Bridging Gaps in Academic Communication: A Study of Internal Communication Infrastructure at the BMS Faculty

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Abstract

Purpose

The present thesis assesses internal communication practices within the Behavioural, Management & Social Sciences (BMS) faculty at the University of Twente. The following research question will thus be answered: how do the faculty board, middle managers, and employees of the BMS faculty perceive internal communication in relation to communication channels, information dissemination, decision-making, and faculty structure?

Method

A qualitative communication audit was conducted with, in total, 35 semi-structured interviews. 15 members of the managerial staff were interviewed, alongside 20 employees of all sections of the faculty. Participants were selected purposefully to capture diverse perspectives across all layers of the faculty.

Results

Several main findings were identified in the data: (1) the usage of communication channels was perceived to be fragmented, with information being dispersed across multiple channels, leading to difficulties in getting to important information, (2) unclear role responsibilities lead to ambiguity in expectations and accountability, especially in middle management, (3) decision-making processes are perceived to be slow due to the involvement of numerous different parties, and (4) the layered and complex structure of the faculty contributed to communication inefficiencies, with employees feeling more connected to their immediate sections rather than the faculty as a whole, highlighting a lack of centrality.

Conclusion

By focusing on internal communication within a higher education context, this research adds to the growing body of literature on organizational communication in academic settings, particularly in decentralized and layered institutions like universities. Besides, the study provides actionable recommendations for the faculty board, including implementing centralized communication tools, enhancing bottom-up communication opportunities, and addressing structural inefficiencies. The findings aim thus aim to guide future initiatives to optimize communication practices within, and outside of the faculty.

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1. Introduction

Internal communication is crucial for organizational success and has become one of the most rapidly expanding specializations within the field of communication science (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017). Internal communication must be prioritized in any organization, as it facilitates interactions with the environment, ensures the flow of information and understanding, and provides the necessary cohesion for the achievement of organizational goals (Barreto, 2020).

The concept of internal communication is diverse, with different interpretations in the literature. According to Botan and Hazleton (2010), understanding internal communication requires a relational approach, highlighting the importance of trust between management and employees and the sense of identification and connectedness among employees as key factors in building internal relationships. Corporate communication scholars consider employees as crucial stakeholders whose behaviour and communication shape corporate identity and convey it to external stakeholders (Welch & Jackson, 2007). On top of that, internal communication is linked to listening to employees (Zerfass & Sherzada, 2015), strategic concerns, and commitment to mission and vision (Yeomans & Carthew, 2014). Furthermore, internal communication is a tool not only for facilitating smooth operations but also for implementing change effectively (Fic & Malinowski, 2015). Internal communication is thus multifaceted and crucial for organizational success.

Academic settings provide a particularly engaging setting for investigating internal communication practices. Due to their unique structures, characterized by less rigid hierarchies and decentralized processes, academic settings have been described as loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976), and organized anarchies (Cohen et al., 1972). While universities have undergone significant reforms regarding governance, strengthening institutional identities, and formalizing organizational processes (Krücken & Meier, 2006;

Christensen et al., 2019), these organizations still face challenges in internal communication practices.

The present research thus aims to assess internal communication practices and reflects upon its role in an academic setting. More specifically, the Behavioural, Management & Social Sciences (BMS) faculty at the University of Twente was chosen, which was initiated by the faculty board. In this light, the following research question will be answered: how do the faculty board, middle managers, and employees of the BMS faculty perceive internal communication in relation to communication channels, information dissemination, decision-making, and faculty structure?

The BMS faculty, which bridges human behaviour and technology, is a complex organization comprised of four departments, each addressing distinct academic disciplines and research areas in their respective sections. Additionally, the faculty has identified five overarching research themes, to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration. The faculty consists of over 600 members and has many layers in its organizational structure, thus making the BMS faculty a complex and vast organization.

In collaboration with another researcher, this thesis seeks to qualitatively audit the internal communication practices of the BMS faculty through semi-structured interviews with individuals from various hierarchical levels of the faculty. This joint effort enables a comprehensive analysis, with the present thesis focussing on the communication infrastructure of the faculty, while the other focusses on the culture and community within the faculty. Thus, through formulating an answer to the aforementioned research question, the study aims to (1) provide academic contributions to the body of literature on this subject, using the BMS faculty as a case study, and (2) provide practical recommendations to the faculty board.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Internal communication

Definitions of internal communication in the literature often focus on the strategic and/or professional management of interactions between stakeholders within an organization (Scholes, 1997; Welch & Jackson, 2007). These definitions typically adopt a more top-down approach, where higher-ups are described to be *managing* interactions within an organization. Kalla (2005) proposed a more integrated perspective, with the concept encompassing all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of the organization. Through these interactions, employees become aware of organizational opportunities and threats and are able to develop understanding of decision-making processes within the organization (Welch, 2012). This view describes the information flow within an organization from a more inclusive point of view than definitions focused on the strategic management of interactions and is thus more representative of the contemporary organizational landscape.

Due to the collaborative effort of the research project, the concept of internal communication was split into two distinct parts. The choice was made to have the present thesis focus on the more ‘tangible part’ of internal communication – what will be referred to as communication infrastructure – including channels, decision-making, and the organizational structure, while the other focuses on the 'intangibles', such as organizational culture and communities within an organization (Nijkamp, 2024). Internal communication will thus be defined in both research projects as follows:

> Internal communication encompasses interactions and relationships among organizational members at all levels, facilitated through established channels and procedures for information dissemination and decision-making. Internal communication ideally 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.

2.2 Communication infrastructure

Communication infrastructure in literature is typically defined as the channels that facilitate interaction in an organization (Cuel & Ferrario, 2009). Adding to this, through communicating within an organization, structure is created which aids individuals in dealing with others in the larger organizational environment (Jakubiec, 2019). Communication thus constitutes organizational structure and information dissemination through these interactions. As is corroborated by Christensen (2014), an ineffective infrastructure inhibits information dissemination and relationships between managers and employees.

Within the context of communication infrastructure, communication is seen as hinging an organization through individuals who follow and create established practices, while also aiding in decision-making and influencing change opportunities (Verghese, 2017). Within organizations, a functioning communication system is a prerequisite for the proper delegation of responsibilities and effective decision-making. (Ewa et al., 2014). Additionally, for internal communication to be effective, an infrastructure with the appropriate communication tools to achieve its intended goals, must be present (Hume & Leonard, 2014).

Communication infrastructure thus extends beyond merely the channels that enable interaction: it encompasses the organizational structures, information dissemination processes, and practices that shape decision-making and facilitate change. Taking these points of view into account, the following definition of this 'tangible' side of internal communication is formulated: communication infrastructure refers to the information distribution channels in place within an organization, alongside the decision-making processes, organizational structure, and information dissemination processes. The following sections reflect upon the role of the aforementioned elements of communication infrastructure in organizations.

2.2.1 Communication channels

In its simplest form, a channel is defined as a means to transmit a message from sender to receiver (Payne, 2005). The choice of communication channel is strongly linked to internal communication satisfaction. Men (2015) found that top managers most frequently use richer media like face-to-face communication and email, followed by intranet and print media. Although employees prefer being informed through face-to-face communication, as supported by White et al. (2010), Reiman & Rollenhagen (2011) noted that such interactions can also cause stress for employees. Therefore, the choice of communication channel depends on the complexity of the information (Erjavec et al., 2018).

The grapevine can also be seen as an important communication channel, which is referred to as a natural phenomenon within an organization providing organizational members with a great deal of information that does not surface through formal channels and serving as a means of emotional release for staff members (Lunenburg, 2010). This is supported by Iosim et al. (2010), who noted that the informal communication channels that appear and exist uncontrollably outside of the formal channels have the power to supplement the information provision from formal channels.

While able to supplement information provision, the grapevine is also a place where rumors and potential misinformation spreads, which is a concern for management as rumors could be harmful for organizational members (Crampton et al., 1998). Thus, while informal channels such as the grapevine play a vital role in organizational communication, challenges for management lie in balancing the benefits of informal communication with the potential risks of misinformation (Shaharuddin et al., 2022).

2.2.2. Decision-making processes

Decision-making is referred to as the process through which managers identify organizational problems and attempt to solve them (Bartol & Martin, 1994), encompassing various processes that serve as intermediate steps between thought and action (Alhawamdeh & Alsmairat, 2019). It involves making a choice among several alternatives to achieve a desired outcome (Androniceanu & Ristea, 2011) and is one of the most critical functions of managers in any organization (Nooraie, 2012).

As noted by Mintzberg et al. (1976), decision-making processes are often characterized by novelty, open-endedness, and complexity, requiring organizations to navigate dynamic and discontinuous processes. The quality of these processes depends significantly on the information available, the alternatives generated, and the integration of diverse perspectives (Tatum et al., 2003). Moreover, Tatum et al. (2003) proposed that internal communication plays a central role in ensuring the availability and flow of information, supporting collaboration in generating alternatives, and facilitating the synthesis of multiple viewpoints. Additionally, the effectiveness of decision-making is influenced by organizational members' efforts to balance personal and institutional needs, as they are directly affected by the decisions made (Elbanna, 2006).

These relationships between decision-making and internal communication reflect the interaction between an organization and its internal environment (Ginsberg, 1988). To navigate this interaction, managers rely on internal communication channels to ensure that decision-making is well-informed and aligned with the organization's goals. In this way, communication functions as the bridge that links thought to action, facilitating the steps necessary to implement and execute decisions effectively (Mykkänen & Tampere, 2014). Decision-making is thus an essential part of internal communication, and internal communication is an essential part of decision-making (Butler, 2010), and internal communication is not merely a parallel process but is intrinsically tied to decision-making (Mykkänen & Tampere, 2014).

In larger organizations, such as the BMS faculty, where decision-making tends to be decentralized and distributed across teams and departments, the role of internal communication becomes even more critical (Wong et al., 2011). Decisions are no longer merely made by higher management but are made at various levels, with input from multiple teams (Joseph & Gaba, 2019). Furthermore, decision-making within teams is seen as an effective method in comparison with individual decision-making (Schmidt et al., 2001). In this light, effective communication between teams ensures that key information is shared, and potential conflicts or misalignments are resolved before decisions are finalized (Smith et al., 2001). However, while decision-making in teams shows advantages in terms of availability of information and representability of team members, it is also harder to come to a joint decision that suits all team members (Tan et al., 1995). Effective internal communication and trust between team members are thus critical success factors in overcoming these complications (Smith et al., 2002).

Given this relationship between decision-making and communication, decision-making procedures will be understood as procedures that involve identifying and solving organizational problems through a series of steps between thought and action. This process requires choosing among alternatives to achieve desired results and is essential for managers in all types of organizations.

2.2.3. Organizational structure & task division

Organizational structure refers to the way tasks are organized, how decision-making authority is allocated, standard operating procedures are established, conventions are practiced, and priorities are distributed within the organization (Soderstrom & Weber, 2019). Hage (1980) proposed four variables of organizational structure: (1) *centralization*, referring to the extent to which decision-making is concentrated at the top of the organization, (2) *stratification*, referring to the extent to which an organization enforces the hierarchy, (3) *formalization*, referring to the extent to which an organization follows written rules and regulations, and (4) *complexity,* referring to the extent to which an organization has educated, professionalized employees who fill specialist roles. Another structural variable was later added by Grunig (1992), who proposed that participation in decision-making was another relevant element of organizational structure, as participation increases the autonomy of employees and reduces their constraints. Kim (2005) proposed that organizational structures are either mechanical; with these structures being centralized, formalized, stratified, less complex and do not allow employees to participate in decision-making, or organic; with these structures being less centralized, less formalized, less stratified, more complex, and facilitating participation of employees in decision-making. Grunig (1992) proposed that these two types of structures either have symmetrical communication, referring to an organization facilitating dialogue and negotiation, or asymmetrical communication, referring to a more top-down approach to communication.

Furthermore, organizational structure arises from processes in which formal structures, routines, and policies interact with interpersonal sensemaking (Orlikoswki, 2000). From this perspective, it is argued that the interactions of organizational members do not only contribute to the organization but constitute the organization. In this light, employees act as important active communicators, instead of passive receivers of information (Heide et al., 2018). Effective communication is thus an essential ingredient for the functioning of the structure, and structure impacts the communication and performance of an organization (Löfgren & Eklund, 2021).

As organizations become more complex, top-down messaging becomes less effective with more levels of management having to pass on information, which is why organizations have opted for more flat hierarchical structures (Whitworth, 2011). Successful internal communication in larger organizations is thus more so defined by a two-way discussion between employees and executives, and between employees (Yeomans & Fitzpatrick, 2017). An organization's structure serves as its backbone for influencing information dissemination and decision-making but is also intricately linked to internal communication as an effective organizational structure facilitates bottom-up communication, top-down communication and overall organizational outcomes (Holtzhausen, 2002).

The organization's structure also influences the responsibilities and roles people take in their position within the hierarchy. Professional roles can be defined as the actual tasks, activities, or job profiles, and/or by the expectations others have of these positions (Falkheimer et al., 2017). As organizations are designed to achieve goals that surpass the capabilities of individuals (Van Vuuren, 2017), tasks are broken down into specific roles that ensure efficient labour division (Verhoeven & Madsen, 2022).

In increasingly dynamic environments, organizational members are expected to fulfil more different roles, with employees simply performing their jobs no longer being enough to thrive within an organization (Thomson & Hecker, 2001). Employees are now more so expected to be active and strategic communicators, implying the expectation of fulfilling communication roles in addition to doing their job (Verhoeven & Madsen, 2022). Through these communication roles, the organizational structures and accompanying roles do not only provide a division of labour, but also the ways in which information should flow through an organization (Marczak & Damian, 2011). Communicating these expectations is important for managers, as a lack of resources to deal with role requirements can cause role stress (Tarafdar et al., 2007).

The complexity of these dynamic environments is heightened in matrix organizations, where multiple dimensions of authority, such as functional and project-based lines are introduced, with the aim of increasing flexibility and adaptability (Davis & Lawrence, 1977). In these structures, employees report to more than one manager, potentially creating ambiguity in role divisions (Ford & Randolph, 1992). On the other side of the coin, these dual-authority systems foster cross-functional collaboration but do require an effective communication infrastructure around them (Holtzhausen, 2002).

In the present study, organizational structure will be understood as the way tasks are organized, decision-making authority is allocated, and how communication flows within the organization. The key variables considered include centralization, hierarchy, formal rules, complexity, and employee participation in decision-making. Role division involves the assignment of tasks and responsibilities within the organization's hierarchy.

2.2.4. Information dissemination

Information dissemination is seen as an essential part of successful internal communication (Oe et al., 2023), with many definitions of internal communication focussing on the exchange of information in an organization (Araújo & Miranda, 2020). Information dissemination traditionally originates the leader, or leaders of an organization, who set the tone for internal communication and the provision of information in a top-down manner (Tourish & Robson, 2003), but is also formed by employees of the organization, with information spreading laterally through an organization as well (Zack et al., 2006).

As was found by Haas (2006), employees prefer to obtain information from top management, with management's interpersonal communication being linked to employees forming trusting attitudes. Within this context, managers need to find a balance between two extremes. On the one hand, informing too little creates a vacuum in which rumours and misinformation can spread, on the other hand, informing too much can cause information to be ignored (White et al., 2010). This is corroborated by Bartoo and Sias (2004), who note that receiving a large amount of information does not mean employees get the right information. Besides, from a managements' point of view, information and communication are often confused, with information not necessarily always being processed. Contrarily, from the receivers' point of view, complaints about overload could be made, while still perceiving themselves as not receiving the right information (Smith & Mounter, 2008).

Information also travels upwards within organizations. This bottom-up communication is defined as a communication process within an organization where individuals take on a more active role in information dissemination, instead of simply passively receiving information (Wilson & Irvine, 2012). Furthermore, bottom-up communication is characterized by surveys and meetings between colleagues, an open feedback policy and an open-door policy, among others (Fabricius, 2020). As argued by Cheney et al. (2004), internal communication implies an exchange of information, not only in a top-down manner, but also between members of the organization, bottom-up communication practices must also be considered in the context of information dissemination. This encompasses formal communications, such as memos and policies, but also informal interactions in the workplace.

Information dissemination is thus a vital part of organizational functioning and is characterized by both bottom-up and top-down communication, while also including the lateral movement of information through different levels of the organization.

2.3 Internal communication in academic settings

Often alluded to as higher education institutions (HEIs), universities play a dual role in both transferring scientific knowledge and engaging in public science communication, contributing to scientific advancement (Borchelt & Nielsen, 2014). HEIs furthermore differ from commercial companies in mission, contribution to the local and regional community, as well as the national economy (Burukina, 2021).

Internal communication plays a large role in HEIs, with it directly influencing the effectiveness of not only academic, but also administrative strategies (Zorn et al., 2000). HEIs differ in their internal communication in terms of having a less strictly defined hierarchy, and less centralization and formalization, which has coined the terms *loosely coupled systems* (Weick, 1976) and *organized anarchies* (Cohen et al., 1972) to describe HEIs. Organized anarchies are characterized by unclear preferences, ambiguous processes, and fluid participation due to varying social, cultural, and economic roles of universities (Cohen et al., 1972). Weick (1976) responded to this with characterizing loosely coupled systems, where parts of an organization are responsive to each other, but maintain their own identities.

Over the last few decades, universities have undergone reforms in terms of strengthening hierarchical governance, centralising organizational decision-making, and formalizing the organizations a whole (Krücken & Meier, 2006; Christensen et al., 2019). As argued by Maassen and Stensaker (2019), HEIs have aimed at strengthening organizational identity, hierarchy, and rationality. They also note that HEIs have strengthened organizational identity through enhancing autonomy and developing organizational profiles. HEIs furthermore aimed at introducing or improving hierarchy and rationality within their organizations through enforcing organizational policies as an organization as a whole.

These reforms are most often seen through the lens of the work by Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) on complete organizations. Within this context, three variables are defined that constitute a complete organization, which have been reformed in universities: (1) institutional identity was clarified by promoting university autonomy and clear organizational profiles, (2) organizational hierarchy was reinforced by increasing central authority to better coordinate and control staff actions, and (3) organizational rationality was strengthened by setting clear goals and performance targets, emphasizing accountability, and aligning academic activities with broader university policies rather than professional norms.

While HEIs have thus undergone reforms over the last decades, concerns still arise regarding the effectiveness of these changing governances. Shields and Watermeyer (2018) argued that HEIs can suffer from competing logics, referring to the organizing principles, practices, and symbols of an organization, where HEIs not only aim at contributing to research, but also have to concern themselves with commercial ends (Greenwood et al., 2011). So while HEIs have undergone reforms in terms of the aforementioned aspects, Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) argued that hierarchical decision-making processes potentially weaken collegial decision-making processes. Furthermore, high formalization levels can reduce spontaneous employee initiatives, hindering voluntary participation in university transformation (Maassen et al., 2017*).* External factors, such as finances (Burukina, 2021) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Clemmons, 2022) also influence HEIs' internal communication. With students being universities' 'main customers', HEIs are especially vulnerable to external shocks and challenges due to their internal vulnerability.

To conclude the theoretical framework, internal communication plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of decision-making, organizational structure, and overall performance within organizations. More specifically, as universities face growing pressures from both internal dynamics and external factors—such as increasing formalization, centralized governance, and external challenges – the need to reassess internal communication practices becomes even more critical. Effective communication not only ensures that decision-making processes are more inclusive and well-informed but also fosters a sense of community and collaboration among faculty and staff. This is particularly crucial in decentralized academic environments where the fluidity of roles and responsibilities often requires greater alignment and clarity. By building a communication infrastructure that supports both the strategic dissemination of information and the cultivation of open, two-way dialogue, HEIs like the BMS faculty can better navigate the complexities of their organizational landscape.

3. Method

3.1 Research design

A communication audit was conducted at the BMS faculty. A communication audit is referred to as a systematic process of acquiring data for analysis, while also assisting managers in providing insights into communication practices (Quinn & Hargie, 2004). This research project was done in collaboration with one other researcher (Nijkamp, 2024). Both researchers conducted interviews and analyzed data, and each brought their own perspective. The present thesis focussed on the communication infrastructure of the faculty, while the other thesis (Nijkamp, 2024) focusses on the culture and community of BMS. The study was approved by the BMS ethics committee.

To get a complete image of the IC practices at the faculty, semi-structured interviews were employed. Semi-structured interviews allow for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of employees regarding complex and, in this case, potentially sensitive issues, while also enabling probing for more information and clarification of answers. Furthermore, as the BMS faculty has many different layers, employees have varied positions and functions. A standardized interview guide is thus precluded (Barriball & While, 1994).

Due to the sensitive nature of some of the topics that were discussed during the interviews, extra measures had to be taken to ensure full anonymity of the interviewees. Function descriptions were fully redacted and replaced by *function description* in the transcript. Any names that were mentioned got the same treatment, with them being redacted and replaced by *FB-member,* or *department head.* This ensured the data remained meaningful while preventing outside readers from linking quotes to specific people. This was less relevant during the second phase, as there are many more professors or researchers in the faculty than department heads. Additionally, as the researchers' supervisors were also both faculty members, they did not know which faculty members were part of the research. They were also not able to listen to any audio recordings, as they would be likely to know the voices of people and could then connect quotes to specific people.

3.2 Participants

Participants for the interviews in managerial positions were carefully selected via purposeful sampling, based on their position and role in the faculty. The potential candidates had a managerial role within the faculty, thus department heads, theme chairs, and the faculty board were invited, alongside some managers of central services (marketing & communications, finance, and HR). The researchers analyzed the faculty structure and identified individuals responsible for the aforementioned roles. Due to the importance of involving these specific participants in the research, no substantial replacements could be found when the purposefully planned candidates refused to participate. Ultimately, one person from this purposeful sample rejected participation, as this person did not trust that their anonymity could be guaranteed.

Regarding the sampling of employees, they were divided into three categories: *professor*, *researcher*, and *support staff.* The category *professor* included associate professors, assistant professors and full professors; the category *researcher* included PhD candidates, one external researcher, and people fully dedicated to research within the faculty; the category *support staff* included management assistants, secretaries, and HR advisors. Given the large pool of potential interviewees, a list of all employees was compiled, categorized by employees' respective sections and roles. The goal was to get one interviewee from each of the 17 sections where every member of each section got a number assigned to them.

The interviewees were invited according to the following procedure. For interviewees in managerial positions, participants were first notified about the research through an invitation email, in which the researchers introduced themselves and explained the purpose of the study and the data handling process. After sending this invitation email, the researchers would contact the interviewees in person, through telephone calls, or through email. To emphasize the importance of the study and encourage participation, the email was sent via the dean's office email address, as senior management engagement is vital for the success of any communication audit (Hargie & Tourish, 2000). Interviews were ideally conducted in person and would last one hour. However, some participants were only available online or for shorter durations. However, due to the importance of these participants to be involved in the research, the researchers decided to continue these appointments.

For the employees, an online random number generator provided a number in relation to the aforementioned sorting of employees into their functions and sections. This randomly selected employee would then be approached in person by the researchers. Due to the large number of potential alternatives within the sample, if an employee was not in their office on the day of invitation, the process would be repeated to get another potential interviewee. In total, 35 people in the faculty were interviewed, with the sample size of phase one being N = 15, and the sample size of phase two being N = 20. In phase two, 7 professors, 7 researchers, and 6 support staff members were interviewed.

3.3 Procedure & interview guide

During the interviews in both phases, the participant was introduced to the topic and given practical information about the study. Furthermore, the informed consent form was presented and discussed (see Appendix 3), and participants were given the opportunity to express questions before the interview started. Once interviewees agreed to the informed consent form, the researchers began the audio recording and initiated the interview.

The interview guide of the first phase was constructed based on the aspects elaborated upon in the theoretical framework, alongside the aspects elaborated upon in Nijkamp (2024). Firstly, the interviewees were asked about important communication channels, after which information dissemination was discussed. The topics discussed next depended on the answers given by interviewees to facilitate a smooth conversation. But in most cases faculty structure and decision-making processes were discussed next. After this, culture, community, strategic direction of the faculty, and general recommendations were discussed. As the focus was on interviewees' perceptions of internal communication practices, questions were phrased as: W*hat do you think about ..., How do you see..., Do you think that...* etcetera. Questions were thus open-ended to minimize interviewer bias. See Appendix A & B for the full interview guides.

As both researchers are native Dutch speakers, interviews with Dutch interviewees were held in Dutch. Interviews with employees of other nationalities were held in English. The interview guide of the second phase was a slightly adapted version of the first phase, where some topics were adjusted to fit the perspective of employees.

3.4 Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed using Amberscript and then anonymized. Once transcripts were sufficiently anonymized, the interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis, as this provided enough flexibility and theoretical freedom to provide a rich, detailed, and complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data analysis itself consisted of going through the interviews and firstly generating the initial themes that were persistent throughout the data. After identifying these themes, a coding scheme was constructed, in which the main themes, subthemes, descriptions and counts of positive, negative, and neutral mentions were written down. Furthermore, it included space for potentially useful quotes and observations. The themes and their corresponding subthemes/codes for phase 1 and 2 can be found in Appendix D. Answers to the interviewers' questions were coded according to this codebook in both phase 1 and 2, where one mention of the theme would be allocated either a positive, neutral, or negative rating. Both researchers collaboratively did the analysis.

4. Results

To systematically analyse the results, the interviewees were first divided into groups. Due to the heterogeneity in functions and positions of the interviewees in the first phase, three groups were identified: (1) the faculty board, (2) academic middle managers (department chairs, research theme chairs) and supporting staff middle managers (managers of marketing & communication, HR, and finance). The second phase's interviewees consisted of the heterogeneous group of employees. Within the data, four main themes were identified related to communication infrastructure: (1) *channels*, (2) *information dissemination* (3) *decision-making processes,* and (4) *faculty structure*. Subsections provide detailed insights into specific aspects of each theme and are not specifically related to the tables.

4.1. Channels

For the first main theme, See table 9 & 2 for the counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions in this theme. The following subsections will elaborate upon the perspectives of the three aforementioned groups regarding these channels and their functionality within the communication infrastructure of the faculty.

Table 1: Counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding channels in phase 1 (middle management and faculty board)

Subtheme	**Positive**	**Neutral**	**Negative**
Formal channels	6	9	10
Informal channels	14	6	16
Functionality of channels	10	8	17

Note: Each number within the tables represents a mention of a certain subtheme within the interviews. This is the case for every table in the chapter 4.

Table 2: Counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding channels in phase 2 (employees)

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Service Portal	2	5	1
Website		4	4
Teams	6	2	1
Mail	7	11	2
BMS All Hands On	5	8	2
Events organized by BMS	6	5	1
Spontaneous Informal Communication	15	4	0

4.1.1. Formal channels

Formal channels that were mentioned by the interviewees were the Service Portal (intranet), newsletters, email, the UT website, meetings, WhatsApp groups, LinkedIn, the Chamber of Professors, and Microsoft Teams. Furthermore, All Hands On BMS was also mentioned, which is an online meeting where every member of the faculty is invited to ask questions and think along with the faculty board about matters relevant to the faculty at that time. While this session is led by the faculty board, it is also dependent on input from faculty members. Of all these channels, the UT website and BMS All Hands On are seen as the most important channels for both external and internal communication. LinkedIn and the Chamber of Professors were both mentioned once and are thus not as relevant. Email was most frequently mentioned, with every interviewee identifying it as important. As can be seen in the previous tables, perceptions of formal channels are quite mixed in all three groups.

The faculty board views the current (formal) communication channels as essential tools for setting strategy and communicating important decisions to the faculty. However, the board acknowledges that these channels do not always effectively fulfil this role. Information often gets spread across various means of communication within faculty, such as email inboxes, newsletters and the BMS pages on the UT website, meaning information provision is fragmented across the faculty. This can lead to key messages being diluted or overlooked. This makes it more difficult for management to effectively convey strategic messages to faculty members. One member of the faculty board suspected that intranets and email had more reach in other organizations, recognizing room for improvement in the way the formal channels are currently used. The FB's strategy to counteract this fragmentation of messaging, is an expectation of a more proactive approach in gathering information from other faculty members, with the faculty board making information available to the faculty for when said information is necessary, this way, faculty members are able to find information themselves across the communication infrastructure of the faculty:

> "And (…) we would then also say that we won't email anymore, because starting from 2023, 2024, we will no longer push information, but you will have to retrieve it yourself, just like you do at home on your smartphone or tablet." – FB member

However, when taking the perspective of the other groups, especially middle management, interviewees expressed that this expectation from the board is not communicated well. In other words, middle management and employees are not so much aware of this proactive approach that is expected from them. Furthermore, members from middle management indicated that each faculty member has their own interpretation of this proactive approach, which causes some to stay behind in terms of information. Thus, while according to the faculty board, information is widely available to the faculty through the various formal channels, a misalignment in expectations occurs as to how this information is to be retrieved.

Questions can be raised as to the extent to which the current communication infrastructure supports the expected proactive approach. Information is made available through the various channels in use at the faculty, but users indicate not being able to find relevant information through these means. The faculty's reliance on multiple, fragmented formal channels contributes to this misalignment, ultimately undermining the goal of accessible communication across all levels of the organization.

Department chairs, research theme chairs, and managers of supporting services indicate that they use channels for disseminating information to their respective teams, while also receiving information from higher up. This is in combination with the informal information network within the faculty, which will be further explained in the following section. This usage of channels is hindered by middle managers indicating that they find it difficult to filter relevant information for their respective teams in the abundance of messages they receive through the different formal channels. This notion is further strengthened by the fragmentation of messaging that was perceived by the faculty board, with information being both abundant and spread across different channels, a problem especially felt at the middle management level:

> "There is an awful lot of emailing... that's a bit of an issue, I think, because then I feel like I've already reported [on] this (…) but there's an overload of emails, so that's quite difficult, in my opinion." – Middle manager

Additionally, middle management seem to be more critical of the channels in general, most likely because they have more communication responsibilities, in terms of both sending and receiving information. This is especially relevant for department chairs, and less so for theme chairs.

In the employees group however, two subgroups were found in the context of this theme. One subgroup, containing about two-thirds of employees, was mostly satisfied with the way things are, as they were able to "just do their job", where the other subgroup was more critical. See further sections for elaboration upon this phenomenon. Employees that were more critical corroborated the assessments of the formal channels made by the faculty board and middle management, but what was noted by them was that due to the growth of the faculty, communication channels feel more impersonal, as information gets sent through many layers and channels. This is in line with the perceived distance between the faculty board and employees being quite large. They also perceive channels to be mostly top-down, with fewer opportunities for bottom-up communication.

Moreover, a difference in the usage of formal channels is observed by employees across different parts of the faculty. The lack of a standardized or uniform approach to how these channels are used further highlights a fragmentation in the information provision through formal channels.

All Hands On BMS was mentioned by nearly every interviewee as an important formal channel within the faculty. All groups view this channel as a valuable opportunity for bottom-up communication. The faculty board sees that many people join these (online) meetings, and they are able to convey their own messages very well. Some employees did highlight the online format as being less than ideal, noting limited interactivity and a lack of focus as areas for improvement:

> "Those All Hands On meetings, I've mentioned it a few times before, I find them lacking in focus. They are very much aimed at involving everyone, which is good, but as a result, nothing really gets done." – Associate Professor

Another formal channels often mentioned as potentially useful was the UT website, and specifically the BMS pages. However, in its current state it is widely seen as an ineffective communication channel for both internal and external purposes. Faculty members note that the information on the website is outdated, scattered, and not presented in a coherent or uniform manner. This lack of organization makes it difficult for faculty members and other stakeholders to find relevant and up-to-date information. One employee described the website as:

> "A strange collection of miscellaneous things, without a clear structure or clear choices. The same applies to the faculty website; outdated information is often placed in illogical locations, and it frequently links to other places unnecessarily. For instance, if you want a summary of the faculty's financial management over the years, such as how funds are distributed across programs, you won't find that information in one place—it's just not possible." – Associate Professor

Aside from the faculty board, who only mentioned the BMS-related pages of the UT website once as a tool that could be used, members of other groups emphasized the need for a more structured and standardized website. They expressed a desire for information to be more easily accessible and clearly organized, which would also align with the faculty board's goal of encouraging proactive information gathering.

Overall, a juxtaposition arises in the usage of formal channels, as middle management and employees perceive an overload of messaging, but also indicate a lack of information at times. This notion is strengthened by the mentions of informal channels being used to supplement information received.

4.1.2. Informal channels

When interviewees were talking about the informal channels, they mentioned the "grapevine", the coffee machine, lunch, and general informal contacts (outside of meetings etcetera) they had with their colleagues. Informal communication mostly happens within interviewees' own sections, sometimes within interviewees' own departments, but hardly across different parts of the faculty.

The faculty consists of many different "research islands", according to the faculty board, which means they see that informal communication is also fragmented. However, the faculty board indicates having little to no sight on the informal communication that happens within the sections, and while they do not desire to always know what happens on an informal level in the faculty, they do indicate the importance of informal channels in information provision:

> "If all goes well, [information] will be properly fed from (…) management (…) So if we deliver the right message to the department heads and section heads, then I hope that this message will also make its way into the organization and back again, so to speak. Everything they hear in the teams should also go back in that direction." – FB member

This approach does speak to the layered nature of the way information is spread throughout the faculty, which will be elaborated upon further in 4.4. Middle management and employees share the perception of informal channels being essential in information dissemination. They further add that informal channels are quicker in providing relevant information, due to the layered structure of the faculty (see 4.3). These groups do indicate a downside of informal channels, such as limited opportunities to fact-check information and often a lack of context. Furthermore, informal channels tend to dilute and morph information as it passes through different individuals/ sections.

Informal communication channels are also used for supplementing the information people get from top-down, as some doubt exists about the completeness of this information, see 4.4 for more elaboration on information dissemination in the faculty:

> "What I noticed in practice (…) is that things often stalled between the departments and the section chairs, and that the communication from the faculty board to the department chairs was often incomplete." – Department chair

Informal communication was furthermore split up into spontaneous informal communication, such as through lunch, coffee breaks, or walks with colleagues, but also in an organized manner, such as through events organized by BMS. These events are perceived to be good opportunities for initiating conversations with people from other parts of the faculty, while also being relevant for collaboration and information exchange.

Overall, the informal communication channels within the BMS faculty can be characterized by two main observations: they are used to supplement information received through formal channels, and informal communication mostly occurs within employees' own sections/ groups.

4.2. Decision-making process

Overall, the decision-making process within the BMS faculty is determined by three important variables: effectiveness, transparency, and involvement. These variables all have different interpretations within the three groups. Furthermore, expectations about how other groups fill these variables in for themselves are mixed, causing challenges in decision-making. See table 3 & 4 for the amount of positive, neutral, and negative mentions per subtheme. Neutral mentions of *involvement in decision-making* indicate that people are not interested in being involved in the first place. This was only relevant for the employees group, as middle management and the faculty board are involved to some extent with decision-making by definition, the extent to which will be discussed later. The fewer amount of mentions from the employee group indicate their generally lower level of involvement. Furthermore, a general negative sentiment can be found in table 3, with many negative mentions regarding the effectiveness and transparency of decision-making. The following sections will elaborate further upon the perspectives of all groups.

Table 3 counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding decision-making processes in phase 1

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Effectiveness	7	15	24
Speed	1	3	19
Transparency	15	8	22

Table 4 counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding decision-making processes in phase 2

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Involvement in decision-making	2	10	1
Effectiveness	2	4	5
Transparency	4	6	5

4.2.1. Effectiveness of decision-making process

Overall, interviewees indicate that decisions are made slowly due to the involvement of many different parties and organizational levels within the decision-making process. This is corroborated by the faculty board who try to strike a balance between involving as many people as possible in their decision-making, which is appreciated by the rest of the faculty, but also causes the process to be slower. This is supported by one of the FB members, who noted that the board is constantly trying to strike a balance between involvement and acting on certain matters:

> "What often happens is that you have a lot of different ideas, and then you hope to involve as many people as possible, so at least there is sufficient support. [Because of that] you do need a lot of time. Because it involves many layers, and that brings a certain sluggishness with it." – FB member

Furthermore, the faculty board indicate to be middle management in a way as well, as they also have organizational bodies above them who make decisions. This also influences the decision-making process within the faculty, as the faculty board does not always have full say over the decisions they have to implement. With this in mind, a difference in expectations also occurs between the faculty board and the rest of the faculty when it comes to decision-making, as it is not always clear who needs to take a decision on what.

Middle management feels there is room for improvement in how the board communicates important decisions, particularly because they are responsible for explaining these decisions to their own departments and/ or teams. Specifically, they find that the board sometimes provides insufficient detail or unclear rationale behind decisions, making it difficult for middle managers to effectively relay the information to their teams. This lack of clarity potentially leads to confusion, misinterpretation, or resistance, as middle managers are tasked to fill in gaps or justify decisions they may not fully understand themselves. This is supported by a concrete example of middle managers being able to supply input on what needs to be on the agenda for meetings with the faculty board. However, a feeling of uncertainty exists as to whether this input is used by the faculty board or not:

> “The question is asked, are there any points for the faculty board? You can submit points, but to what extent they get space on the agenda is unclear, and sometimes important, major points... are sidelined and don't even get discussed in the meeting.” – Middle Manager

They further believe that the distance between a decision made by the faculty board and the sections and individual researchers is large due to the layered process of communicating and executing a decision. This distance is perceived to be enlarged by the lack of a uniform process within all levels of the faculty. While not necessarily undesirable, this means that certain parts of decisions get lost in translation through the different layers of the faculty. In terms of strategy and other decisions, departments play an advisory role, while the implementation of strategy is fully in their hands. Contradicting this decentral approach, central processes exist for decision-making are identified by faculty members, though these are rarely used:

> “And we do have the processes for decision-making, but we use them too infrequently, so to speak, which makes it unclear for everyone what's actually happening in terms of decision-making. Who is being consulted where?” – Middle manager

Most employees, by choice, were less involved in the decision-making process, but those who wished to be involved agreed with management that the process is very layered. They further perceive the board to be in too much of a “wait-and-see” position, instead of taking the initiative on certain matters. The COVID-19 pandemic and the financial situation had been brought up as examples. Furthermore, while the “we-want-to-do-it-together attitude” is appreciated, the board should at times not wait for all employees to be involved but act.

4.2.2. Involvement in decision-making

Regarding involvement in decision-making, many employees indicated that they are not interested in being involved in the decision-making process in the first place, and that they simply hear about decisions after they have been made, which is satisfactory for them. The most important channel for this information is said to be newsletter updates. The employees who are actually interested in being involved in the process mostly do so through their own sections/ departments, not so much with the faculty board directly. In this case, employees are provided with specific points on which they can give feedback:

> “It's also a matter of my tendency to focus on the primary process. A lot of these things are overhead, and in my opinion, there should be as little of that as possible. So I don't seek it out. Ultimately, it's certain people in a limited number of positions who decide what does

and doesn't happen. And, well, that's how organizations are structured, so that's fine." – Assistant professor

This contradicts the board's efforts to involve as many people as possible in decision-making. It is questionable though whether including those uninterested in participation would be valuable. This group within the faculty is content when they get informed about decisions. However, it is the board's task to inform people correctly and on time. This has gone wrong in the past though, where the mere mention of a certain situation arising did raise questions with many people, after which the rumour mill started, meaning that informal communication channels were filling with potential misinformation causing unclarity.

4.2.3. Transparency of decision-making

Regarding the transparency of decision-making, the faculty board at times chooses to not provide the rationale behind decisions. This lack of rationale causes doubts among the other groups about the decision-making processes within the faculty. Also related to the agenda points in faculty board meetings mentioned previously, it is not always clear to department, and research theme chairs if a decision is open for deliberation or if a meeting about said decision is merely a formality and the decision is already made.

When it comes to the transparency of decision-making, central services (HR, marketing & communications, and finance) generally express satisfaction. This differs from the department and research theme chairs, who have a more critical stance. They posited that decision-making is definitely not always transparent, and the people in managerial positions under the faculty board miss the rationale behind decisions from time to time. One person even described the faculty board as putting up a smoke screen from time to time, with the faculty board being deliberately vague about certain matters, such as the financial situation:

> "So when it comes to difficult, important issues, I think that [lack of] transparency, or at least an explanation, leaves something to be desired." – Department chair

Regarding perceptions of transparency among employees, they generally report being unaware of how decisions are made but also expressed contentment with this. This sentiment is shared among the entire group and does not depend on whether employees feel like they are involved or whether they *want* to be involved. However, when it comes to their own jobs, they would like to be more informed. Moreover, in some situations, a lack of details caused more unrest than if a situation would not have been brought up at all. For example, in the case of uncertainty surrounding temporary contracts, people got a heads up that this was happening, but no further details. This caused rumours to circulate in the faculty. Thus, employees find it desirable to be informed on decisions when there is adequate information or rationale to support these decisions. The lack of rationale behind decisions was also mentioned a few times as a hampering factor in understanding and standing behind decisions:

> "I mean, it's always nice to know the reasons behind certain decisions [that are made] (…) to be aware of them. I think that can be helpful" – Associate professor

4.3. Faculty structure

The main theme *faculty structure* consisted of three major talking points during the interviews: *faculty arrangement*, referring to the way the faculty is structured in terms of departments, sections, research lines etcetera, *faculty hierarchy,* referring to interviewees' perceptions of hierarchy within the faculty, and *responsibilities and expectations*. See table 5 & 6 for the counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding this theme. The tables indicate that especially the faculty arrangement was perceived negatively among faculty members, alongside the clarity of responsibilities. The neutral mentions of *responsibilities* in table 5 refer to simply stating one's own responsibilities without any sentiment attached to it.

The following sections elaborate further upon the perspectives of the three groups on the three aforementioned subthemes.

Table 5 counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding faculty structure in phase 1

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Faculty hierarchy	10	5	8
Faculty arrangement	6	8	15
Responsibilities	6	13	6
Clarity of responsibilities	7	5	18

Table 6 counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding faculty structure in phase 2

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Faculty hierarchy	2		2
Formation of faculty	4	3	14
centrality	1		7
Responsibilities & expectations	7	4	7

4.3.1. Faculty arrangement

As for the formation of the faculty, some criticism exists on the overall structure of the faculty, especially in the way sections are distributed among the departments, as the differences between sections and departments are very large:

> "(…) you see that this [structure] works better in some departments than in others, and as a result, within BMS, we have four very different departments in terms of how they function. We have departments with four separate sections that are so different that you wonder why they were put together." – FB member

The research themes are seen as overarching interest areas in which collaboration is fostered. These themes also complicate the structure quite a bit, with people being part of their own department, section, and then also research line. However, the formation of the faculty is clear to the people in middle management, and also to the faculty board.

The arrangement of the faculty in terms of the different organizational layers was also a big topic of conversation for employees and was perceived negatively. Interviewees in this group mentioned the layers of the organization causing a – as coined by one of the interviewees - “campfire effect”, as information travels through the layers of the faculty, it gets reframed or filtered according to each person’s perspective, biases, or communication style. The faculty structure thus facilitates indirect communication, with information – ideally – cascading down the layers of the faculty, eventually reaching its intended recipient

The structure seems to be clear on the level of sections for employees. However, above that (departments and research themes) it becomes cloudy. Especially the research themes cause confusion. The concept of them is clear, but they do not work well in practice according to employees. It is not clear to people who has responsibility over what and who is interested in what:

> “So these research lines have a somewhat unclear position. I understand why they exist and believe they should be there, but their position is a bit ambiguous, which makes communication from these groups not always very useful. Meanwhile, the things they actually do—such as stimulating research—get somewhat overshadowed by messages about: we’ve scheduled another nice meeting.” – Associate professor

However, as is the case more often in the employees group, some people are simply satisfied with the structure because they are still able to do their research and give their education. Still, even those who are satisfied with the structure, find it complicated and state it takes a long time to get used to it. The interdisciplinary and multifaceted nature of BMS, encompassing many different research areas, further complicates matters. This interdisciplinary nature is a double-edged sword, as research and education are rooted in many different areas, but it also causes many different research islands to pop up because of these large differences. This also causes a certain lack of centrality, with many sections having different types of leadership structures and cultures. Thus, a large majority of interviewees indicated not to feel part of the central BMS system, but more so their own sections:

> "Yes, I feel connected to my own section and perhaps to some people around me whom I work with directly. But beyond that, it doesn't feel like a cohesive whole. I don't really feel like I'm part of a cluster and then BMS; it's so large and overarching" – Researcher

Overall, many people find it difficult to fathom the entire structure and opt to focus on their section. This causes a lack in centrality within the organization. Central policies on communication, collaboration, and decision-making processes could aid in streamlining these processes. The current lack of uniformity forces sections and departments to interpret decisions in their own manner, which will be elaborated upon further in the discussion.

4.3.2. Hierarchy of the faculty

Regarding the faculty hierarchy, from the board's point of view and from middle managers' points of view, there is some distance between layers, while both groups see this as desirable, middle managers have a more nuanced perspective, due to their status of middle persons in decision-making and information dissemination. They are also part of sections themselves, which further complicates their perceptions of hierarchy. The faculty is described as a flat organization, with board members also being colleagues in their respective sections and/or departments:

> "[I can imagine] it is just annoying when you have to accept that someone who is actually your equal – because we are a very flat organization, luckily – decides for you how things should be done." – FB member

While not discussed as much as in the employees group, the faculty hierarchy is still felt by employees, with the perceived distance to the faculty board being large. However, people do see the faculty board as accessible, especially those who are involved in decision-making processes. Other employees do not have as much interaction with the faculty board, more often with their direct supervisors and/or department chairs. The overall perception within this group seems to be that the hierarchy is not explicitly enforced, and an overall feeling of a flat organization permeates throughout the faculty:

> "You don't get the feeling that the hierarchy here is terrible or anything. I've never felt that way. It's more like, even though I might just have this position, I don't feel [I am] less than someone else." – Management assistant

4.3.3. Responsibilities and expectations

The responsibilities of faculty members seem to be quite clear when it comes to people's own functions. The faculty board mostly sees sharing information and determining the overall course of the faculty as their responsibilities. The faculty board is caught in a balancing act between providing too little and too much information, with both extremes causing tension. Managing this balance—being informative without overshadowing others—is an ongoing challenge:

> "That applies to the faculty board, we need to outline the main actions and decisions that are made, which are impactful for everyone, and we need to keep up with this continuously." – FB member

When it comes to the department heads, they have the responsibility of translating the information towards their respective sections. A problem that arises for department heads is that they have responsibilities for matters like finances and incentive grants but lack the mandate to act on them. They are thus being held accountable regarding these matters by their respective sections, but do not have much to say about it. Furthermore, the role of the departments is unclear to some, with people indicating that the departments make matters unnecessarily more complex. The research lines further complicate matters, particularly in terms of responsibilities, whose chairs see themselves as facilitators in interdisciplinary research, but also acknowledge it may be unclear to outsiders what they actually do:

> "So you have a middle layer of program directors, research theme coordinators, and department heads whose responsibilities are not clearly defined." – Research theme chair

Regarding responsibilities of employees, it is mostly clear for people what their own responsibilities are. Where it becomes vaguer is when it comes to the responsibilities of others. Some lack an overview of interests and/or responsibilities of other people, especially in pursuing research projects:

> "The thing is, I walk down the hallway and see posters on the wall saying, 'Oh, this person is also working on sustainability,' even though I sometimes don't know about it and don't know who these people are... there's very little overview. It's like living in a small village where you only know a few people" – Professor

Most employees do not see themselves as having specific communication responsibilities though, and those who do, see these within their own sections. One communication responsibility that did get mentioned was to give feedback about challenges their respective sections might face. Related to this, people feel more responsibility towards their direct supervisors than towards the faculty board.

Expectations from the faculty board are also important to consider in the case of employees' and middle management's responsibilities. One problem that arises there is that, according to some, the board does not explicitly state that departments and sections also have their own responsibilities, meaning that departments and sections expect the board to act on matters, while the board expects them to do this themselves. Furthermore, expectations are often implicit, with vague terms being used to make sure people do not "game" the system:

> "It might be helpful to be explicitly implicit. You know, to clearly state that we don't want to tie measurable outcomes to this, because that could lead to consequences we don't want." – Professor

In the same vein, the faculty board expects an active attitude towards information sharing and gathering, with a focus on bottom-up communication, which clashes with the perception of a lack of transparency in decision-making experienced by some. Thus, responsible ownership is expected of people by the board, but the perception of the layers underneath the board is that this does not get explicitly stated, and is more so dependent on the personal interest, or intrinsic motivation of an employee.

4.4. Information dissemination

The main theme *Information Dissemination* touched upon the effectiveness of the way information spreads throughout the faculty and bottom-up communication. See table 7 & 8 for the amount of positive, neutral, and neutral mentions within this main theme. The tables show that middle management and the faculty board tend to be more critical of the effectiveness of information dissemination within the faculty, whereas the negative mentions of *transparency* originate from middle management. Employees indicated to be less involved with information dissemination, as once again, many find they get enough information to "do their job". The following sections further elaborate upon these perspectives.

Table 7 counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding information dissemination in phase 1

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Effectiveness	8	16	22
Transparency	12	7	19
Feedback	8	7	11

Table 8 counts of positive, neutral, and negative mentions regarding information dissemination in phase 2

Subtheme	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Desirability of information	2	11	1
Effectiveness	3	9	5
Amount of information	1	5	7
Transparency		2	3
Bottom-up communication	8	12	1

4.4.1. Effectiveness of information dissemination

When talking about the effectiveness of information dissemination within the faculty, interviewees in all three groups noted that the layered structure of the faculty hinders information flow from the higher levels to the lower levels in the hierarchy. Furthermore, due to this layered structure, information sometimes changes due to different interpretations over the different layers:

> "I think we still need to figure out how we can better bridge the gap with our colleagues on the work floor. I just don't quite know how, because we see that from the management level, it just doesn't trickle down, and the message that is conveyed is not always our message." – FB member.

Another general observation that was made throughout all interviews was the perception of an information overload. Many faculty members, particularly middle managers, report receiving too much information, which makes it difficult to filter out what is essential from what is less important. This abundance of information forces individuals to sift through a large volume of messages to find what is relevant to them both in terms of functioning in their work and being engaged with faculty matters. This is further strengthened by the notion of interviewees noting that while they are flooded with information, not all of it is relevant. For example, information about promotions or interesting research projects, while important in maintaining engagement, often overshadow critical updates or job-related information.

When looking at the perspectives of the three groups separately, the faculty board sees that the way in which information is spread throughout the faculty depends on the loyalty department and research theme chairs have towards the collective (BMS) and their own team/section. This is relevant because department and theme chairs are also part of a section themselves, meaning they are not only loyal to BMS as a whole, but also their own sections or teams. The board also finds it difficult to reach people in the faculty through formal means of communication with the information relevant to them. This means that even when the board has decided on what information to send, it is still difficult to reach the right people with said information.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of information dissemination differ greatly throughout the interviewees. The middle managers of the faculty were the most critical, as they are standing in the middle of information dissemination, with them needing to pass on information from higher up and sending it to their respective sections, while also being involved in bottom-up communication. Department and research theme chairs, alongside managers of supporting services noted that even though they are partly in charge of information dissemination themselves, they feel like they are also being left in the dark on certain matters:

> "So we often see that the faculty board has already come up with ideas, but then it is sometimes forgotten to communicate them properly." – Department chair

Once again, the juxtaposition of on the on the one hand information overload and on the other hand being "left in the dark" can be observed, where especially middle managers feel like they are not getting the *correct* information. A complete provision of information is especially relevant for them, but this has not always been the case. For example, important pieces of information for a meeting were sent the night before said meeting, or the moving of one study to another city, within the context of which information provision was far from satisfactory. Middle managers and employees indicate that it is not possible to have everything communicated directly to them, due to the aforementioned overload of information. However, especially employees indicate that matters which are directly related to job safety could be communicated more effectively, which is relevant in the light of financial troubles in the wider UT. In aforementioned cases, "being left in the dark" meant middle managers were unable to anticipate and manage the impact on their work or teams effectively. These issues highlight an inefficiency in the communication infrastructure.

The same two subgroups of employees were identified. Exceptions to this rule are related to crisis situations that have happened in the past and present, where employees indicate that when their jobs are at stake, information provision should be done more directly. For example, in the light of the financial situation the UT is in currently, information provision was lacklustre according to some, which caused uncertainty and speculation among faculty members:

> "Yes, (…) the rumour mill (…) goes into overdrive when things don't run as they should." – Associate Professor

Overall, while not all information is relevant for everyone, due to an information overload, interviewees find it difficult to filter out the essential information from the not-so important matters. This also ties into the active attitude that is expected from people when looking for information, where the information is apparently available for people, but this availability is often not explicitly communicated to faculty members. While some individuals in middle management and the employees group have doubts regarding the completeness of information, the general consensus within these groups seems to be that information is made available in a satisfactory manner.

4.4.2. Bottom-up communication

The room for giving and receiving feedback within the faculty was also discussed. In this context, many faculty members are more inclined to communicate indirectly about certain matters. The faculty board indicated that they aim to involve as many people as possible within their decision-making and information provision. They furthermore aim at giving faculty members enough opportunity to provide feedback to them. Once again, they expect a proactive approach in the context of bottom-up communication. However, a misalignment in expectations from the different layers of the hierarchy can also be observed here, with this proactive expectation not being communicated adequately according to other faculty members.

Middle managers also feel there is space for bottom-up communication but do sometimes miss confirmation that their ideas are actually taken into consideration. While the faculty board stated not being able to take every single opinion and idea within the faculty into account, this lack of confirmation or consideration does lead to some frustration with middle managers. However, giving feedback does not get penalized or is not seen as an act of offense:

> "I have never felt that it created an unsafe situation for myself, or that I wasn't listened to, or that there was a strange reaction to it." – Middle manager

Related to this, employees identify enough opportunities for bottom-up communication, with some exceptions indicating that the faculty board and department heads are not accessible to them. An important part of this bottom-up communication is BMS All Hands On, alongside communication with direct supervisors, which is the most used way of communicating towards the management levels of the organization. Still, bottom-up communication requires a proactive approach, as the opportunities are there, but these are not to be taken for granted. The extent to which employees desire to make use of these opportunities is an important factor here, as most do not see it as desirable to have more bottom-up communication opportunities:

> "If I have something to address, I know who to contact and how to communicate it, sometimes informally, and sometimes formally, like sending an email. I rarely communicate with the faculty board because there usually isn't a reason to, as other people in committees handle those matters" – Assistant Professor

Overall, feedback and bottom-up communication are both accepted as common practice, but they do require a proactive approach, which suggests an open communication channel towards the faculty board, even though it might not be used by all faculty members.

5. Discussion

The present research aimed at auditing internal communication practices at the BMS faculty of the University of Twente. Through conducting semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to investigate the following research question: how do the faculty board, middle managers, and employees of the BMS faculty perceive internal communication in relation to communication channels, information dissemination, decision-making, and faculty structure? Several main findings emerged from the interview data.

5.1. Main findings & implications

Fragmentation of Messaging

Messaging in the faculty is often diluted or lost due to multiple layers and/or channels of communication, and there is no clear, streamlined way of ensuring important information reaches all relevant parties, information dissemination within the faculty can thus be characterized as fragmented. Furthermore, despite a perceived overload of information, critical messages often do not reach the right people. From the faculty board's perspective, information is readily available, but employees and middle managers do not support this statement. The faculty board furthermore expects a proactive approach towards information gathering, but the communication infrastructure is not perceived to be sufficient in completing these goals. As Verčič and Špoljarić (2020) noted, an effective – electronic – communication infrastructure could aid in informing organizational members, with the richness of communication channels needing to be matched to the equivocality of its intended use. Within the BMS faculty, this leaves something to be desired, as the existing channels are not always successful in reaching these goals.

Haas (2006) posited that members of an organization not only want to want the information they need to know, but they also want to be *in the know*, meaning organizational members need to believe they have all information they deem relevant. To achieve this goal, faculty members turn to informal communication networks to stay in the know and gain additional insights that are not provided through official means. This reflects a need for transparency and a desire to be fully informed, even beyond formal communication procedures. This informal network is thus used to supplement information provision from the formal channels.

HEI's in general have undergone a process of – as coined by Maassen et al. (2017) – formalization, referring to the extent to which communication procedures are written and filed. Through this formalization, in an ideal world, communication would flow in a bidirectional manner, with both top-down and bottom-up messaging flowing through the organization. The formalization of communication practices within the BMS faculty leaves something to be desired due to information getting stuck in the layers of the organization and people interpreting communication practices in their own manner. While the reforms undergone by HEI's aimed to streamline decision-making (see *decision-making*) and information dissemination processes, the findings tell communication practitioners that there is a subtle balance to strike in this context.

Organizational Structure

The structure of the faculty, with its many layers (departments, sections, research themes), creates confusion about responsibilities and weakens coordination across the faculty. This leads to a lack of cohesion and a sense of disconnection between different parts of the organization. The structure is furthermore fragile in terms of information provision, due to its layered nature. HEIs in general are undergoing a process of strengthening organizational governance, the transformation of which is often associated with increased professionalization and specialization in terms of managerial and administrative tasks and responsibilities (Christensen et al., 2019; Krücken & Meier, 2006). While more managerial responsibilities have been introduced with the introduction of the department layer in the BMS faculty, the responsibilities associated with these positions are not clear to everyone (see *responsibilities and expectations*). Strengthening this point, Maassen & Stensaker (2019) found that there is also a trade-off between the standardization and specialization of management functions on the one hand, and the flexibility and adaptability needed to improve organizational productivity on the other, a balance the BMS faculty is also struggling to strike.

The centrality of the faculty structure can also be seen as fractured, with many members feeling more connected to their immediate sections than to the broader faculty identity. Furthermore, a lack of central policy on usage of channels, information provision and decision-making can be observed. This lack of central policy is more contradictory to the formalization processes of HEIs outlined by Maassen et al. (2017). However, this finding is in line with the trend of HEIs introducing more complex organizational structures, resulting in what Christensen et al. (2019) call dysfunctionalities, or difficulties in handling expanded authority and administrative responsibilities.

Especially in the case of middle managers, these dysfunctionalities arise. Middle managers often find themselves bearing the burden of interpreting and implementing policies passed down from senior leadership and are critical for translating strategies into concrete actions (Whitchurch, 2013). However, these tasks are often hindered by unclear responsibilities and/or lack of support (Floyd & Dimmock, 2011).

This can be seen in the BMS faculty as well, with middle managers finding themselves as middle persons in terms of information provision and decision-making. For middle managers to successfully fill their managerial responsibilities, the communication infrastructure needs to be adequate in meeting these needs. BMS introduced an extra layer of hierarchy by forming the departments, which would be in line with Maassen & Stensaker (2017), who saw that HEIs have been bolstering their governance by introducing more hierarchical layers in their structures. However, as they also pointed out, the effectiveness of this can be disputed. This furthermore highlights a need for more research into structures that balance hierarchical decision-making with the informal, collaborative culture characteristic for HEIs.

Responsibility and Accountability

A lack of clarity occurs about who is responsible for what, especially at the middle management level, where department heads often feel accountable for decisions they have little control over. This perception is reflected in Whitchurch (2008), who discusses how middle managers in universities often operate in an ambiguous space, responsible for enacting policies from above but not always empowered to make decisions. This can create confusion over who holds responsibility for specific outcomes. Furthermore, the board expects a proactive approach to information gathering and problem-solving from lower levels, but this expectation is not clearly communicated, leading to a disconnect between responsibility and action.

Decision-making

As for decision-making, it is perceived as slow due to the involvement of many layers of the organization, and employees and middle managers feel that they are often left in the dark regarding why certain decisions are made. As was explained by Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992), decision-making in organizations is influenced by various factors such as politics, rationality, and bounded rationality, where the executive board might have limited visibility into everything that happens in an organization. The same can be seen in the BMS faculty, with many different parties and/or organizational organs being involved in the decision-making process. This is further complicated by the faculty board indicating they see themselves as middle management as well, with other parties above the faculty making decisions that are relevant to BMS as well. Issues with decision-making also tie into the organizational structure, through the flow of information being distorted or delayed. This is exemplified by middle management and employees reporting that decisions are not always communicated with sufficient clarity, which causes confusion and speculation, especially on important issues like financial concerns. Based on the limitations of the decision-making process within BMS, one could say that communication is not an integral part of the process.

As was noted by Van Knippenberg et al. (2015), decision-makers have more access to information within an organization than ever through digital platforms, but it is up to them to effectively navigate this abundance of information and effectively communicate this to their organizations. Given the tendency of HEIs to operate with both centralized and decentralized decision-making processes (Joseph & Gaba, 2019), future studies into internal communication practices in academic settings could examine how different governance structures impact communication effectiveness in different layers of organizations. This could further explore the balance between top-down decision-making and bottom-up involvement of employees in decision-making processes, a balance BMS is currently struggling to effectively strike.

Employee Involvement

Regarding employee involvement, two subgroups can be identified among the BMS employees, with one group not desiring to be involved at all, and the other – smaller – group, being involved through their own sections. Most employees are thus content to focus on their primary tasks and engage at the department or section level rather than with the broader faculty or decision-making processes. Employee involvement and its potential positive effects on job satisfaction, motivation, and employee-manager relationships (Mambula et al., 2021), is often seen in the literature as a continuum, with the highest degree having decision-making completely in the hands of the employees and concluding the more involved employees are the better (Tian & Zhai, 2019). The perceptions of desirability of involvement within this continuum differ within the layers of the faculty, with middle management and the faculty board being involved in decision-making and information provision and employees indicating they are not that interested in doing so.

While the faculty board provides channels for bottom-up communication, employees tend not to make full use of these opportunities. The faculty board's expectations for a proactive, engaged workforce thus do not fully align with employees' perceptions of their roles, with employees stating they do not see themselves as having many communication responsibilities towards the faculty board or departments. This also contributes to a disconnect in involvement, as employees mostly communicate within their own bubbles in the faculty and focus on their own jobs. Important to note here is that once people are worried about their own job safety, they do wish to be involved in decision-making and information provision. As Tuzun (2013) points out in a study on job satisfaction, employees are more likely to be satisfied with communication at the level of their own work, rather than the organization as a whole. This is supported by the present study's findings, with many employees simply not being interested in being involved in the matters that happen behind the scenes.

With these findings in mind, BMS must consider whether they want to focus their strategy on the involvement of all faculty members or giving faculty members space to focus on their 'core business'. On the one hand, existing criticism on the sluggishness of the decision-making process and information dissemination due to involvement of many different parties could already be an indicator of more involvement not being desirable. On the other hand though, the localized nature of current employee involvement can also be explained by the current organizational structure, where the distance to the central faculty is perceived to be large by employees. Related to this, building on Shields & Watermeyer (2018), who argued that HEIs have to deal with competing logics, future research could focus on how governance reforms impact internal communication in terms of employee engagement.

5.2. Limitations

Some limitations of the study can be identified which may have influenced the results. Firstly, while the sample of interviewees was as diverse as possible, with people from all layers of the hierarchy being included, not all perspectives could have been considered because of time restraints. The faculty consists of over 600 members, and although 35 interviews were conducted, the perspectives from employees not in management positions may have been underrepresented. This could limit the generalizability of the findings to the entire faculty. Regarding generalizability, the findings are limited to internal communication practices of the BMS faculty and can thus not simply be applied to other universities, or even other faculties at the University of Twente, with other faculties at the UT being more focussed on natural and formal sciences, instead of social sciences at BMS. As the study used the BMS faculty as a case study to reflect upon the role of internal communication in academic settings, its findings should be interpreted cautiously when applied to other contexts.

Another potential limitation of the study lies in its reliance on interviewees to provide their own perspectives on internal communication practices, which could have introduced bias. As interviewees answered questions based on their own personal experiences, perceptions, or assumptions, they may have acted as unreliable narrators. This concern was particularly relevant during interviews with faculty members in managerial positions, as these individuals may have been hesitant to fully disclose their opinions, even with assurances of anonymity. For instance, one manager declined to participate entirely, noting concerns about confidentiality.

5.3. Practical recommendations

Several practical recommendations have been formulated to advise the faculty board of BMS on internal communication practices in the faculty. The recommendations aim at making communication clearer and more organized through defining roles and responsibilities and ensuring that decision-making processes are streamlined, while also helping faculty members navigate the faculty structure.

Firstly, communication channels need to be consolidated, and their purposes should be made clearer. Currently, faculty members experience important information missing or moving slowly through the faculty, alongside an information overload on the current communication channels. Contradicting this position is the faculty board's perspective, who say that information is available, but do not communicate the expectation of proactive information gathering. Thus, more centralized channels could aid in streamlining information dissemination through the existing communication channels. While email will always be a difficult channel to use within a larger organization, with many mails being sent back and forth, centralized policy on how to use this channels effectively could be helpful. Furthermore, the UT website, and more specifically the BMS part of the website has the required affordances to facilitate more effective information sharing and is perceived to be full of potential to improve communication within the faculty. These changes in the usage of channel should then be communicated by the faculty board, and not indirectly through department heads, research theme chairs, and/or section chairs, but directly to the entire faculty.

Secondly, the current faculty structure with its different layers creates confusion among faculty members, particularly regarding the responsibilities of others. To counteract this, a central place could be installed where people's responsibilities and duties of each role are specified. Once again the UT website is a potentially good place to do so, with users already being able to search for specific people on the website. Internal responsibilities regarding decision-making can be spread on internal channels like the serviceportal. A 'BMS ways of working' document already exists, where responsibilities and meeting structures are discussed and written down, but the existence of this document does not seem to be clear among faculty members; or is not utilized often. This clarification of responsibilities is especially relevant for middle managers, whose roles are seen to be the most ambiguous in the faculty.

Thirdly, the transparency regarding decision-making was discussed often. While it is not possible for the faculty board to provide complete rationales behind decisions at all times, the perception of the faculty board ‘putting up a smoke screen’ at times causes some frustrations among the lower layers of the hierarchy. This has led to confusion and frustration in the past, and preventing this feeling among faculty members can aid in fostering more involvement and engagement. However, it is still up to the faculty board to assess whether decisions can be shared, but at least a rationale as to why reasons behind a certain decision can not be shared could already be helpful. All Hands On BMS is a potentially useful channel in this regard, as many are already involved in these online meetings. This way, communication becomes an explicit and essential part of the decision-making process.

Fourthly, regarding employee involvement, the faculty board must consider whether the aim of involving as many people as possible is desirable or whether it would be more valuable to focus on people’s ‘core business’. As many employees indicated not to be interested in being involved in decision-making and other communication responsibilities, one could wonder whether involving these employees in the first place would be a valuable endeavour. For those not wishing to be involved in faculty-wide matters, communication can go through the departments, however, matters that are related to job security should be communicated faculty wide.

5.4. Conclusion

To conclude, the present thesis sheds light on internal communication practices within the BMS faculty at the University of Twente. While the findings might suggest the faculty faces an array of challenges when it comes to communicating, many faculty members expressed overall satisfaction with current state of affairs. Thus, while potential areas of improvement were identified by the interviewees, the existing communication infrastructure already provides a stable foundation for the faculty.

Higher education institutions like the BMS faculty operate within unique contexts, balancing academic and administrative functions in an increasingly formalized environment. Assessing internal communication practices further aids BMS in overcoming challenges of fragmented communication and complex organizational structures. Effective internal communication is not merely a support mechanism but should be an essential and integral part of BMS's strategy. By implementing the aforementioned recommendations, BMS can build upon the foundation that is already in place to streamline processes and further align communication practices with faculty needs.

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Appendices

Appendix A Interview guide phase 1 (English)

Thank you for participating in this research.

This research project aims at better understanding how employees perceive internal communication within the BMS faculty. Our goal is to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of internal communication and provide recommendations for potential improvements.

During the interview, we will ask you open-ended questions. This will take about 60 to 90 minutes. Please remember that you can choose to stop participating at any time.

For our research, we choose a broad view on internal communication. Of course, we will discuss information provision and communication channels. But we will also talk about engaging and motivating employees and nurturing a sense of belonging and community, to mention some of the other aspects.

We would like to make a recording of the interview, after which the recording will be transcribed and anonymized. The data will thus be saved as anonymized transcripts and can be accessed by the researchers. The supervisors will not know with whom the interviews are held and will not be able to get any personal information from the data. The recordings will be deleted after finishing the research project.

- Any questions or remarks?
- Do you consent?

(The consent form gets signed, and the audio recording is started)

- Can you describe your function within the faculty?

Communication infrastructure

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?

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?
    - *Probes / follow ups*: How do you make sure that your team can send feedback to you? How do you give feedback?

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

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 internal communication?
- To what extent does it cause internal communication problems?

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?

Procedures

(There are various procedures in the faculty, to streamline organizational processes. Think of procedures for recruiting new personnel or for starting new research projects.)

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

<u>Image formation</u>

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

Community & membership

- To what extent do you see the BMS faculty as a community?
    - Potential follow up: 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?

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?

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 (English)

Thank you for participating in this research.

This research project aims at better understanding how employees perceive internal communication within the BMS faculty. Our goal is to identify both the strengths and weaknesses of internal communication and provide recommendations for potential improvements.

During the interview, we will ask you open-ended questions. This will take about 30 to 45 minutes. Please remember that you can choose to stop participating at any time.

For our research, we choose a broad view on internal communication. Of course, we will discuss information provision and communication channels. But we will also talk about engaging and motivating employees and nurturing a sense of belonging and community, to mention some of the other aspects.

We would like to make a recording of the interview, after which the recording will be transcribed and anonymized. The data will thus be saved as anonymized transcripts and can be accessed by the researchers. The supervisors will not know with whom the interviews are held and will not be able to get any personal information from the data. The recordings will be deleted after finishing the research project.

- Any questions or remarks?
- Do you consent?

(Consent form gets signed and voicerecording gets started)

- Can you describe your function within the faculty?

Communication infrastructure

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?
    - Balance between being aware and information overload
- Do you get this information through active searching or through top-down communication?
    - Trickle down of information
- Do you get enough information to fulfill your tasks within your function?
- How do you experience the bottom-up communication in the faculty?

  - *Probes / follow ups:* do you get the space to provide feedback to people in managerial positions?

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?

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?
- 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?
  - *Examples*: 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?
  - BMS ways of working has descriptions of functions.

<u>Image formation</u>

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?
  - Give examples of positive and negative experiences

Community & membership

- To what extent do you see the BMS faculty as a community?
  - *Potential follow up*: 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?

Strategic direction of the faculty

- Are you aware of the BMS strategic course they plan to follow?
    - Long-term plans
- *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?

Role of communication

- 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 (phase 1 & 2)

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. Misha Zoet and Sophie Nijkamp conduct the research, 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 30 and 45 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 to answer 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 traced back 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 Supervisors

Sophie Nijkamp (s.nijkamp@student.utwente.nl) Menno de Jong (m.d.t.dejong@utwente.nl)
Misha Zoet (m.zoet@student.utwente.nl) Mark van Vuuren (mark.vanvuuren@utwente.nl)

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

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**
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 the 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 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 Signature Date

Appendix D Codebooks phase 1 & 2

Table 9 Codebook phase 1

Main themes	Subthemes	Description
Channels		Channels that are used for communication within the faculty, including formal channels but also informal channels
	Formal channels used	Formal channels that get mentioned by interviewees are the serviceportal, newsletters, email, BMS all hands on, the UT website, meetings, whatsapp, UToday, LinkedIn, Chamber of Professors.
	Informal channels used	Informal channels that get mentioned by interviewees are the grapevine, the coffee machine
	Functionality of channels	Perceptions of interviewees about the effectiveness of the communication channels in their intended use
Information dissemination		The way in which (relevant) information spreads through the faculty
	Effectiveness	Does information reach the appropriate people?
	Transparency	Perceptions of whether interviewees think information dissemination is transparent
	Feedback	Perceptions of bottom-up communication and providing feedback to higher-ups
Decision-making process		The way in which decisions are made within the faculty
	Effectiveness	Perceptions of interviewees on how effective decision-making is.
	Transparency	The insight faculty members get in the decision-making process. Not so relevant for faculty board.
	Speed of decision-making	the length of the decision-making process within the faculty
Faculty structure		The way in which the faculty is organized, in terms of structure and hierarchy
	Faculty hierarchy	Perceptions of the hierarchy within the faculty
	Formation of faculty	The way the faculty is structured in terms of departments, sections, research lines etc.
	Responsibilities	How faculty members see their responsibilities and the responsibilities of others.

Table 10 Codebook phase 2

Main themes	Subthemes	Description
Channels		See table 9
	Serviceportal	Functionality of the serviceportal
	Website	Functionality of the website
	Microsoft Teams	Functionality of Microsoft Teams
	Mail	Functionality of email
	BMS All Hands On	Functionality of BMS All Hands On meetings
	Others	Other misc. channels mentioned and discussed on their functionality = Facebook, Utoday, newsletter, journal finders, Google, the infoboard in atriums or hallways
	Spontaneous Informal communication	Informal communication that occurs without the organization of faculty or department or section, and that occurs near the coffee machine and/ or through the grapevine.
	Organized Informal communication	Informal communication that occurs during events organized by the faculty and/or department and/or section
Information dissemination		See table 9
	Desirability of information	Whether or not faculty members are interested in knowing more aboout developments in the faculty.
	Effectiveness	
	Amount of information	The quantity of information, and whether this is seen as either too much, or too little.
	Transparency	See table 9
	Bottom-up communication	The perceptions of bottom-up communication within the BMS faculty
Decision-making process		
	Involvement in decision-making	Whether people are involved in the decision-making process. Neutral means people are not interested in participating in the first place.
	Effectiveness	See table 9
	Transparency	See table 9
Faculty structure		
	Faculty hierarchy	See table 9
	Formation of faculty	See table 9
	Centrality	the extent to which faculty members feel part of the central system (BMS)
	Responsibilities & expectations	How faculty members see their responsibilities and the responsibilities of others. Also, the clarity of the expectations they receive.