiving information using various communication channels, increases in organizational effectiveness were possible (see Figure 7). Michenera and Bersch (2013) claimed that organizations that maintain efficient communication channels were more apt to communicate messages to employees in a timely manner. An obstacle to achieving an open communication culture for many companies is gaining the understanding and support of executives and managers on the organizational benefits of creating open communication cultures.

An open communication culture is a competitive business advantage. In CET, Carlson and Zmud (1999) explained that the importance of message quality and employee experience in the organizational context could promote open communication culture. Campbell and Goritz (2014) claimed that when companies have efficient communication channels that promote an open communicative culture, employees are motivated to exercise innovation, exchange knowledge, and implement best practices. Onea (2012), Pipas (2013), and Siano, Vollero, Confetto, and Siglioccolo (2013) noted

that using communication channels was a management strategy and a recognized avenue

for regulating employee behavior, instilling values, enhancing employee self-image and

showing commitment to building an open communication culture. An organization

having effective communication channels available for transmission of information

allowed employees to receive and retrieve such information; thereby, allowing employees

to remain knowledgeable about company business, which tends to create business

advantage.

Organizational Communication Channels

An organization's communication system was linked by using multiple channels

including e-mail, social media, manager and staff meetings, and conference calls. Many

organizations had constant change within their internal communication channels, which

affects the interpretation of the information communicated throughout the company

(Thomas & Stephens, 2015). One strategy that guaranteed a positive change in this regard

was increasing the strategic alignment between corporate information and the appropriate

choice of communication channels to disseminate the information (Stephens, Barrett, &

Mahometa, 2013; Zmud, Lind, & Young, 1990; see Figure 4). When executives and

managers saturate communication channels with irrelevant information, it diminished the

attention that employees devote to the communications and the channels through which

the communications received (Blue, McBride, Weatherless, & Letowski, 2012). In

organizations that have no standard procedures for assessing appropriate communication

channels, the leaders tend to selects ineffective communication channels (Tenhiälä &

Salvador, 2014).

This literature on organizational communication channels was consistent with the explanations and predictions of CET and, therefore, suggested that the collective preferences of employees can drive daily routine of use, selection, and preferability of communications channels. Figure 4 aligns with the literature and presents a conceptual diagram of how the communications channel selection decision and message transmission relates to CET, as presented in Figures 1-3.
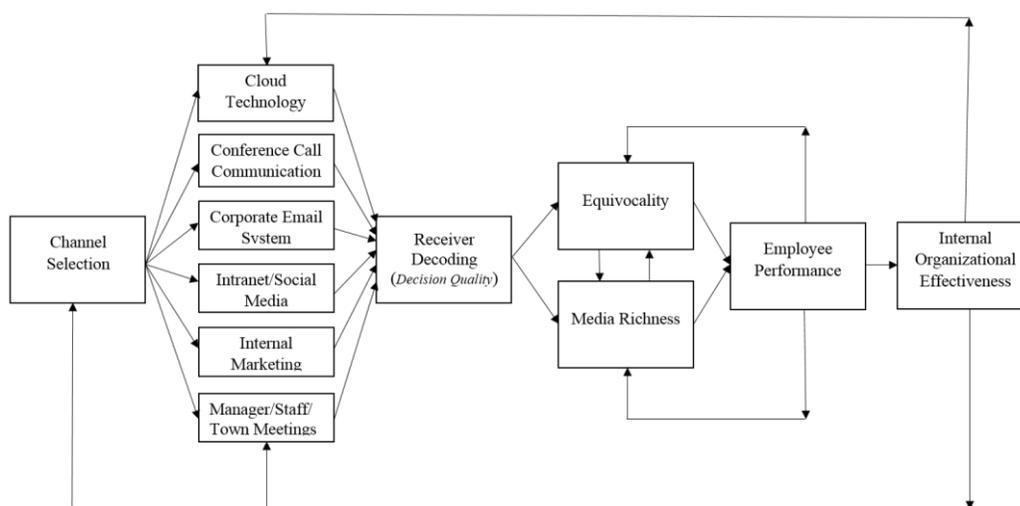
Figure 4. Communicative channel selection model for internal organizational effectiveness.

Assessing communication channel effectiveness included assessing employee perceptions of how communication channels affect the receipt and interpretation of information (Zmud et al., 1990). Employees' communication channel preferences and choices emphasized three perspectives: rational choice, critical mass, and social choice (Zmud et al., 1990). For example, the rational choice perspective suggests that users

choose a communication channel that was most efficient or effective for a specific communication task (Zmud et al., 1990).

Also, according to Zmud et al. (1990), the critical mass perspective suggests that employees will not use specific communication channels until executives and managers use the channel. Similarly, the social choice perspective suggests employees' communication channel choice depends on what channel important employees, such as executives, use to communicate a certain type of information. Additionally, Zmud et al., suggested that corporate executives and managers failed to provide internal strategies for assessing channel effectiveness because they lacked the knowledge and experience on channel selection, which suggests the need for this research study.

Communication channel availability and effectiveness also depends on communications technology, which refers to all equipment and software programs used to process and disseminate company information. Holtgrewe (2014) stated that communication technology was one of the few industries recently demonstrating progress and innovation, and suggests it was reasonable to assume that constantly changing communication technology was likely to continue resulting in new technologies that will change work processes throughout the business society. Therefore, assessing communication channels was a critical function because outdated technology had the potential to corrupt information sent to employees. This conclusion suggested that modern communication technology was necessary for organizations to be competitive, maintain open communications, and build trust with employees (Cidota & Dumitrescu, 2012).

Cloud Technology

Cloud technology emerged as a novel means of transitioning from traditional data storage to digital data storage. There was no universal definition of the term *cloud computing*; however, cloud computing in its most basic meaning was a communication channel that allows the retrieval of data or information from data storage from any location (Mastelic et al., 2015). Berman, Kesterson-Townes, Marshall, and Srivaths (2012) and Dhar (2012) claimed that cloud computing viewed as a new communication channel improved access to information and represented a valuable infrastructure for storing internal data. In contrast, privacy issues, security risks, and infrastructure deficiencies plague cloud computing, suggesting cloud computing might not always be acceptable regarding security levels needed for some internal communications (Dutta, Peng, & Choudhary, 2013). Having powerful security encryption can increase security but does not necessarily secure internal communication channels against outside security breaches. Nonetheless, cloud technology as a communication channel potentially supports various processes used in the dissemination of information (Juels & Oprea, 2013).

Conference Call Communication

Communication technology continues to change the way executives and managers make decisions. For example, conference calls represent a popular communication channel and allow management to disseminate information immediately and receive instantaneous responses. Carlson and Zmud (1999) found that conference calls continued to evolve as a distinct communication channel, especially in terms of efficiency. Chou,

Promes, Souza, Topp, and O'Sullivan (2012) and Gallo, Carpenter, and Glisson (2013)

argued that the use of conference calls viewed as a fundamental communication channel

infrastructure reflect an inconsistency in user perceptions and how they provide real-time

information in decision-making. For example, employees were often multitasking during

conference calls and are therefore not giving full attention to the decision-making process

while on the call. In arguing for the value of conference calls, Lo, van Breukelen, Peters,

and Kok (2014) and Wynn, Hagen, and Friborg (2012) found that conference calls served

a cost-saving function for executives and managers because such interactions limited

travel expenses.

Eliminating the need to travel to offsite locations, in turn, facilitated

organizational effectiveness. Bassemir, Novotny-Farkas, and Pachta (2013) indicated that

participants who used conference calls as a communication channel gained an

informational advantage over employees who do not participate in the conference calls.

Participants who do not attend a conference call must wait for information through other

channels, thereby placing these individuals at a disadvantage (Bassemir et al., 2013).

Interpreted in the context of CET, conference calls represented a popular communication

channel where users develop and change their perceptions of the communication process

and communication channel, suggested the need to address this particular communication

channel in this study.

Corporate E-mail Systems

Corporate e-mail has changed the way businesses communicate with employees

and customers. E-mail represented an expansion of corporate communication channels

because it represented a unique medium for sending and receiving messages including

electronic transmission of product and service sales invoices, purchasing orders, sales and

service complaints, and related problem resolutions (Jansen & Janssen, 2013). Sias,

Pedersen, Gallagher, and Kopaneva (2012) contended that e-mail messages influenced

user perceptions of the e-mail communication channel depending on the promptness of e-

mail responses. E-mail messages represented more direct communications than messages

routed through certain other communication channels and, accordingly, reasonably

influenced employee perceptions about communication channels. In contrast,

Boczkowski and Mitchelstein (2012) asserted that research on the influence of e-mail

systems on employee interaction remained inconclusive. Kiddie (2014) argued that voice

mail was still a primary communication channel because of the overwhelming number of

e-mails sent and received during a workday have likely resulted in an adverse perception

of message quality, suggesting that high volumes of e-mail lead to negative perceptions

of e-mail communication channel effectiveness.

Carlson and Zmud (1999) and Turnage (2013) found that the relationship between

communication technology and channel perception could influence or change an

employee's behavior. Concerning e-mail systems, in particular, Jian (2013) found that e-

mail systems can promote bad behavior, which typically manifested when employees

used their corporate e-mail for activities unrelated to their work or access their personal

e-mail while at work. Hansen, Fabriz, and Stehle (2015) argued that the e-mail channel

was increasingly important and represented an economical way to communicate

information throughout the organization.

Social Media/Corporate Internet

Although social media was a new internal communication channel, Lipiainen, Karjaluoto, and Nevalainen (2013) argued that many companies used social media channels for external communications as a way of connecting with their customers. The availability of social media communication channels could be a critical driver in the selection of message distribution strategies in maintaining a connection to customers and employees (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieterson, 2015).

The rise of social media as an internal organizational communication channel was increasing. Kane, Alavi, Labianca, and Borgatti (2014) found that implementing a social media channel within an organization's communication infrastructure was challenging. Specifically, one primary challenge was implementing effective technology to protect the organization's computer systems from security breaches. Social media systems' generally inadequate information security, potential for modification of in-transit messaging, and high message traffic volumes all increased a company's communication costs (Tsikerdekis & Zeadally, 2014). Kuvykaite and Piligrimiene (2013) argued that the primary communication challenge with social media channels was the ability to secure company information.

Bacile, Hoffacker, and White (2014) argued that an internal social media channel can enable employees to have a voice in organizational matters; specifically in communicating among themselves and with company executives and managers, and sharing perspectives about the company. Mount and Martinez (2014) also found that an internal social media channel was an important internal communication channel. Rolland

and Parmentier (2013) argued that social media can promote organizational effectiveness through knowledge building and interaction among employees and with external parties. However, executives and managers who had a negative perception of social media often do not support the establishment or use of an internal social media channel (Li, Berens, & de Maertelaere, 2014).

Kilgour, Sasser, and Larke (2015) found that, from an informational perspective, social media represented an interactive, virtual environment where organizational managers have limited control over information transmission. Kilgour et al. believed that social media was an appropriate communication channel for external customers in contrast to being a channel for effective internal communications between employees. In contrast, Cardon and Marshall (2015) argued that social media replaced e-mails as the primary internal communication channel for business communications. Furthermore, Cardon and Marshall claimed that the management of social media communication both externally and internally required the adoption of new technical skills. Additionally, those employees experienced and comfortable with social media had an advantage over employees who lack such experience and comfort.

Manager/Staff Meetings and Town Hall Meetings

Schwartzman (1989) characterized a *meeting* as a complex phenomenon that was more a system for research than a tool, a planned setting, or a context for information. However, in contrast, Simoneaux and Stroud (2015) stated that meetings are a traditional channel for disseminating information, securing managerial control, learning information, and building a consensus. Maurer (2013) argued that town hall meetings are important for

several purposes: to create environments for company leaders to shape relationships with their employees by having face to face communications, to provide instant feedback to employees questions, and to manage the consensus on an issue or situation.

However, Besley, McComas, and Trumbo (2012) noted that some company leaders do and some do not conduct so-called *town hall meetings* where employees gather to discuss issues and receive feedback directly with management. The reasons for this likely vary. Aggerholm and Baraldi (2013) found that most town hall meetings center on information transmission rather than knowledge sharing, and there was little direct engagement between management and employees. Nielsen (2013) asserted that beginning and ending meetings with interactions between management and employees was essential to maximize the value of the meeting.

Agypt, Rubin, and Spivack (2012) argued that scheduling any large meeting during a workday can disrupt the employees' workflow. Disruptions could delay other employees from responding to e-mails, text messages, telephone calls, or customer/client visits. Thus, meetings can interfere with the operation of other communication channels. Peltola (2013) observed that management meetings are effective for sharing information, and possibly as a means of maintaining managerial control where executives' correct perceptions on the value of meetings as internal communication channels.

Internal Marketing Communications

Technically, internal marketing communications is not a separate communication channel, but instead a type of messaging. El Samen and Alshurideh (2012) presented the notion that internal marketing involved using the organizations' communication channels

to influence employees to adopt the company products. Pantouvakis (2012) found that many companies do not have internal marketing communications even to announce the release of new products. Instead, many managers rely on external marketing campaigns to inform their employees. These managers assumed that external marketing campaigns eliminate the need for internal marketing communications. Huang and Chen (2013), Sharma and Kamalanabhan (2012), and Yao, Chen, and Cai (2013) found that although communication channels allowed companies to inform employees about their products, some executives lack knowledge on how to use communication channels effectively to achieve internal marketing functions objectives.

Equivocality

Equivocality is the extent to which a message is unclear regarding either its information content or the user's ability to interpret the message accurately (Daft & Lengel, 1986; see Figure 5). Daft and Lengel (1986) argued that a user's information deficiency with respect to the task or action requirements associated with particular messages increased with the equivocality of the message. Any specific communication channel can generally send a variety of information although sending a certain type of information through a channel can cause equivocality in the messaging (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). Daft and Lengel (1986) and Lo (2013) suggested that a sender's understanding of the information to some degree determined the inherent uncertainty or ambiguity of the message. However, the receiver's level of understanding of the informational content of a message also depends on the communication channel used to transmit the message (Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Rice & Shook, 1990). Equivocality can

increase when individuals are excessively busy in completing other tasks (i.e.,

multitasking), thus failing to either recognize the communication channel used or

accurately interpret the message (Blomme & Kristen, 2012). Thus, the characteristics and

actions of both the sender and receiver of a message can influence the equivocality of the

message. Figure 5 summarized the conceptual relationships reviewed in this section

related to equivocality, message interpretation, employee performance, and

organizational effectiveness.
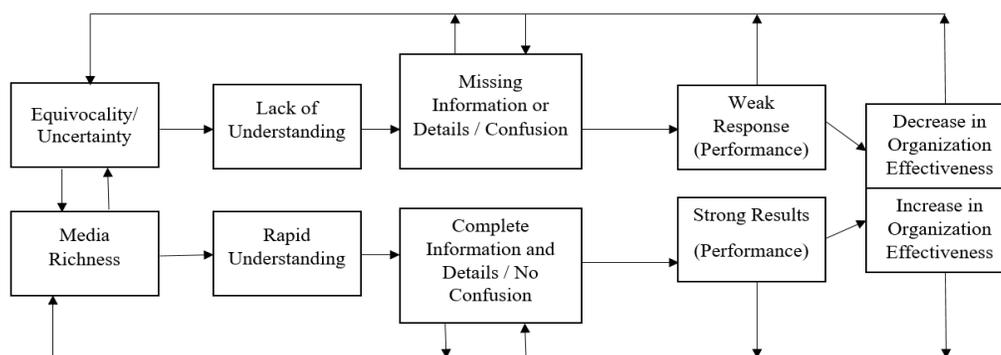
Figure 5. Equivocality and media richness (Isolated Circuit) model for internal
organization effectiveness.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty, in the context of media richness theory and CET, referred to the

difference between the amount of required information a user has obtained and the

amount of information needed to understand and complete the task associated with the

message or communication (Rice & Shook, 1990). Rice and Shook (1990) argued that

individuals may respond to uncertainty in several ways including (a) acquiring and

processing more information, (b) decreasing ambiguity of messages by using more

effective communication channels, and (c) using alternative information systems, are responses to the user's informational requirements.

Information tranmitted over internal communication channels must be rich. Carlson and Zmud (1999) found that as individuals who do not acquire knowledge base about company communications decreasingly are unable to perceive communication channels as rich. Daft and Lengel (1986) found that alternatively, managers are still having to ask many questions to employees about the effectiveness of the internal communication channels. Without proper information employee performance under uncertainty could increase.

Media Richness

According to CET, media richness referred to a communication channel's capacity to communicate information effectively (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). Media richness, as presented in media richness theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1999) referred to the extent to which a communication channel has the capability of carrying a broad range of verbal and non-verbal information referred to the extent to which a communication channel has the capability of carrying a broad range of verbal and non-verbal information. Daft and Lengel (1986) defined media richness as the quality of the messages transmitted over information dissemination channels. Ussahawanitchakit (2012) and Ogara and Chang (2014) found that the media richness of messages reduced equivocality through the choice of appropriate communication channels (see Figure 5).

In a study of *mobile instant messaging* and *mobile text messaging*, Solomon and Koh (2014) found that a positive user experience aligned significantly with their

perceived richness of each channel. However, such perceived richness aligned with user satisfaction for only one of the channels being used. Many users are likely to choose the communication channel based on the inherent richness of messages. Chang and Yang (2013) found that employees' experience with, and the perception of, the media richness of messages collectively influenced communication channel choice. Park, Chung, and Lee (2012) argued that inefficient communication channels lessen the media richness of communication messages, which influenced employee understanding of the information, and therefore, their performance.

Employee Performance

Performing job responsibilities, or specific tasks, effectively is one meaning of employee performance (Kim, 2014). Neves and Eisenberger (2012) suggested that a lack of transparency in communications and the dissemination of inadequate information both increased equivocality and accordingly, reduced employee performance and productivity. Kim (2014) found that achieving high levels of employee performance was a primary concern of executives because performance directly influenced an organization's sustainable growth and competitive advantage (see Figure 6). Blue et al. (2012) argued that effective communication policies could help employees enhance their effectiveness and increase their productivity.

Channel expansion theory suggests that employees who received rich communications develop a deeper knowledge base and specific perceptions of the relative effectiveness of various communication channels (Carlson & Zmud, 1999). Carlson and Zmud (1999) also asserted that individual's negative experiences with a

specific communications channel resulted in less attention to communications sent by via

that channel in the future. However, Glor (2014) found that effective communication

policies, communication management systems, and process improvement constituted a

competitive advantage. An example of this could be playing a game while on a

conference call instead of paying attention to the information being presented. Figure 6

presents the basic concepts related to the employee performance literature and their

interrelationships.
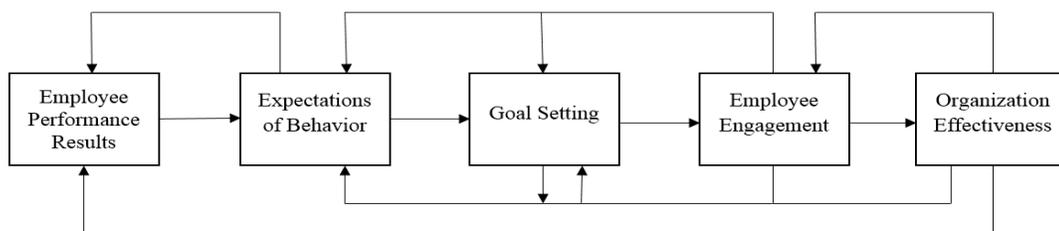
Figure 6. Employee performance (Isolated Circuit) model for organizational
effectiveness.

Information Sharing

Company executives and managers are the primary sources of organizational

information that is shared within a company. Hendarty, Bard, Foretay, and Jie (2014)

argued that, if done properly, the sharing of key corporate information by management

with employees could be a means to establish and maintain trust and build relationships

across the organization. Lam, Huang, and Chan (2014) noted that effective information

sharing involved transparent communications, interactive discussions about the

information, and explaining important corporate decisions through a variety of internal

organizational communication channels. By investing in such processes, a company's management observed and learned how the informational consensus was reached, and by what communication channels were most effective (Lam et al., 2014). For example, Rothenberg (2015) observed that while some managers received information formally and informally, some employees were forced to seek information from potential inaccurate informal channels such as from a rumor mill and that this caused those employees to act based on the incorrect information.

Steijn and Schouten (2013) noted that when employees received information, they generally need a means of sharing their thoughts, ideas, and opinions about the information. Employees who discussed the information with fellow employees and managers might develop improved working relationships with those individuals. Channel expansion theory suggests that when employees become experienced with a particular communication channel or individual, they develop a knowledge base for the channel or individual, enabling them to extract richer information content from the channel or individual (Carlson & Zmud, 1999).

Steijn and Schouten (2013) found that developing multiple effective communication channels was an important element of an effective internal communications management strategy. Individuals do often interpret messages differently and having multiple communications channels might increase message richness. Companies that have efficient communication channels are better able to influence employee understanding of the message content and how to apply that content to their work (Santos, Goldman, Filho, Martins, & Cortés, 2014). Snyder and Lee-

Partridge (2013) found that management decisions that resulted in ineffective

communication channels diminish employees' trust of management and in the viability of

the company. However, Maksl and Young (2013) suggested the institution of active

management of communication channels, especially through new technology resulted in

an employees' perceiving a reduced level of individual privacy in the workplace.

Message Type

Barbour, Jacocks, and Wesner (2013) claimed that message types are strategically

published information in various formats using company newsletter, website, electronic

directories, e-mail, digital signage screens, or blogs. Barbour et al. also claimed their

study investigated the influence of message production by communication managers

about organizational effectiveness. Barbour et al.'s results from multilevel structural

equations modeling indicated that the construction of messages affected perception,

change, and context. The results of this study also applied to employee relationships

during organizational change as a problem in designing messages and seems inconsistent

with the characterization of *message type*; i.e., Barbour et al. did not seem to address

message type in any direct way.

Nechita (2012) found that message type was a significant factor in effectively

communicating information to employees (see Figure 2). Ormond and Warkentin (2015)

believed that employees who adopted certain message type to receive information trust or

have an otherwise positive attitude about the use of communication channels suggesting

employee perception was important in communication channel effectiveness.

Additionally, Hart (2012) argued that electronic communications channels for message

types such as e-mail or the Internet are critical to the socialization of new employees.

Carton, Murphy, and Clark (2014) suggested that, to best help employees understand the

ultimate objectives of their work and environment, executives need to transmit a

combination of messages types comprised of (a) tailored internal messages, (b) balancing

between creating messages with a sense of urgency, and (c) a sense that goals and

objectives can align, and disseminating information while also soliciting input from

selected message types.

Trust/Engagement

Baer et al. (2014) defined trust as a construct that pertained to the perception that

people may be vulnerable in a given situation. Scott and Garza (2014) and Kim (2014)

argued that although increasing employee engagement was an important organizational

goal, management often selects ineffective communication channels resulting in reduced

credibility and trust. Carlson and Zmud (1999) found that selecting efficient

communication channels strengthens perceptions of the trustworthiness of management

and company information. He, Zhu, and Zheng (2014) suggested that inefficient

communication channels and channels inundated with irrelevant messages resulted in

distorted communications that failed to keep employees apprised of current information.

The body of research strongly indicated that proper management and use of an

organization's communication channels may influence employees' degree of trust in

management and their degree of job engagement. He et al. (2014) found that failure for

management to build trust through the use of communication channels could affect

employee engagement. Additionally, He et al. claimed that lack of trust could affect organizational behavior.

Internal Organizational Effectiveness

Menguc, Auh, Fisher, and Haddad (2013) found that using multiple communication channels, as a means of acquiring feedback from employees was a predictor of internal engagement that leads to achieving organizational effectiveness. Johansen and LeRoux (2013) emphasized that the internal communication function was an important factor influencing organizational effectiveness. Kataria, Rastogi, and Garg (2013) suggested that organizational effectiveness was achievable through open communications, which allows alignment of organizational and employee goals resulting in increased employee commitment, engagement, and productivity.

Kataria et al. (2013) further argued that executives who achieved greater employee job satisfaction are better able to achieve organizational effectiveness. There are many ways to assess the effectiveness of an organization, which included establishing efficient communication channels (see Figure 7). Trierweiller et al. (2012) suggested that having efficient communication channels to disseminate information was a part of management responsibilities and that executive often lacked the knowledge to establish effective communications channels.

Assessing Communications

Cobanica and Grecu (2014) found that evaluating internal communications was a complex process, particularly the formulation of assessment policy for channel performance and for developing communication strategies. Zwijze-Koning and De Jong

(2015) argued that assessment of the efficiency of internal communication channels was essential to organizations. They also noted that many managers lacked experience in performing such assessments. Gimžauskienė and Varaniūtė (2012) claimed that combining multiple communication channels and performance measurement systems fostered internal organizational effectiveness.

Ryynänen, Jalkala, and Salminen (2013) argued that poorly constructed messages can be a barrier to an accurate assessment of the existing internal communication channels, but are an important notation of internal communications. Aggarwala and Subbian (2014) found that assessing all aspects of organizational communication systems including infrastructure, communication channels and individual messaging resulted in benefits to both employees and the company. The available literature indicated that a comprehensive assessment of an organization's internal communications and systems can be a valuable tool in the advancement of organization effectiveness.

Organizational Change and Communications

Barbour et al. (2013) argued that organizational change was a result of co-constructed, designed internal interactions facilitated through messages transmitted via effective communication channels. However, Giauque (2015) found organizational change resulted in increased individual stress levels that, in turn, exacerbated equivocality of messages and negatively affect employee engagement and performance. Figure 7 summarized the relationships between concepts addressed in the literature on organizational change and communications reviewed in this study. The body of literature indicated that effective communications are essential to achieving effective

organizational change because internal information sharing was critical to developing an organizational strategy.
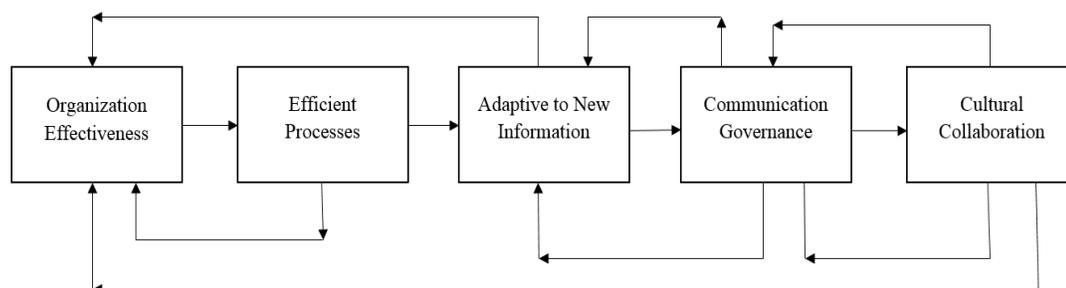
Figure 7. Organizational effectiveness (Isolated-Circuit) path model for channel effectiveness.

In the literature review I found that corporate leaders believed assessing organizational communication channel effectiveness was unnecessary, researchers believed that study of communication channel effectiveness was needed to support channel choice and use decisions. Nyan (2015) found that communication of certainty has a perlocutionary effect. Accordingly, the literature reviewed in this study suggested communication managers need to conduct more exploration on internal strategies to assess the effectiveness of organizational communication channels.

Transition and Summary

In this research study, I explored strategies for assessing the effectiveness of organizational communication channels. Section 1 is about outlining the research problem under study including (a) the rationale for the qualitative multiple case study design, (b) identification of population and geographical location of the study, (c) a review of channel expansion theory, on which the study was grounded, and (d) a

description of the data collection process for this study. Further information about the research method and design, sampling, and data collection of this study is located in Section 2. Information about the findings from this research on professional business practice, possible contributions to social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for future inquiry and researcher reflections about the study follows in Section 3.

Section 2: The Project

Section 2 of this study outlines of the research design and method used to answer the research question and rationale for the study. The description of the design includes the processes of (a) collecting data, (b) ensuring ethical research standards of the study, (c) recording the participant responses, (d) documenting the information from the data collection, and (e) analyzing the data. In addition, I present information regarding the transferability, credibility, and reliability of this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore what internal strategies, if any, medium-sized law firm managers use to assess the effectiveness of their organizations' internal communication channels. The selected population included two medium-size law firms, each having approximately 50 employees and located in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Both lawyers and administrative staff employed in the law firms participated in semistructured interviews designed to elicit their insights and experiences with respect to their firms' strategies for assessing their internal communication channels. In addition, other forms of data collected from the firms included written documentation and direct observation. Implications for positive social change include improved employment conditions associated with a higher sense of self-worth and dignity among employees resulting from higher quality, more effective communications within organizations and communities (Ocasio et al., 2015).

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, a researcher is responsible for collecting data from in-person interviews, documentation, and direct observation; analyzing the data; and, presenting the findings (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Additionally, the role of researcher includes developing research questions; selecting a conceptual framework; selecting participants; collecting, coding, and interpreting the findings of inquiry; and, preparing the results in written form (Yin, 2014). The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research and, accordingly, it is necessary for the researcher to present his or her relationship to the study and its results (Yin, 2014). I was the researcher, and as such, I assumed all these roles and responsibilities. I held no existing or contemplated future relationship with the participants or the law firms where data collection took place.

As the researcher, I was forthright, upfront, honest, and ethical in my conduct, and I treated research participants with justice, beneficence, and respect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Persons involved in the study received assurances that the research would be conducted responsibly, as outlined in the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). I followed appropriate research procedures in accordance with the guidelines for ethical research addressed in the Belmont Report.

I contacted the participants by telephone or e-mail to arrange for their participation. The contact information for the participants was given to me by the office managers of the two firms that were the focus of my data collection. No physical contact of any type was required between any case participants during the interviews. I assumed

that case participants would be open, honest, express their views, share their experience, and recount their stories about the strategies that their organizations employ to assess the effectiveness of internal communication channels.

My responsibility as the researcher included identifying and eliminating bias in the research. Member-checking and cross-case synthesis was used to mitigate any such bias. My use of audio recording equipment to collect information and analyze data and personal reflections assisted in reducing any bias in this research process. I asked semistructured and open ended interview questions about strategies for the effectiveness of organizational communication channels.

Many qualitative research studies have employed qualitative interview protocols to capture research data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The interview protocols in this study included (a) informed consent process, and (b) participant preparation for the interviews, with information pertinent before, during, and after the interview. The interview protocol in Appendix D was used to ensure the interviews returned rich information about strategies for assessing the effectiveness of organizational communication channels.

Participants

For this study, the criterion for participation was that the participants must have been an executives or marketing managers, communication managers, and office manager working at the selected case firms. The selection of participants from the case firms was not random. Participants had varied levels and types of experiences, such as

being an executive or manager; however, all participants had some knowledge of the case

firm's communication channels.

Participants were therefore selected using purposeful sampling because of their

knowledge about their firms' communications systems. Their knowledge provided rich

data on the effectiveness of the organizational communication channels and how such

effectiveness was assessed. Participants had at least one year of experience working for

the case company.

Local reputation of exemplary internal communications indicated that law firms

were appropriate research subjects for this case study. I selected three medium size law

firms in the Commonwealth of Virginia for this study by using personal contacts and

business networks to contact members of the company leadership who guaranteed

company participation. I then worked with the office managers of the firms to schedule

appointments with executives and managers participating in this study. The office

manager provided the necessary contact information and access to the participants.

Additionally, the office managers assisted me in securing consent forms, confidentiality

agreements, and scheduling interview appointments. The particpants' comments

remained confidential.

Establishing and maintaining a relationship with participants was a fundamental

component of the research process; and my relationship with participants began with a

telephone call and a follow-up e-mail after appointments were scheduled (Wallace &

Sheldon, 2013). The telephone call introduced the nature of the study and elicited

participants' views on their firms' strategies for assessing the effectiveness of their firms'

internal communication channels. Consistent with the interview procedures outlined here, Bailey (2014), Wertz (2014), and Wolcott (2014) identified data collection through direct communication between researcher and participant as a primary requirement of qualitative exploration.

Research Method

The most reputable research methods for the social sciences include quantitative, mixed methods, and qualitative. Quantitative research includes determining a correlation, significance, or relationships with numerical data or the analysis of trends (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). Venkatesh et al. (2013) argued that quantitative methods afford researchers the convenience of exploring existing data collected in earlier periods. The quantitative research methods were not consistent with the intent of this study because the focus of this study was on exploring strategies and, therefore, did not involve a use of numerical data.

Mixed method research continues to gain popularity in the social sciences. Frels and Onwuegbuzie (2013) contended that combining the quantitative and qualitative methods can be more effective in answering certain types of research questions in comparison than just the quantitative or qualitative method used individually. Molina-Azorína, López-Gamero, Pereira-Moliner and Pertusa-Ortega (2012) argued that the mixed-method approach remains controversial in academic circles, but these authors highlighted the fact that this approach combines the advantages of two types of data collection. Again, however, the mixed-method approach was not consistent with the exploratory nature of this study.

The qualitative method was selected for this study. The qualitative method involves inquiry into and collecting data on real-world experiences rather than those accumulated in a simulated environment (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative research explores questions of *how* (e.g., how a firm evaluates and makes choices). Accordingly, the qualitative method was appropriate given the nature and intent of this research, which was the exploration of lived experiences concerning the focus of this study (Freeman, Gregen, & Josselson, 2015; Prowse, 2013).

Research Design

Some specific qualitative research designs that were considered for this study were phenomenological, ethnographic, case study, and narrative (Radley & Chamberlain, 2012). The phenomenological research design is for the study of the lived experiences of participants (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research designs often follow the modified van Kaam method for data analysis where, for example, there is a preliminary grouping or clustering of related ideas, after which textual descriptions for each participant are developed (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological design characteristics are similar to the case study design; however, the focus of this study was not the lived experiences of individuals concerning a phenomenon, but rather was on internal communication strategies being used within the organizations.

An ethnographic research design addresses forms of behavior in cultures among a group or within an organization. It was not appropriate for my study because I was not studying organizational culture (Yin, 2009, 2014). The narrative research design reflects

the intent to focus on the lives of individuals as told through personal stories. A narrative research design is appropriate for studies where the central focus is on verbal or textual data as provided by participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The narrative research design encompasses the exploration of individual experiences and the lessons learned from those experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The case study design aligned most closely with the focus of this study because the intent of this study was to explore internal strategies for assessing organizational communication channel effectiveness (Nunan & Di Domenico, 2013; Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested the case study design was appropriate to draw information from multiple sources. For this study, data from participants as well as documentation of the firms' internal policies were necessary to address the research question. Hynes (2012) explained that a case study design was appropriate for exploratory research because it allowed a researcher to better explore the *who* or *what* instead of *how* phenomena affected an organization.

An appropriate research design and sample for qualitative research allows for the occurrence of *data saturation*. In this study, data saturation occurred when the discovery of new information ended; that is when I noticed that participants repeated emergent themes during the data collection phase of a study (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). The multiple case, multiple participant semistructured interview design used in this study allowed for data saturation confirmation, which increased the reliability and potential validity of this study's findings.

Population and Sampling

The selected population included two medium-size law firms, each having approximately 50 employees, a communications department, and located in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Radley and Chamberlain (2012) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) found that purposeful sampling for interviews of employees enabled researchers to elicit richer data based on the descriptive experiences that accumulate from long-term employment. A purposeful sampling approach, therefore, corresponded to the data collection design for this study.

For this study, the criterion for participation was executives or marketing managers, communication managers, and office managers recruited from each selected case firm based on the expectation that this was sufficient to allow sufficient data collection for data saturation. Not achieving data saturation with selected participants' further participants would have been selected and interviewed. Potential participants were selected by each case firm's office manager based on the manager's knowledge of employees who had daily responsibilities to disseminate company communications. I then selected those who would be actual participants. In accordance with the recommendations of Yin (2009), Nunan and Yenicioglu (2013), and Plankey-Videla (2012), the interviewing of participants was conducted in neutral locations (i.e., coffee shops, public libraries, restaurants) to allow participants to feel more comfortable about responding to research questions.

Ethical Research

Prior to collecting data, Walden University's Institution Review Board (IRB) assigned an approval number after evaluating the research proposal using three principles that underlie the protection of human participants in research to (a) ensure equal distribution of burden to participants, (b) uphold the beneficence to minimize potential harm and danger, and (c) minimize personal and professional privacy risks (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The IRB number for this study is 06-07-16-0400565. During the collecting of data and the preparation of the final study I was especially cognizant of respecting the rights of the participants by recognizing their need for privacy and autonomy as well as protecting the participant's privileges during the inquiry and adhering to the requirements for ethical protection of research data is a researcher's responsibility (Yin, 2014). Upon IRB approval, data collection for this study began. The ethical research statement addressed informed consent and incentives, participant withdrawal procedures, procedures for ethical protection, referral of agreement documents, and a participant and organization confidentiality statement.

Participants in this study were handed an informed consent form on the day of the interview, 15 minutes prior to the start of the interview. Additionally, each participant received a verbal explanation 15 minutes prior to the start of the interview concerning the explanations and information provided in the informed consent form and had an opportunity to ask questions or address concerns prior to signing the informed consent forms (Yin, 2014). After the participant agreed to the terms of the informed consent form

regarding his or her participation in the research study, he or she signed the informed consent form.

Participation in this study was voluntary; therefore, participants did not receive incentives to participate in this research study because incentives and enticements that could have biased their responses and thereby damage the integrity of the study (Yin, 2014). Incentives are strictly are prohibited by Walden University's IRB. Matthew, Thomas, and Stephens (2015) used semistructured interviews to collect data from participant concerning communication processes in the U.S. Coast Guard. Putnam and Mumby (2014) claimed that using semistructured interviews allowed efficient capture of data about organizational communications qualitative research.

Participants were provided with explanation of withdrawal procedures at the same time as the informed consent process was explained to them. Accordingly, all participants knew that they could withdraw from the study at any time before, during, or after data collection. Participants could have withdrawn verbally, electronically through e-mail, or by telephone. All participants may withdraw without penalty, retaliation, or mistreatment.

To maintain respect, confidentiality, and fulfill my responsibility, all data and information obtained during this research will be securely stored for the specified period of 5 years, hard copies of the data, flash drives, and computer discs will remain for the 5-year timeframe in a locked file cabinet in a home office, for which I manage the key to protect confidentiality of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After the 5-year period, all material associated with this study will be electronically deleted, shredded or destroyed to protect participants' privacy (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2009).

Copies of all documents in the appendix such as the preamble are in Appendix A; signed

confidentiality agreements in; the completed informed consent forms; the e-mail letters of

request to participants; the collaborative institutional training initiative reports; and, the

letter of confirmation from the law firms taking part in this study will be deleted,

shredded or destroyed.

Data Collection Instruments

For this study, I was the primary instrument for collecting data. Hermanowicz

(2013) suggested the collection of data by in-person interviews, direct observation, and

organizational documentation are all associated with qualitative research studies. In this

study, the sources of data collection were semistructured interviews and organizational

documentation such as corporate communications plans and security procedures for

internal communications. Starr (2014) asserted that open-ended interview questions

designed to elicit data on the *how* or *what* of the phenomena under study were

appropriate for use in qualitative case studies. Yin (2009) argued that no one single data

source had an advantage over other sources and, accordingly, there were advantages

associated with using multiple data sources, as in this study.

I used semistructured interviews as a primary data collection technique. The

interviewing process for this case took a full two weeks. Additional information from the

firms' documentation such as corporate communications plans provided additional data

and with the interview data facilitated triangulation. Miles and Huberman (1994) found

that the triangulation of data was a powerful technique for reinforcing qualitative research

findings.

As the researcher, I worked to enhance the validity and reliability of this study through the member-checking process and transcript review process. Yin (2014) claimed that construct validity and reliability includes four principles (a) the utilization of multiple sources of evidence, (b) creation of a well-organized case, (c) maintaining a custody of proof, and (d) being careful using electronic sources in this study. The table of contents includes the preamble in Appendix A, the confidentiality agreement in Appendix B, the informed consent form, the e-mail letter of request to participate in Appendix C, the research questions in Appendix D the collaborative institutional training initiative report is in Appendix E.

Data Collection Technique

The primary data collection technique was interviews, and the other technique was a review of relevant organizational documents. Participants volunteered to answer questions in a one-on-one confidential interview environment, as specified in the informed consent form of this study. Yin (2014) and Nunan and Di Domenico (2013) argued that the primary technique for collecting data for an exploratory case study was in-person interviews and documentation such as corporate communication plans, and industry and physical artifacts (e.g., library files and direct observation). The pre-explanation included discussion about the in-person interview process consisted of specific data collection procedures, a length of time for the in-person interviews and written permission to use audio recording equipment.

In qualitative case study research, the most common technique to capture data is the interview (Yin, 2009). The advantages of collecting data from interview include a

consistent line of inquiry using unbiased, conversational questions that can elicit data that might include insightful explanations from the participants (Yin, 2014). Disadvantages collecting data by interviews is the possibility of the phenomenon known as reflexivity where respondents give answers based on what they think the interviewer wants to hear. Other possible disadvantages are participants' response bias to questions, and poor recall and inaccuracies (Yin, 2014). Interviews are the essential source of data in qualitative research because of lived experiences of the participants.

Another standard qualitative case study data collection technique used in this research was the review of relevant organizational documentation. The advantages of using documentary evidence included the option to review repeatedly review the documents, the potentially broad span of data represented, and the level of detailed information available (Yin, 2014). Disadvantages of data collection using documentation include potential difficulties in gaining access to materials, incomplete documents causing selection bias, and reporting bias (Yin, 2014). Further, collecting data from documentation that involves extensive reading, can be time consuming.

I obtained permission from each participant to record the interview (Yin, 2009, 2014). I utilized a Sony Linear PCM MP3 digital recorder and a Livescribe Smart Pen 3 recorder. The advantage of recording interviews using a Livescribe Smart Pen 3 and Sony Linear PCM MP3 recorders accurately record participants' responses. I use both devices just in case of an equipment failure (Miles & Huberman, 1994) such as when a battery unexpectedly loses power. Accordingly, the Livescribe Smart Pen 3 was used as backup

equipment during the interviews in case of a failure in the Sony Linear PCM MP3 recorder.

I used *member checking* after conducting interviews in which I verbally summarized and paraphrased participants' responses and obtained their feedback on the accuracy of data and asked participants to validate and authenticate my interpretation of their responses (Hess, McNab, & Basoglu, 2014). Additionally, member checking allowed me to authenticate and correctly interpret responses directly with the participants, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of data obtained during interviews (Harper & Cole, 2012). As a quality control process in qualitative research, member checking is a way to improve the accuracy of participant responses (Harper & Cole, 2012; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Nimnoi & Sudarshan, 2013).

I used the *transcript review* process of written transcripts of participant interviews to validate, correct, and authenticate participant responses as recorded by me, as well as, allowing me to identify common perceptions, experiences, ideas, and themes in the data (Sindena et al., 2013). Additionally, using transcript review allowed me to highlight prevalent statements, and contemplations from the participants (Sindena et al., 2013). I used both member checking and transcript review for this study to increase the reliability and validity of data captured during participant interviews.

Data Organization Techniques

After collection of the data, I organized the data and coded it for analysis. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software that manages the organization of (a) raw data files from the interviews, (b) published research, (c) rough notes, (d) themes, (e) concepts, and

(f) ideas during and after completion of the study (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013; Cambra-Fierro & Wilson, 2011). After performing member checking and transcript review of the data, I entered the raw data into the NVivo software.

Next, I identified statements, ideas, and themes in research participants' responses to the interview questions. Then, I identified and coded titles with the assistance of the NVivo software. Next, I reviewed all raw data and recheck themes. Bazeley and Jackson (2013) found that from the analysis and data organization the identification of themes emerged.

I used pattern matching served as the basis for organizing and summarizing common themes in participants' responses to the interview questions (Yin, 2014). Additionally, I explored the audio recordings and written notes assisted in ensuring the accuracy of the research data. Copies of the participant responses are on a pen drive and in a hand-written journal maintained for 5 years in a locked file cabinet, after which I will dispose of the data by electronically erasing the information on the pen drive.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process for qualitative studies included reducing, simplifying the data by summarizing, paraphrasing, and transcribing field notes, organizing the data to display the findings using cross-case analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). I used cross-case analysis to (a) compare case-specific factors, (b) determine patterns of associations, and (c) generate coding tables and matrices. In this study, the data analysis process included compilation, coding, and analysis of data originating from interviews and archival review.

Data triangulation was part of the data analysis process in this study. The five types of triangulation in social science research include (a) analysis triangulation, (b) data triangulation, (c) methodological triangulation, (d) theory triangulation, and (e) researcher triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Analysis triangulation permits validation of different data collection techniques in research studies (Yin, 2009). Data triangulation involved multiple uses of data sources, in comparison to corroborate facts or phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Methodological triangulation involves the use of different data collection techniques within a study, with the results of each method compared to corroborate findings (Yin, 2014).

Theory triangulation involves interpreting data and empirical results under multiple theories, comparing such interpretations to evaluate the relative correspondence between the data and theories to gain deeper insight into the research findings (Burau & Andersen, 2014). Researcher triangulation permits the use of two or more researchers for the same study to confirm the research data or interpretations of the data (Denzin, 1978). Data triangulation was particularly appropriate for the qualitative, case study research design used in this study because corroboration of the data collected using multiple sources assisted in determining construct validity (Yin, 2014). Specifically, I explored the consistency of data obtained by comparing data obtained from internal documentation to data obtained from interviews of the participants.

As mentioned, after performing member checking and transcript review of the data, I input the raw data into the NVivo software. I transcribed and identified statements, ideas, and themes in research participants' responses by compiling each interview

question in the NVivo Software. Next, I interpreted and synthesized the data by reviewing the data for convergence between participant's responses (Bazeley, 2013; Yin, 2014). Bazeley and Jackson (2013) suggested that identifying data using nodes and codes within each theme helped in identifying participants' responses and build knowledge about the data with the assistance of the NVivo software.

Next, I twice reviewed all raw data and rechecked themes. From the data analysis and data organization emerged the identification of themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). As discussed, NVivo 11 is a qualitative data analysis software that allows for coding on queries, the creation of standard and custom reports, three-dimensional charts for illustrations, tables, spreadsheets and models, and exporting results into readable text. I focused on significant themes identified while reviewing the data for data saturation to determine any alignment to the relevant literature including any new research published since writing the research proposal and the conceptual framework.

<p align="center">**Reliability and Validity**</p>

Reliability

The reliability of this study rests mainly upon my approach during the data collection process. Reliability of a research study is defined as the degree to which the findings of the study could be replicated (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). By making sure the interview process and procedures were implemented properly and consistently the data collection process was likely to result in findings that were repeatable by other researchers (Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013).

To increase the reliability of this study, I clearly and sufficiently documented each step of the research process starting at the time of actual data collection process using a journal. The journal included details on sample selection, member checking during initial participant interviews, which addressed dependability, interpreting participant responses, obtaining interview transcript reviews from participants, and using the data triangulation process as described in the interview process (Lackmann, Ernstberger, & Stich, 2012). Additionally, checking and making sure that careless mistakes are not in the conceptual framework of the study, the data collection process, interpreting the findings, or reporting the findings added to the reliability of this study (Lackmann et al., 2012).

Validity

In the context of a qualitative study, validity referred to the accuracy of data collected and the accuracy of interpretations of the data (Pandey & Chawla, 2016). Data collection from semistructured interviews in combination with in-person interview member checking and participant interview transcript reviews was likely to increase the validity of the data and *dependability* (Johns & Miraglia, 2015). Further data collection was through document review and documentation that I observed. Based on Fusch and Ness (2015) research methods I reached data saturation by collecting a large quantity of quality data, interviews, focus groups, and coding of transcript data that provided confirmability and reduce researcher bias; thereby increasing reliability. I employed critical thinking skills in making deductions from data collection from the participants' responses using NVivo software and the coding process.

Fusch and Ness (2015) claimed that data triangulation was a way of exploring various levels and perspectives of the data. To allow for data saturation, a purposeful sample was used which selected two case firms and employees of those firms as case participants who had the necessary experiences to provide rich data relevant to the focus of this study (Ando, Cousins, & Young, 2014). The use of a relatively large number of participant case interviews allowed for data saturation (Ng & Chan, 2014).

I employed data triangulation to analyze and synthesize the data obtained from interviews and organizational documents. To achieve *credibility* by adhering to the protocols and process of (a) pattern matching, (b) data triangulation of data sources, (c) member checking, and (d) expert review supported this study. *Transferability* and credibility referred to the results of a study that aligned in other contexts, which was an objective of this study given its case study design with purposeful sampling (Crowe, Inder, & Porter, 2015). Confirmability referred to the extent to which the results of the study were supported by the data and, in this study; the procedures discussed in this section were designed to achieve such confirmability (Yin, 2014).

To address *confirmability* in the study, I employed an expert review process. Bhana, Flowerday, and Satt (2013) and Kelly, Jenkinson, and Ziebland (2013) engaged expert reviewers to confirm potential assumptions, participant comments, and recommendations of the data collection instruments to eliminate ambiguity and increase confirmability. Similarly, I presented the interview questions to academic experts with research interests related to organizational communications and obtained their opinions to increase confirmability of the data collection instrument. The academic experts, with

relevant educational backgrounds and research experience in marketing or communications, reviewed the proposed interview questions for alignment and clarity. Additionally, to ensure data saturation, I interviewed case participants until they began repeating the same information (Yin, 2014) was the best opportunity to reach data saturation.

Transition and Summary

The goal of this qualitative, exploratory case study design was to conduct exploration on the internal strategies for assessing the effectiveness of organizations' internal communication channel effectiveness. The information resulting from this inquiry may benefit other academic researchers regarding internal communications and assist business leaders and managers within the internal communications functions. This study showed that having effective internal communication functions could enhance organizational social change. The results of this study could contribute to the existing literature by providing increased awareness of communication strategies, and by suggesting the value of the internal communications organizational function

In Section 2, I focused on the methodology, design, and restated (a) the business problem, (b) purpose, (c) data collection process and the role of the researcher, and (d) any potential relationships with researchers and participants. Additionally, (a) access strategies, (b) ethical protections, and (c) data retention plan for the inquiry, (d) justification for the research method, and (e) a research design for this study have been presented. Finally, Section 2 included a discussion of matters relating to the (a) population and sampling, (b) ethical considerations, (c) instruments for data collection,

(d) data collection techniques and organization, (e) data analysis, and (f) reliability and validity of the results of this study.

In Section 3, I presented a brief restatement of this study's purpose and a brief summary of the findings. A full presentation of research findings, application to professional practice and applicability of the research conclusions with details to professional practice, implications for sustainable social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for future investigation for further studies, reflections on the researcher's experience, and a concluding statement will complete the study.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore the internal

assessments strategies that midsized law firm managers use to assess the effectiveness of

their organizations' internal communication channels. The three organizations that

participated in this research were considered exceptionally well-managed and well-

organized by peers in their field. Results emerged in the form of themes that the leaders

of similar size professional organizations can use when developing their organization's

internal communications strategy, specifically a strategy to assess the effectiveness of

various internal communication channels.

Presentation of the Findings

The overarching research question was: what internal strategies did managers of

medium-sized law firms use, if any, to assess the effectiveness of their internal

communication channels? After the successful completion of the data collection process,

transcript review, and member checking, three core themes emerged from the data

analysis: (a) informal assessment strategies, (b) indirect assessment strategies, and (c)

timely vs. efficient assessments.

Emergent Theme 1: Informal Assessment Strategies

An informal and unwritten communication channel assessment strategy can be

effective and sufficient for some organizations. After reviewing the organizations'

documents, policies, records, and the interview data, it was clear to me that the leaders of

the three case firms had only informal and unwritten strategies to assess the effectiveness

of the organizational communication channels. None of the organizations had any written

formal communication plan or separate formal plan to assess the effectiveness of internal

communication channels.

Case Participant LFB2 stated, "There is no overarching plan." Case participant

LFC1 stated, "We do not have a written plan. Our firm looks at communication as related

to some other point in professional development, culture, economics, compensation, and

successful performance of the practice groups (e.g. contracts, litigation, family law)."

Additionally, case participant LFB1 stated, "There is no written communication plan for

the company."

Case Participant LFB3 stated, "Traditionally, we have not used formalized

methods of assessing internal communications." Case Participant LFA5 said, "As a

manager, I think the informal approach is a more accurate assessment of the firm and

employee decisions." While informal assessments appear functional, some participants

felt a more formal structure strategy may be needed as an organization grows or changes.

Case Participant LFB2 stated,

> Our organization has grown and how we communicate has changed. When
>
> we were smaller, the employees could gather in the lunch room or walk
>
> into someone office. It was very informal and we could gather in five
>
> minutes. Little more thought needs to go into informal communications, as
>
> well as, I think we are struggling with the fact that we do not want to lose
>
> the intimacy and personalization as an organization that is easier to foster
>
> when you are smaller.

This finding contradicts the observations of Jimenez-Castillo and Sanchez-Perez (2013), who emphasized the importance of formal organizational communication channel assessments. This theme also contradicts Mishra et al. (2014), who found that assessing the efficiency of internal communication channels was important to ensuring effective internal communications. Jimenez-Castillo and Sanchez-Perez (2013) and Mishra et al. (2014) also emphasized that communication assessments help leaders to ensure that information is disseminated appropriately in their organization. Carlson and Zmud (1999) noted that some corporate executives and managers failed to provide internal strategies for assessing channel effectiveness because they lacked the needed knowledge and experience. Table 1 shows the frequency of participants' comments about informal channel assessments. Case firm A and Case Firm B participants discussed informal channel assessments 10 times, which was 10.6% of participant responses (see Table 1).

Table 2

Number of Times Informal Assessment Discussed

Theme where participant discussed Informal Assessment	Times Discussed	% of Coverage
LFA1	1	44%
LFA2	5	8%
LFA3	1	9%
LFA5	3	17%
LFB1	1	6%
LFB2	1	15%
LFB3	8	7%
Law firms' equivalent percentage numbers	20	10.6%

Emergent Theme 2: Indirect Assessments Strategies

Indirect assessments of the effectiveness of internal communication strategies can be sufficient in some organizations. Case Participant LFC1 detailed how his firm assesses channel effectiveness by stating,

The firm measures communication channel effectiveness indirectly. Meaning that our managers do not go around the office to check the effectiveness. Instead, we use examples of how many people walk out the company door unhappy. We use exit interviews to identify communication problems. We have a directors' committee; a communication system report of how the firm and employees are

doing. Management listens and visually watches people. We look for patterns of

communications.

Case Participant LFA5 said,

In respect to the litigation that I do, my manager assesses meetings based on the

work that people must do: Do people communicate whether they have work or

not, are they communicating what they have done and what work they still need

to be done and communicating what is expected and follow through with it. So,

that is more of an assessment of an end-product.

Case participant LFA2 emphasized,

As a manager of a legal assistant, our communication channels originate in varied

ways. First, we meet in my office every morning to determine daily goals.

Second, we discuss needs for each client throughout the day. Third, we have

meetings every late afternoon where we discussed goals for the next day. I base

channel assessment on how well we communicate to accomplish our jobs. Having

face to face communications is extremely important during the day, as well as

using e-mails.

Case Participant LFB2 explained, "Our firm looks at assessments of communications

channels as related to other points such as the performance of the practice groups (e.g.

criminal, civil, contracts) who are the recipients of information." This theme contradicts

the observations of Ryynänen et al. (2013), who wrote that poorly constructed messages

could be a barrier to an accurate assessment of the existing internal communication

channels.

The result of this study also contradicts the findings of Aggarwala and Subbian (2014), who found that directly assessing all aspects of organizational communication systems, including infrastructure and communication channels, resulted in benefits to both employees and the company. However, this finding is supported by the findings of Cobanica and Grecu (2014), who noted that assessing internal communications was a complex process, particularly the formulation of assessment policy for channel performance and for developing communication strategies. Table 2 shows the frequency of participants' comments about the continuous and varied indirect assessments. Both Case Firm A and Case Firm B participants discussed indirect assessment 11 times. Case Firm C discussed indirect assessment 1 time, which was 22.9% of participant responses (see Table 2).

Table 3

Number of Times Indirect Assessment Discussed

Theme where participant discussed Indirect Assessment	Times Discussed	% of Coverage
LFA1	2	19%
LFA2	3	11%
LFA3	2	16%
LFA4	2	30%
LFA5	2	14%
LFB1	3	34%
LFB2	2	21%
LFB3	6	41%
LFC1	1	43%
Law firms' equivalent percentage numbers	23	22.9%

Emergent Theme 3: Efficient vs. Timely Assessments

Some participants, while acknowledging the functionality of the informal and indirect approaches to channel assessment in place within the organization, expressed some frustration with those arrangements. Specifically, they desired more timely feedback and more timely corrective action than their present systems provided. Efficiency is the chief virtue of the informal and indirect strategies to the assessment of an organization's communications channels. Less time, effort, and costs (i.e. efficiency)

appear to be the characteristics of the informal and indirect approaches. However, according to some participants, the tradeoff is a less than an optimal and timely system.

Specifically, some participants explained that the analysis by the management of the data appears to be slower than would be optimal and slower than feedback from the informal and indirect assessment to the management team. Some of the participants seemed to assume that a more formal assessment regime would provide more timely feedback, although they were unable to provide a clear explanation of why they believed that to be so.

Case Participant LFB3 stated, "Not having formal assessment strategies can place stress on managers and leaders to perform their duties without state-of-the-art communication processes, tools, and therefore not in a timely manner." Case Participant LFA3 addressed timeliness by saying,

> If a senior partner in the firm said we need to meet twice a month for financial information or about a client, or something needs to be distributed to the other partners, only then is a concerted effort made to choose the right channels to distribute the information. Assessing the quality of that channel as such as cloud technology should be a high priority for disseminating that information more quickly to the other partners on and offsite.

Case Participant LFB1 commented, "The current communication channels have shown year after year that we do not need a change, but having communication channels that inform employees with timely information would be more effective." Additionally, Case Participant LFB3 pointed out,

An education process needs to happen on why the channel assessment is

important; why employee preference in the way they receive company

information is important. Knowing which communication channels are efficient in

the dissemination of messages is important. There needs to be groundwork, so the

firm's communication channels remain strong. There is a sense of family through

the efforts of efficiently using the communication channels we have. The priority

is to keep that in place and have everyone understand that assessing the

communication channels keeps us up to date.

The importance of timely assessments and the timely delivery of feedback to the

management team was noted by Carlson and Zmud (1999) and Sprain and Boromisza-

Habashi (2013). Table 3 shows the frequency of participants' comments about focusing

on efficient and timely communications. Case firm A participants focused on efficient

and timely assessments 7 times. Case firm B participants focused on efficient and timely

assessments 5 times. Case firm C participants focused on efficient and timely

assessments 2 times, which was 22.3% of participant responses (see Table 3).

Table 4

Number of Times Effective vs. Timely Communication Assessment Discussed

Theme where participant discussed Efficient vs. Timely Assessment	Times Discussed	% of Coverage
LFA1	1	10%
LFA2	1	4%
LFA3	1	9%
LFA4	2	33%
LFA5	2	16%
LFB1	3	37%
LFB2	1	11%
LFB3	1	8%
LFC1	2	95%
Law firms' equivalent percentage numbers	14	22.3%

Section 3 contains a colloquy of the three themes that originated during the study. I used semistructured interviews to procure data related to what internal strategies that medium-sized law firm managers use to assess the effectiveness of their organizations' internal communication channels. Additionally, I reviewed corporate communications documents. However, each organization lacked formal communication plans to support the operations of their internal communication departments, thus I primarily relied on data from interviews.

Applications to Professional Practice

The results of this study could assist leaders and managers of some small professional organizations with general communication planning, specifically regarding planning to assess the effectiveness of internal communication channels. Each theme provides insight into how similar organizations approached communication planning and channel assessment. The findings capture the participants' perspectives on both positive and negative aspects of their current communication processes. Managers of similar sized professional organizations who read this research will be better informed on the broader considerations of communication planning and specifically the assessment of internal communication channels. Ultimately, the reader may, because of this research, be better equipped to craft an optimal plan for the specific requirements and conditions of their organization.

The result of this revealed that midsized law firms, to varying degrees, may have informal channel assessment strategies. Formal channel assessments could be important for organizations. Additionally, the results indicated that having informal assessments or indirect assessments could be functional for organizations without the resources to establish a more rigid and costly formal assessment protocol. Nelson and Quick (2015) found that organizations with a strong communication channel assessment method often perform better than those lacking assessment strategies.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this qualitative multiple case study could foster positive social change by influencing the attitudes and behavior of law firm leaders and managers to lead

and manage teams. Thus, the findings can potentially affect positive change by proving

how assessment of communication channels are administered and providing synergy for a

more positive employee workplace experience, thus improving the quality of life for

employees. The assessment strategies identified in this research might help guide leaders

in operating more efficient and effective small professional service organizations that are

better able to serve the needs of the local communities.

Stephen, Patterson, Kelly, and Mair (2016) argued that fostering social change

through channel assessments is a process that can be used within or outside the borders of

the firms. Specifically, internal assessment could be central to having efficient

communication channels that directly promote social change. To foster social change,

Nelson and Quick (2015) argued that commitment to the organization and having

effective channel assessments helps build organizational culture.

Small professional service firms, such as legal firms, provide important services

to individuals, families, and businesses in their community. The services they provide are

critical to ensuring the safety and protection of their clients. Every member of the

community could find themselves in need of their services. Therefore, it is imperative

that these firms operate efficiently and effectively so that they can provide the needed

services at a competitive price.

Recommendations for Action

Three important themes that emerged from this research: (a) informal assessment

strategies, (b) indirect assessment strategies, and (c) efficient vs. timely assessments

should be a managerial consideration when formulating communication plans and

policies. When developing an organization's communication plans, a mechanism for the assessment of the organization's communication channels should be a consideration. From Themes 1 and 2, it is evident that there are two foundational choices for leaders; (a) the choice of a formal or informal approach to assessment of the organization's communication channels, and (b) the choice of a direct or indirect approach to assessment. While most researchers who study communication planning and channel assessment clearly favor a formal and direct approach to assessment, Theme 3 revealed us that there are benefits and consequences of each choice.

Almost any organizational leader is familiar with the concept of *return on investment* (ROI). *Investment*, in the context of ROI, refers to money directly spent but also to time and effort spent, which are also expenses. *Return*, in the context of ROI, refers to income and to organizational benefits that are often difficult to financially value. Much of decision making in most organizations involves the consideration of ROI. I recommend that organizational leaders consciously evaluate the time and effort required for some form of formal and direct assessment of the internal organizational communications, and consider the possible ROI of each option.

Specifically, organizational leaders should give consideration to the efficiency and effectiveness of their internal communication channels. The leaders should also consider the positive organizational benefits of being able to more effectively and rapidly institute improvements. If the costs, in time and money, exceed the ability of the current resources of the organization, then the leaders should consider developing the most effective and efficient assessment system that they can afford.

From the totality of this research comes the lesson that in the modern era of rapidly multiplying communication channels, leaders should give greater consideration to investing in communication planning and assessment. During the interviews, various participants bemoaned what they perceived as inadequate consideration and exploration in organizational communications infrastructure and planning. These participants, while acknowledging the functionality of their organization's current message delivery and assessment system also bemoaned that absence of current communication channels (i.e. social media) and more timely assessments.

Therefore, I recommend that leaders consider the broad benefits to employee morale of optimal communication alignment and assessment systems. Both the literature and the responses of some participants indicated that to some degree that there are generational differences in perspectives about internal organizational communications. More specifically, these differences concerning the number and type of communication channels, and an individual's preference for specific channels for specific tasks. These appear to be potential issues of employee morale, as well as missed organizational opportunities for improvement. The findings of this study and the recommendations can be used in professional services companies, industry conferences, corporate seminars, and workshops. Additionally, the extant research can be used in academic journals and professional business publications.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional qualitative research that is similar to this doctoral study would be useful in ascertaining if similar findings could be obtained from other professional

service organizations, perhaps in other regions of the country or world. The only

limitations apparent in this research are those inherent in qualitative research and a small

multiple case study. A qualitative multiple case study constitutes an exploration of the

subject, not an effort to prove or test hypotheses. The results of qualitative research and

of case studies are recognized as not generalizable to other populations (Yin, 2014).

However, the findings and conclusions from this qualitative multiple case study should

be the partial basis for quantitative research to examine if similar conclusions are

obtainable from a much larger sample of organizations.

I recommend further qualitative and quantitative research on post-implementation

of various strategies for assessing communication channels. Such research could provide

extant knowledge on the effectiveness and efficiency of assessing communication

channels. I also recommend both qualitative and quantitative research to explore and

examine how different groups within intergenerational workforce perceive the usefulness

of various communication channels.

Reflections

I selected the subject of internal strategies for assessing the effectiveness of

organizational communication channels because of the lack of research in the field.

Having more research on the subject could help improve the functioning of businesses'

internal communications. It was my intention to distinguish myself from other

communication professionals by having this knowledge.

During my doctoral journey, I gained extensive knowledge about epistemology,

research methods, critical analysis, and a specialization in marketing. This doctoral

program provided a comprehensive business curriculum. For my research study, I choose to perform research in the legal industry. I believe this choice was an excellent decision because it afforded me multiple opportunities to build relationships and help improve communication channel effectiveness in legal firms.

During my six-year doctoral journey, there were many educational and life challenges. However, during those challenges, I learned to rely on the experience attained during the coursework phase and from the doctoral editing process. My goal for beginning this journey was to attain knowledge that would increase my research skills, but I achieved much more. The Walden University's Doctor of Business Administration program enhanced my life as a person, business research scientist, increased my confidence and ability to research critical business issues, write scholarly articles, and manuscripts for publication. From that perspective, I have achieved my research goals.

Conclusion

Law firm leaders and communication professionals who are interested in improving the effectiveness of their company's internal communications channels might find this study helpful in development of their organization's internal communication strategy and policies. Evolving communication technology, the increased volume of information needed by businesses, and the intensified competitive environment has made internal company communication more critical to a business's financial success. In this qualitative multiple case study, I explored strategies used by three law firms in the Commonwealth of Virginia for assessing the effectiveness of their organization's internal communication channels.

The participating firms were recognized by their peers as being exceptionally well managed. Data from interviews and company documents were analyzed through the conceptual lens of Carlson and Zmud's (1999) channel expansion theory, utilizing in NVivo 11 coding to identify patterns and themes. Three important themes emerged: informal assessment strategies, indirect assessment strategies, and efficient vs. timely assessments. The first theme reflects the finding that an informal assessment strategy can be effective and sufficient for some organizations depending upon the size and complexity of the organization.

The second theme reflects the finding that indirect assessments can be sufficient in some organizations that lack the resources to support a more direct and specific assessment process. The third theme reflects the participants' perceptions that while informal and indirect assessments may be more time and resource efficient, the feedback from such assessments are often less timely and less likely to be quickly acted upon by managers. In the final analysis, managers may consider these three themes with formulating organizational communication policies.

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Appendix A: Preamble

This preamble presents a brief outline of internal organizational communications channels, which include (a) conference call communication (i.e., video, web, and telephone), (b) word of mouth communication, (c) corporate e-mail systems, (d) corporate intranet, (e) town hall meetings and, (f) manager/staff meetings. This study will not explore communications tools of displays and exhibits.

Appendix B: Confidentiality

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research on *Internal*

Strategies for Assessing Organizational Communication Channel Effectiveness, I will

have access to information that is confidential and will not be disclosed. I acknowledge

that the information must remain confidential.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification, or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that a violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I am officially authorized to access, and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement, and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: E-mail Letter of Request to Participate

Date:

Dear XXXXXX,

My name is Melvin Murphy, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am working towards completing my Doctor of Business Administration degree in Marketing. I am conducting a doctoral research study on Internal Strategies for Assessing Organizational Communication Channel Effectiveness, qualitative inquiry.

Because of your success and accomplishments in the communications field, I am asking you to participate in a small interview on the subject of internal communications or by individual interviews. I believe that your contribution and expertise will make a significant contribution to academic research and industry artifacts.

Unfortunately, there is no monetary compensation for your participation. However, for your participation in the study, you will receive a summary of the findings, which will allow you to learn innovative best practices that are being implemented and help you gauge ROI for your communication platform and show value in the communication function.

I want to thank you in advance for participating and helping me complete this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at 703/ 216.3888. Otherwise, I will be calling or e-mailing you to provide a schedule for the interview.

Best regards,

Melvin Murphy

Appendix D: Interview Questions

The central research question for this study is: What are the internal strategies used to assess the effectiveness of organizations' internal communication channels?

Interview Questions

The following general interview questions align to conduct semistructured interviews with employees in the selected case firms:

1. Internal communication channels include cloud technology for retrieving stored information, conference calls, corporate e-mail systems, social media, internal marketing, town hall meetings, manager, and staff meetings. What communication channels does your managers use to communicate to employees?

2. How do managers assess the effectiveness of each of the internal communication channels used in your organization?

3. What strategies does your managers use to improve the effectiveness of internal communication channels (i.e., how does your firm plan, organize, direct, and control the use of communication channels)?

4. How do the use of various communications channels influence your firm's culture, employee performance, and overall firm effectiveness?

5. In your firm, how do working relationships affect individuals' choice of a communication channel for business communications?

6. What additional information or strategies would you like to share about assessing the effectiveness of your firm's internal communication channels?

Appendix E: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Report

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS REPORT*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Melvin Murphy (ID: 2558256)
- **Email:** WaldenU.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Laureate International Universities (Walden) (ID: 2906)
- **Institution Unit:** Business
- **Phone:** 703-216-3888

- **Curriculum Group:** Student Researchers
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 15243769
- **Completion Date:** 02/28/2015
- **Expiration Date:** N/A
- **Minimum Passing:** 70
- **Reported Score*:** 95

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research	02/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction	11/12/11	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE	11/14/11	4/4 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees	02/28/15	3/4 (75%)
Avoiding Group Harms - U.S. Research Perspectives	02/28/15	1/3 (33%)
Students in Research	11/12/11	10/10 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE	11/14/11	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

CITI Program
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Web: https://www.citiprogram.org

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT REPORT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Melvin Murphy (ID: 2558256)
- **Email:** WaldenU.edu
- **Institution Affiliation:** Laureate International Universities (Walden) (ID: 2906)
- **Institution Unit:** Business
- **Phone:** 703-216-3888

- **Curriculum Group:** Student Researchers

- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Report ID:** 15243769
- **Report Date:** 02/28/2015
- **Current Score**:** 95

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Students in Research	11/12/11	10/10 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE	11/14/11	4/4 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction	11/12/11	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE	11/14/11	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE	11/14/11	4/4 (100%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research	02/28/15	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees	02/28/15	3/4 (75%)
Avoiding Group Harms - U.S. Research Perspectives	02/28/15	1/3 (33%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner Identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution Identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

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