

***Voices in academia: A qualitative study on organizational culture, community, and strategic dynamics through internal communication.***

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# Abstract

## ***Purpose***

This research investigates the research question: How do managers, middle-managers, and employees of the BMS faculty perceive internal communication in relation to organizational culture, sense of community and strategic objectives? The study aims to identify the strengths and challenges faced by the BMS faculty from the perspectives of head management, middle-management, and employees, with the goal of potentially enhancing internal communication.

## ***Methods***

A qualitative analysis was conducted through semi-structured interviews in two phases to explore perceptions among management, middle-management, and employees. A total of 37 individuals were interviewed, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the communication dynamics within the faculty.

## ***Results***

The findings reveal that the organizational culture is perceived as fragmented, with various departments operating as separate entities. While the culture is generally described as open, welcoming, cooperative, and inclusive, some participants noted a lack of transparency, fear of judgement, and internal dynamics that may hinder an open culture. The sense of community within the BMS faculty is predominantly department-based and depicts a lack of cohesion. Notable concerns regarding a lack of transparency and strategic alignment is perceived.

## ***Conclusion***

The perceptions of managers, middle-managers, and employees regarding internal communication within the BMS faculty reflect a complex interplay between organizational culture, community engagement, and alignment with strategic objectives. While internal communication effectively supports collaboration within smaller teams, transparency and a unified approach towards strategic objectives is lacking within the organization. A more cohesive environment, where purposeful communication is enhanced and transparency is promoted, might deepen the sense of connection and shared identity across all levels of the BMS faculty.

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# 1. Introduction

In any organization, internal communication serves as the lifeline to connect individuals, foster collaboration, build a cohesive culture and work towards achieving shared goals. Effective internal communication does not stand alone; it is deeply intertwined with organizational culture, community cohesion, and strategic clarity. A strong internal culture, supported by effective communication, contributes to higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, ultimately enhancing both individual and collective performance (Can & Lanxi, 2023; Lee & Dong, 2023; Ruck & Trainor, 2012). In the words of Pineda et al. (2024), internal communication encompasses both tangible and intangible elements that serve as the backbone of the organizational functioning. In any organization, effective internal communication is not just a functional necessity but a critical factor that significantly influences the overall success (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). The communication does not only facilitate administrative coordination but also nurtures a collaborative culture where staff feel part of a community that aspires to achieve similar goals.

Especially within academic institutions, this collaborative nature and community feeling are typical and necessary to achieve a certain level of quality (Kosir, 2014). Academic settings are often characterized by a high level of employee autonomy and a complex, multi-layered organizational structure. This makes communication both a challenge and a critical factor in ensuring cohesion and effectiveness. Effective communication and culture are instrumental in ensuring that employees not only share information but also align with the institution's values, feel heard, and actively participate in shaping the academic environment (Gupte, 2007). Similarly, the Faculty of Behavioural, Management, and Social Sciences (BMS) at the University of Twente embodies these principles, serving as an academic institution that bridges technology and social sciences. Home to over 600 employees, the BMS faculty offers a wide range of disciplines, bringing together expertise in different areas such as psychology, management, and communication. Ultimately forming a multifaced organization that fosters an international, interdisciplinary, collaborative, and inclusive environment. A complex organization like the BMS faculty requires effective internal communication that not only focuses on disseminating information, but also aspires to build a culture of support and collaboration, where people feel part of a cohesive community. With its blend of behavioural,

managerial, and social sciences, this organization represents an interdisciplinary culture where the diversity of roles and departments can oppose challenges that might impact the culture, sense of community and strategic alignment among the faculty.

Accordingly, the BMS faculty requested a research project to gain a deeper understanding of how the internal communication is evaluated, with a specific focus on the different viewpoints among management and employees in varying functions. While the knowledge on the importance of internal communication is well-established, much of the research focuses on corporate or non-profit sectors, with academic institutions often overlooked—especially from the perspective of faculty and staff rather than students. This study addresses this gap by providing insights into internal communication within the BMS faculty, offering practical recommendations for improvement. The findings aim to enhance communication practices within the faculty and contribute to a broader understanding of internal communication in academic settings.

This research was part of a two-fold project designed to explore both the tangible and intangible aspects of internal communication within the BMS faculty. In collaboration, the two researchers aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of employee experiences on internal communication, hereby identifying the current quality of its practices. While the other research paper unfolds the tangible elements such as communication channels used and faculty structure, this specific paper focuses on the intangible factors, being cultural and strategic aspects. It examines how the internal communication is perceived across different levels of the BMS faculty, specifically focusing on its alignment with key aspects such as organizational culture, community, and strategic objectives. By addressing these aspects, this study aims to answer the following research question: *How do managers, middle-managers, and employees of the BMS faculty perceive the internal communication in line with the organizational culture, sense of community, and strategic objectives within the BMS faculty?*

## 2. Theoretical framework

Drawing from internal communication studies, this section explores the many facets within internal communication and its role within organizations. The chapter aims to provide a foundation for understanding the complex, dynamic, and interdependent nature of internal communication. The key elements such as organizational culture, sense of community, and strategic communication initiatives are intricately connected to internal communication practices and collectively influence the overall success and effectiveness of an organization. By establishing a clear understanding of how internal communication operates and affects organizational outcomes, the framework will serve as a guide for a communication audit to assess the strengths and weaknesses of current communication practices.

### ***2.1 Internal communication***

Internal communication is more than just the exchange of information; it involves the purposeful and strategic sharing of messages that help employees understand the organization's goals, values, and objectives. Effective internal communication fosters a shared sense of direction, trust, and collaboration among employees, contributing to a positive work environment where individuals are motivated and empowered to perform their best (Reka & Borza, 2012). Furthermore, the internal communication has a significant impact on the organization and its performances, portraying as a "voice of the organization" (Karjalainen, 2015). Therefore, internal communication should be perceived as the backbone of the organization and a crucial element for organizational performance. Often, internal communication aspects reflect the communication infrastructure and its use of communication channels, such as an organization's intranet, meetings, and email transferring. As effective internal communication relies on delivering appropriate messages to employees in a timely and understandable manner (Welch, 2012). In this shape, communication tends to lean to the traditional definition of a sender-receiver model, in which messages are mostly sent from top to down. However, internal communication happens in way more places and flows between all members of an organization, also known as "the grapevine" (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998). Araujo & Miranda (2020) recognize this and show how internal communication should be considered on more levels than solely between manager and employee. In line with this perspective, Kosir (2014) describes

communication in an organization as a tree, where communication processes flow from top to down, down to top, and in between layers. Hereby, the organization can be understood as a tree where all branches and leaves are interconnected. Furthermore, Botan & Hazleton (2010) argued that understanding internal communication requires adopting a relational viewpoint.

Accordingly, Welch & Jackson (2007) proposed a stakeholder-based approach in which internal communication is defined as the “*strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within organizations across a number of interrelated dimensions including, internal line manager communication, internal team peer communications, and internal corporate communication*” (p. 184). Similarly, Zerfass and Franke (2013) state how communication can be perceived as a management action. They suggest that communication should involve monitoring, interpretation, and decision-making processes. Accordingly, internal communication is a task for everybody in the organization (Karjalainen, 2015). Gupte (2007) similarly sees internal communication as a cooperative way to share knowledge among the entire organization.

Visibly in all these definitions, cooperation and managing relational communication practices stand at the core. Internal communication encompasses the exchange of information, ideas, and messages within an organization via all formal and informal communication channels to convey information among all organizational members involved. Furthermore, effective internal communication ensures that everyone in the organization is aligned with the organization’s goals, values, and objectives and shares a feeling of collaboration and belonging to a community. Accordingly, the current research uses the following definition:

*Internal communication (IC) encompasses the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within an organization, facilitated through established channels and procedures for information dissemination and decision-making. IC fosters a culture of collaboration, empowering both managers and employees to contribute to organizational objectives while nurturing a sense of belonging and community within the faculty.*

However, the success of internal communication is not determined in isolation; it is profoundly shaped by the broader organizational context, which includes its culture, the sense of community it fosters among its members, and the strategic priorities it aims to achieve. Therefore, the connection between these concepts will be further explored in the following sections.

## ***2.2 Organizational culture***

Organizational culture serves as the foundation for how communication is perceived, practices, and valued within an organization. It encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and norms that shape the behavior and interactions of employees, influencing both the tone and flow of internal communication. Understanding the interplay between organizational culture and communication is essential as it reveals how cultural elements can either facilitate effective communication or create barriers that hinder collaboration and engagement. Furthermore, the informal communication happening between employees happens more often than formal communication on the work floor (Kalla, 2005). Therefore, the informal elements in an organization should be considered as it impacts the culture and organization as a whole. Hofstede (1980, as cited in Gupte, 2007) defines culture as “a system of collectively held values”. Schein (1984) explains culture on three levels: artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. He emphasizes that culture is learned, passed down, and capable of evolving over time. Gupte (2007) adds that organizational culture is visible in the company’s practices, composed of core values that may not be visible externally but are expressed through symbols, heroes, and rituals. Expressing organizational norms, values, and beliefs through internal communication can engage employees more effectively, fostering a sense of belonging. A strong organizational culture promotes open communication, collaboration, and trust. In contrast, a rather hierarchical culture can hinder the communication flow, create barriers between employees and management, and followingly reduce organizational effectiveness. Gupte (2007) asserts that organizational success is influenced by the cultural characteristics of flexibility, openness, creativity, and dynamism, commonly associated with adhocracy. A culture focused on entrepreneurship and innovation, thrives in dynamic environments, and prioritizes flexibility can be understood as adhocracy. This underscores the importance of aligning communication practices with the overall culture to optimize organizational objectives.

Many scholars argue how internal communication is a crucial element within organizations, affecting employee engagement (Ruck & Trainor, 2012), employee development (Proctor & Doukakis, 2003), employee well-being (Walden, 2021), employee motivation and sense of coherence in an organization (Karjalainen, 2015). The success of an organization is closely tied to employee satisfaction, which is often enhanced by effective internal



communication and a supportive organizational culture. Ensuring employee satisfaction is crucial for achieving organizational objectives (Zerfass & Franke, 2013). Accordingly, communication within an organization directly impacts employee motivation and attitude, which in turn influences overall performance and in turn influences the organization's success (Can & Lanxi, 2023). Lin (2007) stresses the importance of a social interaction culture over extrinsic rewards when promoting knowledge sharing, further intertwining organizational culture with communication practices (Karjalainen, 2015). Hereby, satisfied employees are often more likely to perform well and contribute positively to the organization's overall performance. Robson and Tourish (2005) emphasize the importance of upward communication in organizational settings. They argue that a lack of communication from staff to management can blind managers to potential issues, leading to ineffective internal communication and decision-making. Employees need encouragement and guidance from both their peers and their managers to achieve their goals and stay motivated. Such a supportive organizational culture will strengthen engagement among organizational members (Karjalainen, 2015). Therefore, management within an organization plays a key role in internal communication; sustaining employee motivation and creating an environment that encourages both open communication and organizational success (Karjalainen, 2015). Further, a positive atmosphere and communication in the organization improves the performance and decreases employee turnover rate (Can & Lanxi, 2023). The motivation among employees can help the performance of the entire organization, as employees who are more appreciated and empowered in their work, tend to be more successful (Lee & Dong, 2023). Furthermore, employees who are satisfied and trust the organization are more likely to share this positive perspective of the organization to the outside world, therefore increasing corporate success (Lee & Dong, 2023). This internal branding is crucial for the growth of a company (Ikram et al., 2021). Aligning communication practices with cultural values ensures a cohesive work environment where employees feel valued and empowered, ultimately driving the organization toward its goals.

### ***2.3 Sense of community***

Building on the significance of culture, the sense of community within an organization also plays a crucial role in shaping internal communication. Creating a strong sense of community enhances collaboration, trust, and a shared sense of purpose among employees,

further contributing to a more cohesive organizational environment. Effective communication is necessary for managers to understand the employees better and to create an enjoyable working culture that enables cooperation (Chen, 2023). Hereby, strong internal communication and culture fosters a sense of community, which supports open and effective communication. A sense of community is integral to fostering organizational cohesion. Meaning, if an organization wants to achieve a sense of unity within the organization, a sense of community should be established. More importantly, when members of an organization feel part of a community, they are more likely to be motivated and achieve organizational objectives. Hereby, teamwork, recognition, feedback, and the appropriate level of job challenges are all critical factors that contribute to an enthusiastic workforce, as highlighted by Sirota et al. (2005). Employees need encouragement and guidance from both their peers and managers to achieve their goals and stay motivated. Humans are naturally driven to form emotional connections with their surroundings, so when managers foster a united organizational culture and good relationships between members, engagement and motivation follows. When managers are disconnected from staff, it may cause the organization to drift off course and fail in achieving goals or maintaining a workplace harmony. Poor communication can threaten organizational relationships; therefore, it is important to consider the employee's perspectives and create a safe environment where employees feel heard.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe a sense of community as a feeling of belonging and mutual care among members of a group. Especially in organizations where internal communication functions as a tool for promoting collaboration and shared vision, a sense of unity is crucial for employees to feel supported and engaged. Additionally, psychological safety within an organization plays a crucial role in fostering a culture of learning and improvement within organizations. According to Edmundson (2018), psychological safety enables team members to feel secure in contributing their ideas and efforts towards a greater purpose, without fear of judgment or retribution. Especially in organizations that seek innovation, offering a psychologically safe space for employees is crucial to enhance this innovative culture. As a sense of safety encourages motivation and can lead to a culture focused on continuous learning and development (Gallo, 2023). Research has shown how organizations that prioritize psychological safety experience more innovative thinking and long-term organizational success. Besides the psychological safety a member should experience in an organization to function well, Gupte

(2007) emphasizes on the physical proximity one should experience on the work floor. It is explained how employees that are working near each other, often share information more freely and effortlessly, therefore creating a more dynamic and collaborative environment.

Nowadays, the demands and challenges of modern work environments have put pressure on the well-being at work. Prioritizing employee well-being and fostering a supportive work environment are crucial for maintaining team cohesion and motivation, especially during periods of change. During such times, organizational culture serves as a “glue” that binds members together, helping them stay focused and united as the organization adapts and evolves (Schein, 1984). This sense of cohesion is further reinforced through organizational identification, which Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) describe as the psychological alignment of individuals with their organization. When employees see the organization as an extension of themselves, they develop a deeper sense of unity, leading to higher engagement and motivation. This identification is especially significant in university settings, as faculty and staff often develop a deep connection with their institution and contribute directly to the university’s culture and overall image (Bakirtas & Demirci, 2021). Furthermore, Black (2008, as cited in Bakirtas & Demirci, 2021) argues that the branding of an educational institution speaks more to its identity and community ownership, rather than to the products or services it offers. This again highlights the importance of an effective organizational culture in order to shape the perceptions and identification of its members.

#### ***2.4 Strategy***

While culture and community lay the foundation for internal communication, strategic communication practices ensure that these elements are aligned with the organization’s overarching goals. A well-defined communication strategy helps to coordinate efforts, convey clear messages, and drive organizational objectives, making internal communication not just a supportive function but a critical component of overall business success. It is important for an organization to collectively share knowledge with one another and manage how information gets spread, to assist in employee development. Especially during changes in an organization, internal communication is crucial to help strengthen interpersonal relations, sense of belonging, and cooperation (Kosir, 2014). According to Holtzhausen (2002), the effectiveness of internal communication is tied to the organizational structure, as a well-designed structure facilitates information dissemination, decision-making, and improved outcomes. The structure of

organizations affects the internal communication processes, as the size of the company influences how information is transferred and how it can be lost (Chen, 2023). And as higher education institutions seek quality assurance (Kosir, 2014), it is crucial for these institutions to focus on improving the internal communication.

Furthermore, leadership plays a vital role in this alignment, particularly in academic institutions, where it guides both trajectory and culture (Kipasika, 2024). As Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasize how leadership that clearly expresses the institution's mission, vision, values, and strategic objectives, fosters alignment and promote educational excellence. Visibly, managers play a significant role in shaping internal communication, but in many cases, such as within the BMS faculty, managers are often promoted based on their career progressions, rather than their managerial aptitude. This highlights the importance of having the right leaders in an organization to ensure effective communication. Leaders and managers serve as role models for organizations and to reflect its culture. As Jacobsen and Salomonsen (2020) highlight, transformational leaders prioritize sharing the organization's vision, while transactional leaders focus on distributing rewards. Karjalainen (2015) emphasizes that managers are responsible for motivating and engaging employees, particularly during periods of organizational change. In modern organizations, agile leadership is crucial for aligning with the mission, vision, and values of the institution. Schein (1984) further links the concept of "adhocracy" to the flexibility required within a culture, noting that leadership stability and adaptability are crucial in managing organizational change effectively. Therefore, organizations require to stay flexible, and the leaders must maintain the organization's core values while adjusting to changing circumstances. As Kipasika (2024) emphasizes, leaders must be able to reflect these core elements to inspire and guide their teams effectively. This becomes especially important in educational institutions where leadership plays a key role in shaping both the culture and organizational outcomes. Leadership that embodies the organization's values and communicates openly with employees is essential for fostering a supportive, trust-based work environment that can adapt to new challenges. In this sense, leaders do not only guide their teams but also shape the culture and identity of the institution itself. Hereby, trust is an essential component for achieving organizational goals. Williams (2001) suggests that when team members share common goals and values, the trust within the group increases. For the BMS faculty to reach its objectives, its members must therefore believe in the organization and trust its ability to perform well.

Furthermore, trust in an institution's capabilities is crucial for achieving desired outcomes (Gill & Sypher, 2009). Trust is also contingent on managers behaving consistently with employees' expectations and openly communication their actions (Whitener et al., 1998). The way managers present themselves plays a key role in shaping employees' perceptions of trust (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Leaders who demonstrate reliability and transparency are more likely to foster a trusting environment, which is critical for organizational cohesion and success. Accordingly, Lee and Dong (2023) describe the term *transparent internal communication* as openly sharing information, positive and negative, and including employees in decision-making processes. Hereby, the "employee-organization relationship" plays a significant role in the trust an employee experiences within an organization.

Effective decision-making processes require transparency and well-established feedback loops, as Men (2014) points out. These two elements are crucial for ensuring that decisions are well-informed and clearly communicated throughout all levels of the organization. Moreover, Madera et al. (2014) have shown that employees' perceptions of communication efficacy within the workplace have a considerable impact on individual performance and engagement. Zerfass and Franke (2013) underscore how effective communication with stakeholders – both internal and external, reinforces the organization's identity and external image. The UT aims to position itself as the "ultimate people-first university of technology", with its personal approach to research and a focus on technological and innovative systems. This is a strategy that should be intertwined within the UT's culture. Therefore, decision-making is a critical element for the organizational functioning and should be well-considered in internal communication systems. According to Eisenfuhr (2011), decision-making involves choosing from a set of alternatives to achieve a desired outcome. The desired outcomes of decisions are often determined by higher-ups, and it is crucial that these objectives are effectively translated to lower levels. Internal communication plays a significant role in facilitating this process to ensure that decision-making is more efficient and effective (Butler, 2010).

In conclusion, this theoretical framework established the intricate relationship between internal communication, organizational culture, sense of community, and strategy within an organization. Hereby underscoring their collective impact on the overall functioning and success of an organization. Effective internal communication is not merely about the transmission of

information or organizational structure, it also involves fostering a culture of collaboration, transparency, and trust that aligns all members towards shared goals and strategic objectives. Through various formal and informal channels, internal communication serves as the backbone of an organization, shaping employee engagement and motivation and in turn drives overall performance. Especially in academic settings like the BMS faculty, these dynamics become even more critical due to the multi-layered structure and the diversity of roles. The organizational culture within the BMS faculty influences how communication flows between managers, middle-managers, and employees, affecting their sense of belonging to a community and engaging in the faculty's mission. Hereby, leadership plays a pivotal role in cultivating an environment where effective internal communication can thrive, ensuring that all members, from top management to staff, feel heard, informed, and aligned with the faculty's strategic direction.

Building on these insights, this research aims to explore the perceptions of managers, middle-managers, and employees within the BMS faculty concerning internal communication practices. The study seeks to identify strengths, challenges and potential areas for improvement in aligning internal communication with the faculty's goals, based on the interplay between communication, culture, community, and strategy.

## 3. Method

### *3.1 Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative research design to analyze and evaluate the quality of internal communication within the BMS faculty of the University of Twente. A communication audit was performed in a two-phase approach to assess how employees experience the communication practices, internal culture, community feeling, and strategy elements. Communication audits are essential because they bring communication issues to the forefront of the management agenda, encouraging a more strategic focus on improving efficiency and effectiveness across the organization (Hargie & Tourish, 2009). The initial phase was exploratory in nature, where interviews were conducted with members of the faculty who hold faculty-wide communication and managerial responsibilities. Their role within the organization serves as a unique position that is expected to clearly communicate information to other employees. Therefore, the goal of this phase was to map out the existing communication landscape and identify potential areas of improvement from a managerial point of view, from both head managers (faculty board) and middle managers (department heads and research theme chairs). Their perspectives were vital for understanding the flow of information and cultural dynamics across the faculty. The second phase focused on participants who hold no specific management responsibilities within the faculty. This phase was intended to understand not only how communication is conducted but also how it is experienced by individuals across the faculty in varying functions. By splitting the data collection in two phases, the researchers could identify the potential differences in experience per function and gain a broader understanding of communication within the faculty.

This study was part of a larger research project involving two interconnected projects, performed by two researchers, both involved in preparing, conducting, and analyzing the interviews. The project – initially issued by the BMS faculty – focused on gaining a clear understanding of the quality of internal communication within the BMS faculty. To allow for the researchers to focus on their own themes, the project was split in two. However, the researchers collaborated closely throughout the entire research process, conducting all data-collection together and staying in close contact during the analysis of results. Due to occasional scheduling conflicts, some interviews were conducted by only one researcher, while the other handled

transcription to ensure familiarity with the content. Combining the project allowed for a wider breadth of research on the topic of internal communication, and blending insights from both researchers made the analysis less one-sided and more reflective.

### ***3.2 Interview guide & procedure***

To guide the qualitative data collection, a comprehensive interview guide per phase was developed. Both researchers collaboratively developed the interview guides, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives and consistency in data analysis. As the project was two-fold, the interview guides were also categorized accordingly. Drawing on several elements of internal communication, one theme was called *communication infrastructure*, hereby focusing more on the tangible elements, and the other one was called *image formation*, exploring more intangible elements. Following an interview guide served to have interviews in a semi-structured manner. The semi-structured interviews ensured that all key aspects of internal communication and culture were systematically explored, yet, allowing for flexibility for participants to share their experiences in a free manner. Especially the differences in functions per interviewee promoted to choose for semi-structured interviews rather than standardized interviews (Barriball & While, 1994). The first interview guide allowed for exploration on the topic to create a broad understanding. The second interview guide was slightly adapted after the first phase was concluded, as some topics seemed to need more attention than others. Both interview guides can be found in Appendix A and B.

Due to the research project being initiated by the BMS faculty board, the first invitation to the participants was communicated via the faculty board. Hereby, the researchers conformed a message explaining the purpose of the research, who was involved in the project, and that people could expect invitations regarding this project. Before commencing the study, ethical approval was obtained from the BMS ethics committee, ensuring that all research activities adhered to the guidelines for proper research. Especially since the interviews regarded confidential themes, the anonymity of participants had to be maintained throughout the study. The informed consent form that all participants filled in can be found in Appendix C. Following that, the message was sent out to all potential participants by the secretary of the faculty board, still abiding to the confidentiality regulations. Although some people decided to respond to said message, the researchers mostly actively invited participants via face-to-face interactions. Once potential



interviewees were approached in person by the researchers and an interview date was confirmed, the researcher sent an information email. This email included the informed consent form and a list of topics to be discussed during the interview.

Before the start of each interview, participants received detailed information about the research objectives, interview procedure, and how the results would be used. Accordingly, participants were informed about their rights during the process and explained that they could withdraw from the study at any given time. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask any questions or give remarks regarding the research. Followingly, all participants were asked to sign the informed consent form, which indicated they voluntarily agreed to partaking in the study, knowing how the results would be used, and approving the audio recording to begin.

The initial question in each interview session asked the participant to introduce themselves by explaining their function within the faculty and the length of time they held that position. This question was specifically asked in order to collect descriptive information of the sample; however, participants were reassured this information would not become public with the shared results in order to reassure confidentiality. Followingly, the participants were asked multiple open-ended questions as prepared in the interview guides, aimed to understand the participant's view on the internal communication within the BMS faculty. During the interviews, the researchers frequently used prompts to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses or asked follow-up questions on unexpected given answers. Finally, the participants were asked if they had any additional comments they would like to make or lay any additional emphasis on previously given answers.

### ***3.3 Participants***

To gain a broad perspective on experiences from employees in different functions, the data-collection was split in two phases. The study was conducted over a period of 6 months. Recruitment of participants for Phase 1 began in May, with interviews being conducted over the following weeks. Phase 2 began immediately after concluding Phase 1, where interviews with participants started in July.

#### ***3.3.1 Phase 1***

The participants for Phase 1 were selected using purposive sampling, which allowed the researchers to invite individuals based on their specific functions within the faculty. The focus

was on members having a managerial function, as these positions are critical links within the communication structure and these people influencing the dissemination of information. Managers play an essential role in ensuring the effective transmission of information from the faculty board to various departments and sections. To establish the list of participants, the researchers utilized the publicly available organizational chart of the BMS faculty and assessed the faculty structure and the people involved. All people who had a significant communication role within the faculty and departments were considered as potential participants. To exemplify, faculty board members, chairs of departments, research theme chairs, and supporting services (e.g. finance and HR) staff belonged to this group. In phase 1, 15 interviews were conducted over the course of 4 weeks. All participants were invited via either face-to-face interactions or phone calls, depending on the most appropriate and convenient process.

### *3.3.2 Phase 2*

The second phase of the study was aimed to capture a broader perspective from a wider range of employees across the BMS faculty. In total, the BMS faculty is divided in 17 sections and employes over 600 individuals, with function titles that varying per department. Given the large number of employees, it was not feasible to interview everyone which made the researchers create selection criteria for this phase. The sampling strategy aimed to include at least one employee from each section within the faculty and focusing on covering several different functions (including professors, researchers, support staff). Although the sample could not be fully representative to the whole faculty due to its size, this approach allowed various perspectives across the faculty to be included in the research. The participants were selected following a systematic sampling process. Gathered from the data available through the University of Twente's website, a comprehensive list of all employees in the BMS faculty was compiled. Researchers categorized the employees by section and function and followingly applied a random numbering system choosing which potential participants to invite from this list. Potential participants were invited mostly through face-to-face interactions, and if the initial invitee was unavailable to participate, another individual from the same section and function category was invited to partake. For phase 2, 22 participants were interviewed over the course of 2 weeks. The sample included 4 PhD students, 7 management assistants, 9 professors, 1 engineering doctorate student, and 1 HR advisor. Additionally, the researchers made a distinction between long-term and short-term employees to account for potential differences in perspectives

over the years employed for the BMS. Hereby, employees with over five years of work experience in their current role were classified as long-term (N = 12), while those with less than five years were considered as short-term workers (N = 10).

In order to protect the anonymity of all the participants, no further details on their specific roles are given. Therefore, in order to describe a participant's role within the faculty, all functions were categorized in three categories. Hereby, the first category is called "faculty board" and entails the faculty board members, due to their significant role they have within the faculty. Secondly, the category "managerial staff" includes employees who hold a middle managerial role within the faculty, such as *department chair* or *research theme chair*. The third category states "academic staff", which entails employees with functions such as professor, assistant professor, researcher, and PhD student. Lastly, the fourth category is called "support staff" and encompasses employees working in supporting services such as financials, communications, and HR, and the management assistants, as these roles function as central figures throughout the whole of the faculty.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The data analysis for this study followed the five levels of a thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). This analysis allowed for the researchers to explore the data in a flexible manner in order to obtain a broad understanding of the complex qualitative data. During the interviews, both researchers took detailed notes on the most noticeable points raised by participants. These notes provided immediate insights into the main emerging themes, helping to track recurring themes and patterns throughout the whole data collection process. Per phase, after all interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed using the AI transcription tool Amberscript. Still, all transcripts were checked by the researchers to preserve the nuance of the conversations and again familiarize themselves with the discussed topics. Furthermore, the transcripts were anonymized by deleting confidential information, to ensure absolute anonymity.

The researchers used a predefined codebook during the analysis, combining inductive and deductive coding methods to identify key themes within the wide range of internal communication elements discussed (Schadewitz & Jachna, 2007). Initially, the codebook entailed the themes followed according to the interview guides, divided in main and sub themes.

The codebook can be found in Appendix D. During the coding, the researchers revisited the codebook and adjusted where necessary. Each code entailed a negative, neutral, and positive category to identify how internal communication was experienced across the faculty. Both researchers performed the analysis together, as the intracoder reliability ensures the coding process to be consisted among both researchers (Van den Hoonaard, 2008).

## 4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study, focusing on the three core themes central to this research: organizational culture, sense of community, and strategic communication within the BMS faculty. The primary goal of this research is to understand how internal communication practices influence and reflect these themes, shaping the overall organizational environment. This chapter highlights both the strengths and challenges of current communication practices. By examining the diverse experiences of head managers, middle managers, and employees, this chapter aims to uncover how internal communication contributes to the sense of cohesion and engagement within the faculty. These findings set the stage for a deeper analysis in the following discussion chapter, where the research question will be answered.

### **4.1 Organizational culture**

#### *4.1.1 Overall sentiment*

The organizational culture within the BMS faculty is generally perceived positively by the majority of respondents, expressing a strong sense of satisfaction with the overall work environment, and emphasizing a sense of inclusion and collegiality that fosters a positive atmosphere. Participants identified several core values within the BMS faculty – such as openness, directness, interdisciplinarity, friendliness, entrepreneurial spirit, critical thinking, cultural diversity, and a focus on education and research. The culture was often described to be cooperative, constructive, and characterized by mutual solidarity solidary to one another. Most participants throughout the whole faculty expressed to feel a part of a supportive environment where colleagues treat each other well and maintain an open and respectful dialogue. This contributes to a feeling of safety and belonging, which is particularly valued in academic settings where competitive and hierarchical dynamics are common. One participant simply described the faculty’s culture as “good”. Another participant compared the culture to that of a “small village”, highlighting the familiarity and comfort that people experience. Overall, people express to experience an informal culture that is welcoming to individuals and where they feel at home. Several participants mentioned that the BMS culture is, in their view, relatively friendly compared to other universities or even other faculties within the University of Twente. This sentiment is encapsulated in the following statement from one of the respondents:

*“We're actually a pretty friendly, sweet university and faculty, so in that respect I really like that.” (faculty board member)*

Multiple participants stated to appreciate how this faculty is rather democratic in nature, allowing for people to express their opinions and where interactions flow across different levels of the organization. This makes it easier to establish positive relationships and collaborate effectively. The next quote underlines the perception that the BMS faculty is not overly hierarchical, which contrasts with the often strict hierarchies seen in other academic institutions.

*“Here, I think it's great to find that you're just allowed to be there, who you are, and there also is good contact between someone at a higher level and a lower level.” (support staff member)*

The atmosphere of friendliness and approachability makes the faculty an attractive workplace for both new and long-standing employees. The faculty is culturally diverse and interdisciplinary, and many employees – Dutch and international – feel very welcomed by their colleagues. The interdisciplinary nature of BMS is seen as a positive aspect, offering a chance to bring colleagues from different departments together to collaborate on research projects. Another participant emphasized this sentiment by stating the following:

*“We have a very pleasant way of dealing with each other, the atmosphere here is really good and I think also really better than some other clubs. So I'm very happy with that and in that way you also hear a lot.” (academic staff member)*

#### *4.1.2 Conflicting views*

However, this positive perception of the BMS culture is not universally shared. Several participants highlighted a more critical and serious side of the culture, marked by fear, hesitation, and political dynamics. This aspect of the culture is characterized by a lack of transparency and openness. Despite the faculty's reputation for having an “open culture” some say to experience a two-faced culture which is actually not as transparent and open as promised. This discrepancy between perception and reality was highlighted in a couple of interviews with respondents with

different functions, expressing disappointment in this promised open culture. A notable concern is the fear of being judged, which discourages open communication and people sharing their true thoughts or concerns. One short-term participant articulated this contradiction clearly:

*“Quite a serious culture, I think. And there is a certain negativity, where it is often assumed that things are not good to begin with” (support staff member)*

Another participant expressed a perspective where there is a lack of open communication:

*“People do tend to be very politically-correct and seem to hide what they really think when they do not agree with something, so to speak.” (managerial staff member)*

Such sentiments indicate how the open communication and sense of harmony are not experienced by all members. Some participants called the open culture to merely be a façade where beneath the surface there is a tendency to approach issues with skepticism and negativity. Notably, this discrepancy between perception and reality was highlighted in a couple of interviews, especially with participants who hold a middle-management position, expressing disappointment in the lack of true openness and transparency within the faculty. In particular, a notable concern is the fear of being judged, which discourages transparency.

*“It's a culture of fear that has only gotten worse under this regime. Not okay, not transparent, not clear, that's what I think of it.” (support staff member)*

This negativity is often seen as overshadowing any positive developments within the faculty, contributing to a rather serious tone. The discrepancies felt by participants showcase how the academic environment and individual behaviors shape the culture in different ways in different departments. Some participants believe that the faculty's atmosphere is influenced by historical issues and unresolved tensions, creating a lingering sense of distrust. Some state how these longstanding grievances might have cast a shadow over the present-day culture, making it difficult for the faculty to move forward cohesively. As one participant put it:

*“I also notice that there are some colleagues who are always negative and that they leave a big mark, giving a negative spin to a piece of news that might have been positive.”*  
(support staff member)

In summary, the organizational culture within the BMS faculty presents a complex picture characterized by both positive and negative perceptions. While many respondents express satisfaction with the cooperative and inclusive atmosphere that fosters collegiality and a sense of belonging, others highlight significant concerns regarding transparency, fear of judgement, and political dynamics. This discrepancy underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the cultural nuances at play, as well as a recognition of the historical tensions that may influence current interactions.

## ***4.2 Sense of community***

### *4.2.1 Department-based community*

The sense of community within the BMS faculty was variously evaluated by the respondents. Given the substantial size of the faculty, many employees found it challenging to perceive themselves as part of a singular, cohesive community that encompasses the entire faculty. Instead, employees tend to focus on fostering a sense of community within their own departments or sections. This department-based community feeling is often facilitated by the close physical proximity of colleagues on the work floor and shared involvement in the same research projects. Consequently, employees experienced a sense of cooperation and support within their immediate teams, with colleagues generally assisting when needed.

*“I do notice that it's pretty much a close-knit faculty, that people really do know each other. This feeling of "we do it together". I really did get that feeling.”* (support staff member)

Another participant emphasizes this mentality of helping each other, yet also expressing how it sometimes requires more when many people feel involved in situations:



*“I think the key word is, that we have super-involved colleagues in all areas and that on the one hand, that has a lot of value, because if you have an initiative here, people are very quick to do something and enthusiastic and things get off the ground easily. On the other hand, things also take a long time, because out of involvement people also want to have an opinion about it.” (managerial staff member)*

Although multiple respondents recognize a collaborative nature where employees support one-another, several participants pointed out that this localized sense of support was not visible throughout the whole faculty. Participants express to feel a lack of cohesion and systematic support, indicating a somewhat disconnected organization. One participant summarized this sentiment:

*“The word that comes to mind is disjointed, with a good vibe. So basically, we've got a lot of good will, positive energy, lot of things to celebrate, you know the metaphor for how we all go through life... We all got our problems and our own struggles, and that's the way it is, you reach out sometimes and you stay in your own lane sometimes. There are these pockets, these circles, they're fluid. Some see each other, some have no clue the others exist.” (managerial staff member)*

This comment illustrates how the faculty is perceived as fragmented, with most individuals relating more strongly to their immediate section or team rather than a broader faculty community. The disconnection means that not all employees experience the same sense of connection, with some colleagues remaining unaware of others' existence due to the lack of a cohesive, faculty-wide community structure. In this sense, the faculty is rather a collection of isolated groups where not many identify themselves specifically as a BMS member. It suggests that the sense of togetherness does not extend much beyond the immediate workgroup or department.

*“Yes, 'community' is a big word. In that sense, I do feel connected to my own team and colleagues here, but beyond that, not really. To call it a community would be going too far.” (academic staff member)*

Another long-term participant also expressed this view of people being rather connected with their own section:

*"I feel that people do work a lot within their own section. Then I'm also speaking for myself, maybe other people experience it very differently. But I don't really necessarily see BMS as one community." (academic staff member)*

Yet, this lack of a cohesion across BMS is not necessarily seen as negative by everybody, as participants generally prioritize a good connection within their immediate team of colleagues, rather than a broader organizational identity. Many acknowledged how BMS is likely too large, making it difficult and challenging to foster one single, unified community. As long as they maintain good relationships within their immediate circles, there is no great desire to have one unified community. One participant clearly expressed this point of view by describing the need for positive interactions with close colleagues:

*"As long as I get along well with the people I often have contact with, you know? Those are the important things for me. Yes, and downstairs at the service desk, you know... just really the people you often interact with. Yes, and if that's good, I'm completely fine with it." (support staff member)*

Such comments reveal that employees prioritize practical, day-to-day relationships with colleagues over developing a larger community identity. The emphasis is on functional and immediate work interactions rather than on creating a sense of broader cohesion within BMS. Employees have noted that the working culture is highly dependent on the specific department one belongs to and the disciplinary preferences or working styles. Showcasing that the work environment, collaboration dynamics, and communication styles vary significantly among the different disciplines in the faculty. Furthermore, it suggests that the sense of togetherness does not extend much beyond direct colleagues. Affecting how employees present themselves externally. Participants' responses revealed varied levels of identifying themselves as part of the BMS. Multiple participants mentioned how they identify with their section or working team, but

not as with the BMS as a faculty. A participant remarked to feel “functionally assigned to the BMS” instead of experiencing a BMS community. Another participant expressed the same sentiment:

*“BMS as an identity is hardly there. I never present myself as a ‘BMS member’ to the outside world, so to speak.” (academic staff member)*

Another participant experienced a similar sentiment:

*“But I think very few people will be the first to say ‘I’m in BMS.’ They will say, ‘I’m in a group or in a department,’ but never ‘I’m in BMS,’ so to speak.” (managerial staff member)*

To enhance the sense of community within the faculty, a few events are organized so colleagues can meet each other in an informal setting and enhance the connection within the entire faculty. By many respondents, these moments are appreciated and display a willingness to enhance the community feeling among the entire organization. However, a few participants also expressed to feel a distance during these events.

*“But like lately, there was such a BMS event, but then I don’t have the feeling that I belong there or something.” (support staff member)*

#### *4.2.3 Physical proximity*

Furthermore, the challenge of fostering a broader community is further complicated by the physical separation of the two main BMS buildings, Ravelijn and Cubicus. The two main buildings the BMS faculty occupies - Ravelijn & Cubicus, have a significant distance that impacts the faculty’s cohesion. Employees working in Cubicus often report feeling less connected to the faculty board, which is primarily located in Ravelijn. The different physical environment of the buildings also contributes to varied working styles and levels of interaction. A few participants mentioned the effects of Covid-19 regulations have contributed to a sense of disconnection among colleagues. To exemplify, participants mentioned that it is not always easy to meet-up with a colleague because they do not know whether they are in office or working

remotely on that day. Furthermore, some participants working in Cubicus describe to feel more isolated due to the building's physical layout, making spontaneous interactions with colleagues more difficult and less frequent. In contrast, the shared office spaces in Ravelijn seem to facilitate more collaboration and informal communication within teams. These experiences reinforce the sense of disconnection between departments and buildings and contribute to a fragmented and less cohesive faculty culture. As the faculty currently faces a relocation from Cubicus to the new building Capitoool, concerns about increased physical distance are growing. The Capitoool building is even further away from Ravelijn, resulting in even fewer opportunities for spontaneous interactions. As a result, employees – particularly those located in Cubicus, worry that this move to the new building will further diminish their connection to the faculty board and negatively impacts the sense of unity within BMS.

*“With the upcoming relocation [from previous Cubicus to Capitoool], we will be even more clearly divided into two faculties. To be honest, it already feels a bit like ‘those from the other side’ and ‘our side of the faculty.’” (academic staff member)*

Moreover, the move to the new building may also undermine existing practices that facilitate open communication and collaboration for some. The way in which employees are used to work may change which can impacts ... to exemplify, many people state how the faculty applies the “open door-policy”, allowing for spontaneous interactions and easy accessibility between colleagues. However, the new building might potentially interfere with this policy as offices need to be shared and distances get greater. A participant expressed how this might influence the way of working

*“We currently have an ‘open door’ policy, which is something I recently emphasized as being important. But the move is not going to help with that. It’s going to have an impact. We will be based in Ravelijn. Because of the new setup, we will have to share offices more. Right now, I have a room where I keep my door open all day if possible. But if I end up in a room with four people, you just won’t do that.” (academic staff member)*

These sentiments illustrate how the physical layout and spatial organization of workspaces can significantly influence interpersonal interactions and the overall working culture. Overall, the sense of community within the BMS faculty appears to be primarily department-based, with strong connections and collaboration existing within smaller teams rather than across the entire faculty. While many employees appreciate the close-knit relationships they have within their immediate work groups, this localized sense of belonging often results in a fragmented overall community where broader faculty-wide cohesion is limited.

### **4.3 Strategy**

#### *4.3.1 BMS strategy*

The perception of the BMS faculty's strategy varies considerably among employees, reflecting a mix of awareness, uncertainty, and disconnect. While many middle-managers have a clear understanding of the faculty's strategic goals and objectives, this awareness does not seem to extend consistently across all levels of the organization. Many employees express a sense of confusion or lack of clarity regarding the faculty's overall strategic vision. Several participants shared how they feel there is no clear direction communicated to them, with a strategy to appear abstract and distant. Some stated how this creates a low-motivated culture where people hold back rather than express their actual needs, leading to a lack of ambition:

*"It's informal, not very goal-oriented, not very conflict-driven, and sometimes not very ambitious either. (...) This has two sides. It means that everyone gets along well, but it also means that not much really happens."* (academic staff member)

Another long-term participant states to experience a similar view:

*"[The BMS strategy] is not so much on the forefront, at least from my point of view."*  
(academic staff member)

These sentiments highlight the lack of clarity and cohesion within the BMS strategy. Some participants reflected how the lack of clear direction within the BMS faculty can cause the field of social research to miss out on certain research opportunities or demotivate employees to strive

for a goal. A participant in particular expresses how their work feels somewhat neglected in the greater scheme:

*“There is a very strong feeling that none of it really matters. But it should matter. I also have the feeling that those in charge don’t really have a clear vision of where they want to go, and I would like to feel more aligned with that direction.” (managerial staff member)*

The participant’s words emphasize a longing for a clearer vision and stronger support from the faculty leadership. Some employees attribute this issue to insufficient promotion and advocacy for BMS research, where the BMS faculty does not highlight its importance and value of its research leading to a feeling of being undervalued and demotivated.

#### 4.3.2 Transparency in decision-making processes

Another recurring point of concern is the lack of transparency and clarity in decision-making processes experienced throughout the faculty. Multiple employees expressed frustration regarding how decisions are made, noting that the rationale behind these decisions is often unclear and communication is inconsistent. Even employees holding managerial positions, who are closely connected to the faculty board and expected to be part of the decision-making process, feel that their opinions are not sufficiently considered. Furthermore, it causes concerns about the clarity of communication, making it sometimes difficult for employees to understand why decisions are made. This can cause a disruption in the trust relationship between employees and management sometimes, even between head managers and middle-management.

*“What I really miss when it comes to internal communication is the rationale behind the decisions that are made, like hiring all these assistant professors, or pushing through with a move that’s going to cost millions, while we are already financially struggling. Yeah, so the explanation, the argumentation, I often feel much more need for that, and it doesn’t come. And then you start questioning what the leadership is doing. Simply because there’s no explanation. You just want some clarification.” (managerial staff member)*

A few participants expressed how information before certain decision-making meetings is often lacking or communication is only happening last-minute, leaving little room for members of certain meetings to join the discussions. Therefore, participants often do not feel well-prepared for discussions making it difficult to be part of the decision-making process, as one participant expresses:

*“It is often only afterwards that you get insights into what has been discussed, but you would actually want to have that information at a much earlier stage.” (support staff member)*

Accordingly, another participant states to wonder whether all information is clearly communicated:

*“Well, I don't have the impression that everything that say at the faculty board level is discussed, also trickles down.” (managerial staff member)*

This concern was particularly strong regarding the recent relocation to the new building. For example, one participant mentioned how they did not feel included in the decision to move offices and how the affects this has on employees' work routines was not fully considered.

*“Well, for example, specifically about the move to Capitool. We were not really included in that decision (...) and it's just not at all convenient when you're in a very large office with all your colleagues and you have your students. (...) So, I don't think they were really aware of our role as teachers and researchers.” (academic staff member)*

Although most of the employees and support staff expressed to not be familiar with the specific strategic objectives of the BMS faculty, it is also shared how they distance themselves from the decision-making processes due to their function. Employees choose to not get involved in certain decision as that does not belong to their function. Therefore, the responsibility of deciding a strategy belongs to those in managerial positions, causing a handful of employees to explicitly express how they believe the people in those functions will make correct decisions:

*“I do have the confidence that [the faculty board] are really doing everything they can to keep everyone working as much as possible.” (support staff member)*

Furthermore, some respondents expressed to sense a gap between the expectations of the faculty board and reality of the working environment. As was often stated, the faculty members are often expected to proactively seek out information relevant to their role. However, employees still miss clear information from the faculty regarding certain decisions. While the faculty regularly sends out large volumes of information, participants noted that it is challenging to discern what is most urgent and relevant. Again, highlighting the need for a clearer distinction in the information regarding the BMS faculty’s objectives. Especially for those with a high workload, it becomes difficult to keep up with all the communications. One participant clearly expressed how a lot of information can probably be found, yet this requires a pro-active attitude:

*“Very important things, then you constantly get a message, absolutely. And the rest is also a little bit up to you, I think, that you yourself are constantly on top of the news portal, that you get that kind of information. It is offered, but then you have to be more active yourself, because you have to go and look it up yourself.” (support staff member)*

Overall, the lack of transparency and disconnection experienced by participants suggest a need for clearer rationale behind decisions and more direction of strategic objectives.



## 5. Discussion

The discussion chapter will address the key findings from the study, providing an analysis to answer the research question: *How do managers, middle-managers, and employees of the BMS faculty perceive the internal communication in line with the organizational culture, sense of community, and strategic objectives within the BMS faculty?* By connecting these results to existing literature, this chapter will offer a clearer understanding of how internal communication, organizational culture, community dynamics, and strategic communication dynamics influence perceptions within the BMS faculty. Additionally, practical implications specifically directed at the BMS faculty will be presented, outlining recommendations that can help the faculty enhance transparency, cohesion, and strategic alignment across departments.

### **5.1 Main findings**

The main findings of the results highlight a complex and multifaceted view of the BMS faculty's internal dynamics. Firstly, the BMS faculty's organizational culture is perceived as a fragmented organizational culture where various departments operate as separate entities. The interdisciplinary nature of the BMS creates collaboration but also causes challenges to create a unified culture. Though mostly the culture is described as open, welcoming, cooperative and inclusive, some voice an opposing view in which there is a lack of transparency, fear of judgement, and internal political dynamics, potentially hindering an open culture. The study of Lee and Dong (2023) showed the importance of transparent communication, as it enhances the employee empowerment. Similarly to the study of Proell et al. (2022), the culture and evaluation practices can significantly influence the willingness of employees to express their opinions.

Secondly, the sense of community within the BMS faculty is predominantly department-based. Strong connections and collaboration thrive within smaller teams, but this localized focus often leads to a fragmented overall community, limiting broader cohesion across the faculty. Employees prioritize close-knit relationship within their immediate groups, yet there is less identification with a unified, faculty-wide community. Some participants attribute this department-focused community to physical proximity, as the physical distance make it difficult to connect with colleagues located in other buildings. This is recognized by Gupte (2007) who asserts that employees in near proximity of each other often share information easier, showcasing how distance can obstruct easy information sharing. For some, this lack of a unified identity

across BMS is not seen as a significant issue, as they prioritize meaningful connections with colleagues they interact with regularly. However, it also indicates potential challenges in fostering a sense of collective identity and engagement across the faculty. The findings of previous research suggest that symmetrical internal communication and dialogue play a crucial role in shaping organizational culture and in turn impact the employees' identification (Yue et al., 2020). Efforts such as organizing social events show a desire to bridge these gaps, but for some employees, these attempts are not always enough to overcome the inherent separations between different sections and departments.

Finally, the findings point to a general sense of lack of transparency and strategic alignment within the BMS faculty. Some have the perception that information does not consistently trickle down to all levels of the organization, causing employees to not feel involved. This can lead employees to mistrust the information flow, as satisfaction from employees during meetings and regarding quality of communication is vital for building trust (Vokic et al., 2020). Participants expressed the need for clearer communication around decision-making processes and a stronger sense of direction regarding strategic objectives. For internal communication to be effective, it is essential that employees are fully informed about any changes and the expectations set by management across the organization (Kosir, 2014). Although some distance themselves from decision-making processes, a general sentiment that employees have to pro-actively seek information is shared. Overall, these findings emphasize the need for more cohesive communication strategies and efforts to foster a unified culture within the BMS faculty, ensuring that employees feel more connected, informed, and engaged across all departments.

## ***5.2 Practical implications***

Based on the findings in this research on internal communication within the BMS faculty, several key areas of improvement have been identified. To enhance the overall communication flow and strengthen the internal culture, the following practical steps are recommended. These recommendations will not only enhance the operational efficiency but also contribute to greater employee satisfaction and alignment with the faculty's objectives. Firstly, the lack of transparency and clarity in decision-making processes has emerged as a significant issue. Employees often miss the rationale behind certain decisions and wish to be more involved before a decision is made. Therefore, clear organizational communication is necessary to allow for

frequent feedback moments and clearly assigned responsibilities. As Gupte (2007) suggests, a flexible structure with well-delegated tasks and decision-making autonomy can help streamline internal processes. Additionally, Kipasika (2024) highlights that clearly explaining what each function entails can improve the communication flow within the organization. To address these challenges, the faculty could benefit from showcasing more transparency by communicating decision-making processes earlier and allowing employees to voice their opinions. Feedback loops are a crucial element of effective communication (Zdravkovska & Haque, 2023), and organizations seeking meaningful employee participation must foster trust (Shahid & Azhar, 2013). This requires transparent practices, such as clearly explaining the rationale behind decisions and specifying when feedback from employees is needed. Making a clear distinction in these decision-making processes helps prevent misunderstandings and increases engagement. Furthermore, ensuring that the outcomes of meetings and decisions are communicated clearly and promptly will help employees understand the reasoning behind decisions (Chen, 2023). By adopting a more symmetrical communication approach based on transparency, the faculty can involve employees more actively in decision-making processes, creating a sense of involvement and ownership (Araujo & Miranda, 2020).

Secondly, to enhance community feeling within the faculty, it is essential to focus on fostering a more inclusive environment through effective communication practices. Chen (2023) highlights the importance of promoting openness and inclusivity, which can be achieved by improving communication strategies across the board. The BMS faculty should prioritize creating channels for clear and empathetic communication that encourage all employees to share their perspectives and experiences. According to Mishra et al. (2014) fostering a sense of enthusiasm is crucial for building a positive work environment and strong internal culture. The enthusiasm can be enhanced by organizing social events for employees to gather and meet and possibly create more cross-departmental collaboration. Additionally, promoting initiatives that encourage interaction between departments helps build a stronger sense of belonging to the BMS community. By implementing initiatives that facilitate regular feedback and open dialogue, the faculty can cultivate an atmosphere where everyone feels valued and included. Encouraging managers to model transparent and consistent communication is also vital, as it sets the tone for a participatory environment (Karjalainen, 2015). When leaders demonstrate openness, it invites employees to engage more actively, thereby strengthening interpersonal connections and

reinforcing a sense of community. Ultimately, by prioritizing inclusive communication practices, the faculty can foster collaboration, enhance relationships among staff, and create a more cohesive community where every member feels empowered to contribute.

Lastly, to significantly boost employee engagement, it is crucial for staff to feel a strong connection to the faculty's vision, mission, and strategic objectives. Kipasika (2024) highlights that when employees are well-informed and aligned with an organization's goals, it fosters a sense of purpose and belonging. Therefore, the BMS faculty should prioritize regular communication of its strategic objectives, clearly articulating how these goals relate to the work of various departments. By consistently sharing the faculty's vision and how individual contributions fit into the larger picture, employees can better understand their roles and see the impact of their efforts on the community. This alignment not only enhances individual motivation but also strengthens the collective identity of the faculty. When employees recognize that their work contributes to shared goals, it cultivates a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to the faculty's mission. Moreover, open discussions around strategic objectives can encourage collaboration across departments, as staff can identify common goals and opportunities for partnership. By fostering a culture of transparency and inclusivity, the faculty can deepen employees' connections to one another and the organization, ultimately enhancing the sense of community and strengthening the organizational culture.

### ***5.3 Theoretical implications***

In addition to the practical implications tailored for the BMS faculty, this research offers theoretical insights into the understanding of internal communication and organizational culture within academic institutions. Existing literature often depicts faculty environments as relatively autonomous and internally cohesive (Pandey, 2004), however, the findings of this study reveal a more nuanced and complex landscape. The observed discrepancies in perceptions between managers employees suggests that traditional models of communication effectiveness might not fully apply in decentralized academic settings. Additionally, the identification of the distinct subcultures within the different departments of the BMS faculty, indicates how internal communication practices should be adapted to the diverse identities and communities of the organization. This approach aligns with the assertion by Marquis et al. (2011), that complex organizations should be viewed as communities rather than monolithic entities. Such findings extend theoretical discussions on organizational culture by emphasizing the role of subcultural

dynamics (Schein, 2010) and revealing how fragmented internal communication can affect broader perceptions of community and inclusion. Moreover, the unexpected finding that management holds a more negative view of internal communication compared to employees underscores the necessity of examining intra-organizational power dynamics and the prevailing gap between managers and staff (Patnaik et al., 2021). This gap can adversely impact organizational commitment and job performance, as indicated by Chen et al. (2006), who found that higher levels of organizational communication correlate with enhanced organizational commitment and job performance across different contexts. Consequently, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of internal communication processes within universities, particularly within faculties comprising of multiple departments.

#### ***5.4 Limitations***

Similar to any study, this study encountered several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, the restricted sample size was a significant constraint. Although many participants were interviewed, they represent only a small portion of the entire faculty, which limits the generalizability of the findings. For instance, section heads, who also hold a crucial middle-management position within the organizational structure were not included in the sample, due to time constraints. Their insights would have provided an even broader understanding of internal communication, given their intermediary role between management and employees. Similarly, no supporting staff from Campus Facility Management were interviewed, potentially resulting in a gap in understanding internal communication from the perspective of employees at different levels, also outside the BMS faculty. This exclusion could potentially have skewed the findings, as these experiences could have enhanced the comparison to other facilities part of the internal communication.

Another limitation refers to the “speak-up” mentality observed among participants. While the participants were invited personally and voluntarily chose to partake in the research, it is important to consider that those who agreed to be interviewed might have felt more comfortable expressing their views openly. This comfort may not be representative of the entire faculty population, as some individuals declined participation due to concerns regarding confidentiality and the use of results. Consequently, the findings may reflect the opinions of individuals who were more willing to share their concerns, leading to a potential bias in the data. This limitation suggests that the study might not fully capture the perspectives of those who were less inclined to

voice their opinions, which is a common challenge in qualitative research relying on voluntary participation.

Furthermore, the researchers' proximity to the participants posed another potential limitation. As both researchers were students within the BMS faculty and had existing relationships with many of the interviewees, their familiarity could have influenced participants' responses. While this proximity facilitated meeting straightforward arrangements and fostered a comfortable environment, it may also have led participants to withhold information or alter their responses. Although the researchers made concerted efforts to ensure trust and confidentiality, it is possible that some participants did not feel entirely comfortable discussing sensitive topics. This may have led to unintentionally affected objectivity of the findings.

Lastly, the brief nature of the interviews can create a snapshot that skews perceptions, limiting the depth of exploration into the complexities of internal communication and organizational culture over a longer period of time. Such short interactions may fail to capture the full spectrum of detailed issues or shifts in attitudes over time. Especially now since the BMS is in a moment of change. To address this limitation, future research could benefit from a longitudinal approach, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how internal communication practices evolve within the faculty.

### ***5.5 Suggestions for future research***

While these findings contribute to the understanding of internal communication in academic contexts, further research could explore these communication patterns across other faculties and institutions. Future research could further explore this area by investigating how the structure of a faculty divided into several sub-units influences communication flows and organizational culture. Such studies would bridge the existing knowledge gap concerning organizations that operate as networks of smaller entities, such as higher education institutions.

Especially for this specific research, it could be beneficial to expand the sample size to include a broader range of participants, such as section chairs and support staff. This would provide a more holistic view of the communication dynamics within the faculty. Including these perspectives would help capture the experiences of those involved in various organizational levels, thereby enriching the understanding of internal communication processes. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for future studies to employ a longitudinal approach, replicating this research at different points in time to observe patterns and shifts in internal communication and culture

over the course of a longer period. Given the current transitional phase the BMS faculty is undergoing, it would be particularly insightful to conduct a follow-up study within a year to identify any changes and measure the impact of these changes on the perceptions.

Finally, it is essential to acknowledge that internal communication is an ever-evolving field, reflecting the dynamic and adaptive nature of communication itself. Ongoing research into the experiences and perceptions of internal communication within organizations is crucial for developing effective strategies that enhance communication and manage organizational culture. This is particularly important in higher education, where diverse departmental needs and complex stakeholder relationships create unique challenges. By investigating these dynamics further, future studies can provide valuable insights that inform best practices and foster a more cohesive organizational culture, ultimately improving both employee engagement and institutional effectiveness.

## ***5.6 Conclusion***

Perceptions of internal communication within the BMS faculty reveal a mix of strengths and challenges. Managers, middle-managers, and employees experience communication differently, often influenced by their function and department they belong to. While the organizational culture is seen as cooperative and inclusive, concerns around transparency and political dynamics suggest that open communication is not always consistent. The sense of community thrives within smaller, department-based groups, but this localized focus often leads to a fragmented faculty-wide cohesion. Strategic communication also shows gaps, with many middle-managers and employees expressing uncertainty about the overall direction, largely due to a lack of clear, consistent messaging. In conclusion, the perceptions of managers, middle-managers, and employees regarding internal communication within the BMS faculty reflect a complex interplay between organizational culture, community engagement, and alignment with strategic objectives, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement that are essential for fostering a cohesive and effective work environment. While internal communication effectively supports collaboration within smaller teams, there is a need for greater transparency, open dialogue, and a unified approach to bridge the gaps across the organization. Addressing these intricacies can help create a more cohesive environment where clear, purposeful communication fosters not just effective operations, but also a deeper sense of connection and shared identity across all level of the BMS faculty.

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# Appendices

## ***Appendix A: Interview guide phase 1***

### Communication infrastructure

#### A. Channels

- What are, in your opinion, important communication channels within the faculty?
- What do you think of the functioning of the channels available in the faculty?
- What do you think of the role of informal communication within the faculty?

#### B. Information dissemination

- *For middle managers:* Are you always aware of relevant developments in the faculty? And how do you get this information?
- *For faculty board:* How do you decide on what information to disseminate within the faculty?
- Which information do you consider nice-to-know and need-to-know?
- How do you experience the bottom-up communication in the faculty?
  - How do you make sure that your team can send feedback to you? How do you give feedback?

#### C. Decision-making procedures

- What do you think of the way decisions are made within the faculty?
  - Probes:
    - Decision making is making a choice to achieve a desired result
    - Decision-making in different departments
    - Decision-making in different research streams
    - Transparency and feedback loops

#### D. Faculty structure

- What do you think of the organizational structure in the faculty?
  - Think of the departments and the research lines
- To what extent is the organizational structure beneficial for the internal communication
  - To what extent does it cause internal communication problems?

#### E. Communication roles and responsibilities

- What do you see as your own communication responsibilities within the faculty?
  - Examples: translating information to lower levels, giving feedback, determining the overall course of the faculty, conveying the image of the faculty.
- Are you satisfied with the way you can fulfill these responsibilities?
- What kinds of problems do you encounter in your responsibilities?

#### F. Procedures

- Can you think of generic procedures in your work?
- What do you think of these procedures?

### Image formation

#### G. Culture

- What do you think of the culture in the BMS faculty?
  - What do you see as core values of BMS?
- Any values that need to be kept and that are not desirable?
  - How does internal communication aid or obstruct the cultivation of the faculty culture?
- Give examples of positive and negative experiences

#### H. Community & membership

- To what extent do you see the BMS faculty as a community?
  - What are your communities in the faculty?
- What internal communication practices affect how you feel part of the community?
  - Such as traditions, informal gatherings, procedures
  - What activities help strengthen connections among faculty members?
- What changes or improvements could be made to foster a stronger sense of community within the BMS faculty?

#### I. Strategic direction of the faculty

- Given the major themes that are relevant right now, such as the financial situation, student enrollment, and the renovation of Cubicus, do you trust the overall strategic direction of the faculty?

#### J. Role of communication

- What is your overall opinion of the internal communication at BMS?
  - Can you name three things that are going well in terms of internal communication?
  - Can you name three things that need to be improved in terms of internal communication in the BMS faculty?
- Any final remarks or things you want to add?

## ***Appendix B: Interview guide phase 2***

### Communication infrastructure

#### A. Channels

- What are, in your opinion, important communication channels within the faculty?
- What do you think of the functioning of the channels available in the faculty?
- What do you think of the role of informal communication within the faculty?

#### F. Information dissemination

- Are you always aware of relevant developments in the faculty?
- Do you get this information through active searching or through top-down communication?
- Do you get enough information to fulfill your tasks within your function?
- How do you experience the bottom-up communication in the faculty?
  - Do you get the space to provide feedback to people in managerial positions?

#### B. Decision-making procedures

- What do you think of the way decisions are made within the faculty?
- What do you think of the transparency of the decision-making process?

#### C. Faculty structure

- What do you think of the organizational structure in the faculty?
- To what extent is the organizational structure beneficial for the internal communication
  - To what extent does it cause internal communication problems?
- To what extent do you experience short lines of communication?

#### D. Responsibilities and expectations

- What do you see as your own communication responsibilities within the faculty?
  - E.g. Communicating with supervisors, giving feedback, teaching, doing research.
- What kinds of problems do you encounter in your responsibilities?
- Do you think your function is the same on paper as in practice?

### Image formation

#### G. Culture

- What do you think of the culture in the BMS faculty?
  - What do you see as core values of BMS?
  - Any values that need to be kept and that are not desirable?
  - Open door policy
    - How does internal communication aid or obstruct the cultivation of the faculty culture?
  - Can you give examples of positive and negative experiences?

#### H. Community & membership

- To what extent do you see the BMS faculty as a community?
  - What are your communities in the faculty?
- Would you say it's desirable to be part of a bigger BMS community?
  - What would people in managerial positions have to implement to facilitate this?



- What internal communication practices affect how you feel part of the community?
  - Such as traditions, informal gatherings, procedures
  - What activities help strengthen connections among faculty members?

I. Strategic direction of the faculty

- Are you aware of the BMS strategic course they plan to follow?
  - *If yes:* Given the major themes that are relevant right now, such as the financial situation, student enrollment, and the renovation of Cubicus, do you trust the overall strategic direction of the faculty?
  - *If no:* what are the reasons why not? Would this be desirable for you?

J. Role of communication

- What is your overall opinion of the internal communication at BMS?
  - Can you name three things that are going well in terms of internal communication?
  - Can you name three things that need to be improved in terms of internal communication in the BMS faculty?
  - Any final remarks or things you want to add?

## ***Appendix C: Informed consent form***

### **Information about the study ‘Internal communication quality within the BMS faculty’**

This research project aims to investigate the quality of the internal communication within the BMS faculty, identify strengths and weaknesses in the communication system and providing recommendations for improvements. The research is conducted by Misha Zoet and Sophie Nijkamp, two Master students in Communication Science at the University of Twente. The study is supervised by Prof.dr. Menno de Jong and Dr. Mark van Vuuren. The research is reviewed and approved by the BMS Ethics Committee.

The research consists of qualitative interviews with employees working in the BMS faculty. The interviews focus on the participants’ experiences with and views on the internal communication within the faculty. They will last between 60 and 90 minutes.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason, without the need to justify their decision. Participants also have the right to refuse answering specific questions.

The researchers would like to make an audio recording of the interview. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and anonymized. When the transcription is made, the recording will be erased.

The data will be saved as anonymized transcripts and may be accessed within the research team (the researchers and the supervisors). The supervisors do not know with whom the interviews were held. The data will not be shared with the faculty board or with any other third party. Participants have the right to request access to and rectification or erasure of their interview data. The transcripts will be stored in a safe online environment for a period of five years.

The data will be used by the two researchers to write their Master theses. In addition, the data may be used for one or more academic articles about internal communication in academic settings. If quotes of participants are used, special attention will be paid to the confidentiality of the research. Only quotes that cannot be reduced to individual employees or groups can be used in the reporting.

In the case of questions, suggestions, or concerns, please feel free to contact the researchers or their supervisors (see emails below).

#### Researchers

Sophie Nijkamp ([s.nijkamp@student.utwente.nl](mailto:s.nijkamp@student.utwente.nl))  
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#### Supervisors

Menno de Jong ([m.d.t.dejong@utwente.nl](mailto:m.d.t.dejong@utwente.nl))  
Mark van Vuuren

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee/domain Humanities & Social Sciences of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente by [ethicscommittee-hss@utwente.nl](mailto:ethicscommittee-hss@utwente.nl)

**Informed consent form for the study ‘Internal communication quality within the BMS faculty’  
YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THE STUDY INFORMATION AND THIS FORM**

*Please tick the appropriate boxes*

**Yes    No**

**Taking part in the study**

I have read and understood the study information. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.    

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.    

**Use of the information in the study**

I understand that information I provide will be used for (1) master theses, (2) communication recommendations for the BMS faculty, and, possibly, (3) academic articles.    

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or my job function, will not be shared beyond the study team.    

I agree that my anonymized interview fragments can be quoted in research output.    

I agree to be audio recorded.    

**Signatures**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant [printed]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant and, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what they are freely consenting.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the researcher [printed]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix D: Codebooks**

*Codebook phase 1:*

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>
Channels	
	Formal channels used
	Informal channels used
	Functionality of channels
Information Dissemination	
	Effectivity
	Transparency
	Feedback
Decision-making process	
	Effectivity of decision-making process
	Transparency
	Speed of decision-making
Faculty structure	
	Faculty hierarchy
	Formation of faculty
	Responsibilities
	Clarity of responsibilities
Culture	
	Culture within BMS
	Core values of BMS
Community	
	Sense of community
	Membership
	Internal communication practices
Strategy of faculty	
	Support of faculty strategy
Recommendations	
	Positive
	Negative

*Codebook phase 2:*

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>
Channels	
	Serviceportal
	Website
	Teams
	Mail
	BMS All hands on
	Others
	Organized Informal Communication

	Spontaneous Informal Communication
Information Dissemination	
	Desirability of information
	Effectivity
	Amount of information
	Transparency
	Bottom-up communication
Decision-making process	
	Involvement in decision-making process
	Effectivity of decision-making process
	Transparency
Faculty structure	
	Faculty hierarchy
	Formation of faculty
	Centrality
	Responsibilities & expectations
Culture	
	Culture within BMS
	Core values of BMS
	BMS-wide culture
Community	
	Sense of community
	Desirability of sense of community
	Internal communication practices
Strategy of faculty	
	Awareness of faculty strategy
	Trust in faculty strategy
Recommendations	
	Positive
	Negative