

# Establishing effective internal communication in diverse organisations.

[A case study at “De Fietsambassade Gent vzw”](#)

Word count: 10 906

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A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master after Master Multilingual Business Communication

Academic year : 2022 - 2023

# Foreword

This master's thesis constitutes the capstone of the master after master Multilingual Business for the future.

This thesis was written while I was interning at De Fietsambassade Ghent vzw, with the guidance of my promotor Prof. Mathias Seghers. He gave me key pointers to work with and handed me valuable workways and feedback. I am especially grateful for his prompt responses, which have greatly facilitated the progress of this work. The subject and research question of this thesis were offered by my supervisor Karen Scheire of 'De Fietsambassade'. I would therefore like to thank her for her valuable input and instructive internship under her guidance. Also, the other colleagues deserve a mention for Communication. With the help of this master after master, I feel ready to jump into work life. This last year offered me many on-hands experiences which will be useful in my future workplace, as in my daily life. Katie Hertveldt and Ludivine Crible are fantastic coaches and tutors who make sure everyone following this master after master can develop his full potential. They offer a sympathetic ear when needed and take this into account their support and help.

Furthermore, big thanks to my participants at the interviews for their time and critical, valuable input.

Furthermore, I would also like to thank my fellow students, my family, boyfriend and friends for the support and proofreading of this thesis. Their encouragement has been a constant source of motivation.

Lastly, I am grateful to Ghent University, the internship experience, and the completion of this master's thesis, as they have provided me with valuable insights and knowledge that I will carry with me into my future endeavours.

Laura Vandendriessche

23/06/2023

# Abstract

Diversiteit neemt een steeds prominentere plaats in binnen organisaties, waarbij de voordelen ervan steeds duidelijker naar voren komen. Verscheidene onderzoeken wijzen uit dat diversiteit leidt tot een verhoogde talentontwikkeling, een vernieuwende aanpak van problemen en andere voordelen. Daarnaast vormt interne communicatie een essentieel aspect van een goed functionerende organisatie. Effectieve interne communicatie draagt bij aan de motivatie van medewerkers en zorgt ervoor dat zij op de hoogte zijn van relevante ontwikkelingen. In het bijzonder in diverse organisaties speelt interne communicatie een cruciale rol. Desondanks blijft onderzoek op dit gebied beperkt.

Deze masterproef streeft ernaar een antwoord te formuleren op de vraag: "Hoe kan interne communicatie het beste worden aangepakt in een diverse organisatie?" Om deze vraag te beantwoorden, wordt een casestudy uitgevoerd bij De Fietsambassade Gent vzw, waarbij interviews worden afgenomen onder de medewerkers van deze organisatie. De steekproef is zorgvuldig samengesteld met het doel een zo divers mogelijke vertegenwoordiging van medewerkers te verkrijgen.

De verzamelde interviewgegevens worden onderworpen aan thematische analyse met behulp van het softwareprogramma NVivo. Uit de analyse van de interviews blijkt dat medewerkers van De Fietsambassade over het algemeen allemaal graag hun job doen en er graag werken en ook de communicatie binnen de teams verloopt goed. Werknemers die ontevreden zijn over de interne communicatie, klagen vooral over de doorstroom van informatie binnen de organisatie. Zij ervaren een gebrek aan een duidelijk kader en systeem om de communicatie op vlak van beleid tijdig en bij iedereen te krijgen. Daarnaast heeft een aantal medewerkers geen toegang tot internet en e-mail, wat hen beperkt in het gebruik van digitale communicatiekanalen.

Om deze uitdagingen het hoofd te bieden, wordt gezocht naar een effectieve manier om alle informatie te bundelen. Een mogelijke oplossing die naar voren komt, is het opnemen van alle nieuwe ontwikkelingen en relevante informatie in de interne nieuwsbrief, informatie van de externe nieuwsbrief wordt van toegevoegd aan de interne nieuwsbrief. Hierbij wordt niet

alleen informatie opgenomen die primair relevant lijkt voor klanten, maar ook informatie die van belang is voor de interne werking van de organisatie. Op deze manier kan de nieuwsbrief fungeren als een centraal communicatiemiddel dat voor alle medewerkers toegankelijk is.

Daarnaast benadrukt het onderzoek het belang van het vermijden van een te sterke afhankelijkheid van informele communicatiekanalen. Hoewel informele communicatie een belangrijke rol kan spelen bij het opbouwen van relaties en het uitwisselen van informele kennis, is het van essentieel belang dat formele communicatiekanalen worden ondersteund om informatieverlies tegen te gaan.

Tenslotte legt de masterproef de nadruk op het belang van een gevarieerde communicatiemix in een diverse organisatie. Naast online communicatie moeten ook offline communicatiekanalen, zoals papieren communicatiemiddelen en persoonlijke interactie, worden benut om iedereen te bereiken, ongeacht hun toegang tot digitale kanalen.

**Kernwoorden:** interne communicatie, diversiteit, casestudy, organisatie, uitdagingen

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# 1 Introduction

Flanders and the city of Ghent demonstrate significant diversity in various aspects. For instance, Ghent has a foreign-origin population of 40% and encompasses more than 150 nationalities. Additionally, nearly 22% of Ghent's residents do not conform to the traditional parent-child family structure. Furthermore, approximately 6% of Flemish adults in Ghent have been diagnosed with disabilities, and 8% of Flemings lack Internet access. (stad.gent, 2023) (Vanweddigen, Noppe, & Moons, 2022).

Also in companies, diversity is gaining prominence as companies become larger, internationalise, form strategic alliances and facilitate mergers and acquisitions inside and outside their primary domain of work (Jackson, Whitney, & May, 1995). The globalisation process and worldwide migration further contribute to the growing significance of diversity and diversity management (Singh, 2018). Additionally, diversity has also increased because of an increase in women and people with disabilities entering the work force (Foma, 2014).

Simultaneously, internal communication within organisations is emerging as an increasingly vital topic. Over the past ten years, an increasing number of books have appeared on this theme and its importance has become clear (Miquel-Segarra & Aced-Toledano, 2019). Organisations often harbour the misconception that internal communication will effortlessly fall into place and yield favourable outcomes. In reality, employee perspectives often reveal substantial challenges and obstacles associated with effective internal communication.

Benify's (2019) article aptly describes the importance of internal communication as follows: "Internal communication helps bring and keep your organisation together. It connects departments and teams in the workplace and ensures that every employee is up-to-date, on the same wavelength and aware of what is happening in and with the company." According to an article in Forbes Coaches Council (2018), communication is also important to not feel ignored in the workplace. People who feel ignored or left out lose confidence, score lower on IQ tests, work slower, show less perseverance and become lethargic (Koeleman, 2018). Koeleman (2018) gives three reasons why efficient and effective internal communication is crucial:



- It is necessary to get work done. Internal communication is used to facilitate work processes and disseminate knowledge.
- It is necessary for the functioning of the organisation and to involve people of all levels in their organisation's policies. Engaged employees are more motivated.
- Internal communication is indispensable in change processes.

It is noteworthy that when searching for "problems with diversity in the workplace" on search engines like Google, the primary issue that arises is often related to communication challenges. Surprisingly, there is a lack of extensive literature discussing effective approaches to address these differences within organisations and how to adapt internal communication accordingly. Given the diverse linguistic backgrounds, variations in Internet usage, and contextual disparities among employees, it becomes crucial to prioritize internal communication to ensure effective message delivery in diverse organisational settings. Considering this, the following research question can be formulated based on existing literature:

**'How is internal communication best handled in a diverse organisation?'**

In this thesis, research was conducted on the basis of a case study at De Fietsambassade Gent vzw. Exploratory research was conducted during an internship of ten weeks to gain insight into De Fietsambassade their way of working and certain struggles. The final research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with people from all over the organisation. The research question can be divided into the following sub-questions:

- What is the current state of internal communication in De Fietsambassade Gent vzw?
- What is going well in terms of internal communication in De Fietsambassade Gent vzw?
- What improvements can be made in the field of internal communication in De Fietsambassade Gent vzw?
- What matters of internal communication should every diverse organisation pay attention to?

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Diversity

#### 2.1.1 What is (workplace) diversity and diversity management?

Diversity is a difficult term to describe and there is no single definition that describes all forms of diversity. In this paper, diversity is understood to be an infinite number of attributes such as age, gender, race, origin and diploma (Servaes, Choudhury & Parikh, 2022). Robbins (2003) describes diversity as any dimension that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another, in which these dimensions can be visible or invisible. Workplace diversity within an organisation indicates that the workplace is heterogeneous in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, in which employees possess distinct elements and qualities that differ from one another. This influences how people interact and achieve business results. (Foma, 2014). According to a definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, diversity is approached as “the practise or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.” (Oxford University Press, 2021). An insight into the book by Cops, Pleysier, Put and De Boeck (2015) is the reason we can speak of a “diverse organisation” and a “non-diverse organisation” because of the observation that in a non-diverse organisation, the workplace is still insufficiently reflective of society.

In the workplace, there are two types of diversity that can be distinguished, namely **surface diversity** and **knowledge diversity**. Surface diversity are demographic characteristics that are easily visible, such as gender or age. Knowledge diversity is highly relevant in organisational constellations. It is based on an educational/functional background or organisational history (Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2019). This article will focus on knowledge diversity in the organisation. Surface diversity in the organisation “creates” knowledge diversity and that is also where this paper is about. This can be explained by the mechanism of selective perception, which is a mental process in which information is interpreted after being filtered through a cognitive base. An individual’s demographic background determines his or her cognitive base. The cognitive base is “assumptions about future events knowledge of alternatives and knowledge

of the consequences of alternatives.” If members of a group differ in characteristics such as gender and functional background, they may have different interests, values and mental scripts. This means that they have different expected sequences of actions or events, and selective perception may lead them to have different views on the group’s task (Pelled, 1996).

### **2.1.2 Advantages of workplace diversity**

Implementing workplace diversity has become a major focus in many Human Resource Departments because of its numerous advantages (Easley, 2001, p.38).

Some of these advantages are a bigger talent pool, increased employee trust and engagement, new perspectives, innovation, better decision-making, improved performance and stronger business profiles and profits (Servaes et al., 2022). There is a higher chance of a wider variety of task-relevant knowledge and skills in diverse groups than in homogeneous ones. It depends among other factors on the diversity of the educational composition (Lauring & Selmer, 2012). More task-relevant knowledge and skills influence the productivity of the worker individually but also of their co-workers because of sharing knowledge and skills (Tuor Sartore & Backes-Gellner, 2020). It also stimulates employees to think outside the box and think about more creative and innovative solutions (De Dreu & West, 2001). Diverse companies are better able to respond to challenges, win top talent and meet the needs of different customers. By building a diverse team of employees, a business will be better able to reach specific audiences (McKinsey & Company, 2022) (Foma, 2014). Other studies have shown that a team composed of people with the same ethnic background and personality may cause conflict and decrease productivity. By contrast, a team composed of individuals with diverse ethnic backgrounds and personalities has a greater potential for increased productivity, reduced conflict, and decreased competitiveness among team members (Le, 2008). McKinsey, a global consulting company, conducted another study that showed a linear relationship between racial and ethnic diversity and better financial performance. They conclude that diversity is a competitive differentiator that shifts market share toward more diverse companies (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). In companies where leaders give diverse voices the time to speak and to listen, it is more likely to unleash value-driving insights (Hewlett, Marshall, & Sherbin, 2013).

Diversity management is a business strategy adopted by organisations to facilitate the recruitment, retention, and inclusive development of individuals from various backgrounds (Thomas & Robin, 1996). Schoenfeldt and Shaw (1999) and Sadri and Tran (2002) stated that managing diversity includes building specific skills and creating policies that increase the best work behaviours and attitudes from each employee.

An important nuance to highlight is the difference between the concepts of diversity and inclusion. Diversity is about effective differences between individuals and thus who is represented in the workforce while inclusion is about how those differences are dealt with, thus behaviours, values and rules of the game. Inclusion refers to how the workforce experiences the workplace and the degree to which organisations embrace them and enable them to make meaningful contributions (Bush, 2021) (McKinsey & Company, 2022).

## **2.2 Internal communication**

Internal communication helps to develop policy and make meaning together. Good information is timely provided and received, correct in content, relevant, useful, clear, accessible and complete. Internal communication helps employees share information, establish relationships and generate meanings (Berger, 2008); to promote interactivity (Capriotti, 1998); to reaffirm their own identity and the organisational values (Berger, 2008) and create a positive organisational climate (Charry-Condor, 2018). It has also been proven that internal communication helps make decisions, resolve problems and manage the process of change (Men, 2014; Capriotti, 1998).

Another definition is from Reijnders, Hogendoorn, Koning, de Laat, and van Silfhout (2015), "Internal communication is a process of continuous exchange of messages and their meaning-making between persons professionally involved in the organisation." This book clarifies this definition by breaking it down into four key aspects:

- 1) "Continuous exchange of messages": Transmission and flow of information within the organisation.
- 2) "And their meaning-making": The message exchange is not meaningless. The sender gives it an interpretation and a meaning. However, the receiver gives its own

interpretation and meaning which can cause messages to have a different meaning and possibly lead to a misunderstanding.

- 3) “A process between people”: Refers to the interaction and collaboration between people.
- 4) “Those professionally involved in the organisation”: It is difficult to draw a line on what is meant by “internal.”

(Reijnders et al., 2015)

An important note here is that internal communication is not about transmitters and receivers but about dialogue. The internal communication mix, a set of consultation forms, channels and available (digital) resources, can be used to steer this dialogue in the right direction (Koeleman, 2018). According to Sedej and Justinek (2013) it is on the one hand important that the internal communication is flexible and tailored to the specific organisation in which it is used. On the other hand, it must provide relevant data that will allow the organisation to make well-founded decisions (Castillo-Esparcia & Villabona-Beltrán, 2018). Therefore, it is important to evaluate internal communication since “knowing both the positive and negative results makes it possible to set priorities, make decisions and carry out planning provisions” (Álvarez-Nobell & Lesta, 2011, p. 12).

Francés (2017) confirms this and suggests that the evaluation of communication is essential to demonstrate the efficacy and impact of internal communication on the corporate and business strategy of the organisation. Adecec (2016) states that “without measurement, it is not possible to manage communication” (p. 7).

### **2.2.1 Levels of internal communication**

Internal communication takes place at three different levels: the interpersonal, the group and the organisational level. The **interpersonal level** is communication between individuals. **Group level** communication occurs in teams, units and employee resources or interest groups. The focus here is on information sharing, issue discussion, task coordination, problem

solving and consensus building. The biggest level, the **organisational level**, focuses on vision and mission, policies, new initiatives and organisational knowledge and performance.

### 2.2.2 Functions of internal communication

From the employees' perspective, internal communication should serve the following four functions:

Firstly, **task information** is about how the process works and how the system works, any quality and safety requirements, recent changes and defects. Employees are successful in their jobs because of their good task information. Examples include work instructions, schedules and work schemes.

Secondly, **policy information**. Employees have a clear picture of the organisation's goals and policies and can participate in policymaking. They know about the "where and when" of their organisation. This ranges from mission and HR communication to information and dialogue regarding internal policy processes. Employees have expressed a keen interest in obtaining answers to several crucial questions: What goals is the organisation pursuing?; What opportunities and threats are there for the organisation?; What are the short- and long-term changes?; What role does my own work play in the whole?. Employee dissatisfaction is often not due to the policy itself but arises because the policy is not properly communicated. One reason may be that they underestimate employees' need for this type of information. When an organisation does not communicate enough policy information, it triggers a rumour mill.

Thirdly, **knowledge management** involves sharing explicit and implicit knowledge. This involves the exchange of knowledge which allows the organisation to continue to innovate. To perform their work successfully, people depend on and work with others. Explicit knowledge is about sharing and making knowledge findable, while implicit knowledge is about making colleagues and peers with certain specialities and experience findable.

Fourthly, **social information or motivational information** relates to connecting employees. Motivation is linked to the other communication functions, there is a strong link between internal communication and engagement, motivation, identification and a sense of the “we”.

(Koeleman , 2018) (Michels, 2009)

### 2.2.3 Types of internal communication: formal and informal communication

There are two main forms of internal communication: formal and informal.

*“Formal communication is supposed to serve the purposes of the corporation while informal communication is supposed to serve the employees private purposes”* (Kraut, Fish, Root, & Chalfonte, 2002)

Figure 1 Formal vs informal communication shows variables that distinguish formal from informal communication (Kraut, Fish, Root, & Chalfonte, 2002).

Figure 1 Formal vs informal communication

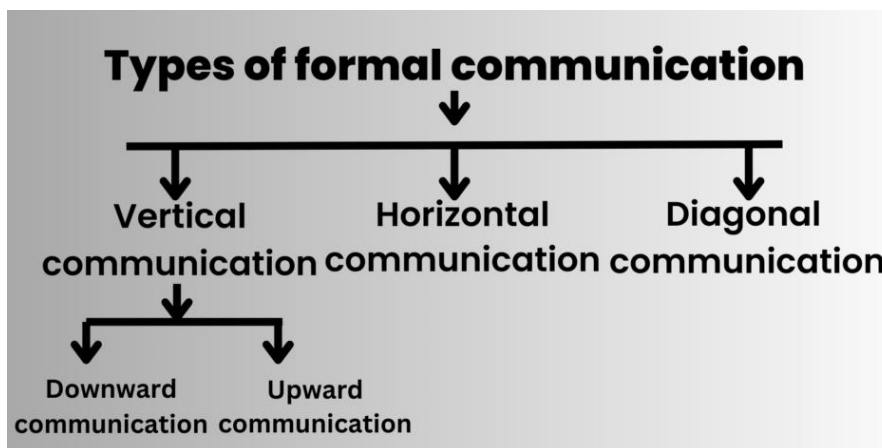
FORMAL	INFORMAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheduled in advance</li> <li>• Arranged participants</li> <li>• Participants in role</li> <li>• Preset agenda</li> <li>• Impoverished content</li> <li>• Formal language &amp; speech register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unscheduled</li> <li>• Random participants</li> <li>• Participants out of role</li> <li>• Unarranged agenda</li> <li>• Rich content</li> <li>• Informal language &amp; speech register</li> </ul>

*Note.* Adapted from “Informal Communication in Organizations: Form, Function and Technology”, by Kraut, Fish, Root and Chalfonte, 2002

Formal communication are messages passed through official pathways and follows the formal structure and organisation chart of the organisation. Instructions and information are passed

downward and upward along these channels. Formal communication has been proven to be related to productivity, job satisfaction, decreased coordination costs, reduced conflict-making, reinforced trust and overall satisfaction. It reduces the negative effects of rumours which leads to a higher level of satisfaction (Sheykh Al Eslami Kandlousi, Janee Ali, & Abdollahi, 2010). Figure 2 Types of formal communication below shows a breakdown of formal internal communication.

Figure 2 Types of formal communication



Note. Adapted from <https://clearinfo.in/blog/formal-vs-informal-communication/>

Vertical line communication or top-down communication. This type of communication is often used within organisations, including De Fietsambassade Gent. This information flows downwards through the organisational chart (e.g., from CEO to communications manager to communications officer). However, it is an illusion that communication in the modern world still proceeds via this tight linear line. Information sharing is much more complex, and the message is often distorted at the end. This linear thinking needs to change to selecting information and interpreting what is going on rather than focusing on relaying information. Vertical bottom-up communication is communication in which the source is at the bottom of the organisation. The purpose of this form is to inform the board and management of the wishes of the employees on the shop floor and the real “ins and outs” of the organisation. Horizontal communication is communication between employees from the same position, whereas diagonal communication is a hybrid of vertical and horizontal communication, such as a dialogue between employees of different ranks who are not in the same chain of command (Koeleman, 2018; Michels, 2009; Slack, 2021).



Informal communication involves messages communicated through unofficial pathways and is based on relationships among people. People talk about their problems, attitudes, jobs and whatever they like, eventually leading to satisfaction (Sheykh Al Eslami Kandlousi et al., 2010). This may sometimes feel irrelevant but research has shown that informal communication is highly relevant for organisations. Employees' perception of being informed increases significantly as does their affective commitment, both of which increase job satisfaction. Chats at the coffee machine do not decrease employees' productivity but instead helps them to carry out their jobs more effectively (Koch & Denner, 2022).

Formal and informal communication complement each other, and most workplace communications can be situated somewhere in the formal-informal spectrum. Not every interaction in the workplace can be clearly categorised into one of these two types (Koch & Denner, 2022). Daniels, Speaker and Papa (1997) noted that informal communication can fill gaps that formal communication fails to address. When employees do not obtain sufficient information through formal channels, they rely on informal channels (Gray & Laidlaw, 2002). Research shows that when communication from management is limited, employees rely more often on grapevines, a form of informal communication (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998). Informal communication is often believed to be more authentic than formal communication (Burton, 2008).

#### **2.2.4 One-way communication vs two-way communication and symmetrical communication**

Two-way communication requires feedback and dialogue in the communication process (Huang, 2001). Unlike one-way communication, which disseminates information as monologues, two-way communication highlights the exchange of information between the two parties and empowers the public in the process. According to Berger (2008), the 100 "best companies" share the idea that two-way communication is the basis for employee motivation and organisational success.

Symmetrical internal communication adds another layer to two-way communication and active listening. Symmetrical internal communication is also about changing organisational

behaviours by considering and incorporating employees' opinions and feedback. Such communication makes employees empowered and makes that they will actively engage in organisational changes (Sun, Queenie Li, Lee, & Tao, 2021). Symmetrical communication, which is related to the dimension of ethical communication, is concerned with balancing organisations' and publics' interests by the organisation's willingness to initiate changes. Symmetrical communication is a form of participative communication with a strong sense of empowerment (Yeunjae, Jo-Yun, & Wan-Hsiu, 2021; Sun et al., 2021).

### **2.2.5 Appropriate channels for internal communication**

In their research, Vercic and Spoljaric (2020) underline that the channels used in an organisation depend on the type of organisation, mode of communication and the message. However, they could also prove that "traditional" media are still relevant and affect satisfaction more than "new" media. This does not mean that incorporating new technologies into mediating communication should be slowed. Merely, it implies that certain information should still be conveyed via traditional channels. The "traditional" media used in this research were emails and meetings.

The overall conclusion is that which channels are appropriate depends on the organisation and organisations need to be attentive to what employees want and expect from internal communication. (Vercic & Spoljaric, 2020)

### **2.2.6 Novelties and challenges for internal communication**

Vercic et al. (2012) identified 12 challenges in internal communication, which were confirmed by later research (Araújo & Miranda, 2020). These include new internal digital and social media, change communication, crisis communication, trust and credibility of leadership, employee engagement, loyalty, motivation, cultural diversity, developing internal communication policies and standards, return on investment measures, value for money and outsourcing. Araújo and Miranda (2020) confirmed these challenges but bundled them into three groups. The **empowered status of employees** makes the work environment more complex. This demands the consideration of employees' personal characteristics when

developing internal communication. The **rise of the Internet and social media** has both positive and negative implications. It significantly influences internal communication practises within organisations. The **pursuit for evaluation and control** implies a need for measuring and evaluation tools. There is an increasing interest in supporting professional efforts with tangible results. Research shows that measuring these efforts is important but many organisations do not get there.

### **2.2.7 Principles of successful internal communications**

Berger (2008) provides a summary of the principles of successful internal communications.

Firstly, **timeliness and content**. Employees should receive timely and relevant information through the channels they use and trust and in the language they understand. Messages should contain a certain context relevant to the employee. To ensure that it is relevant for that certain employee, the direct supervisor of that person should translate the message.

Secondly, **channels**. Face-to-face communication is the richest medium and should be emphasised in internal communication, especially in crisis situations, with major changes and to celebrate accomplishments. Listening skills reduce errors and misunderstandings, help discover problems, save time, improve evaluations and facilitate relationship building. Social media can empower employees but cannot be the only channel to use. New and traditional media should be blended so that everyone understands them.

Thirdly, **leadership roles**. Visibility is the first form of nonverbal communication for leaders and they should be visible for internal communication. Their communication should invite open, ongoing and transparent discussion and leaders should also keep in mind “actions lie louder than words”, actions should match their words.

Fourthly, **participation and recognition**. Encouraging employee participation in decision making to improve the overall climate for communication and improve the quality of decisions and recognize and celebrate achievements at all levels helps build shared values and organisational identity, such as similar social events.

Fifthly, **measurement**. This is a key to successful communication and helps define problems, determine the status quo, record progress, assess value and provide a basis for future direction.

Lastly, **culture**. Two-way communication is the foundation of employee motivation and organisational success. Two-way communication provides continuous feedback to learn and process organisational changes.

(Berger, 2008)

## **2.3 What are the challenges for internal communication in an organisation characterised by diversity?**

While it has already been proven that there are many benefits associated with diversity in an organisation, research is lacking on how best to approach internal communication in such an organisation. Indeed, there are challenges associated with internal communication in a diverse organisation but there is limited research on this topic as well. Research by Koeleman (2018) states that context is a particularly important aspect of internal communication: “Internal communication is the conscious sharing of messages and their reception and interpretation. In interpreting those messages, the context of the organisation plays an important role”.

The challenge arises when there are “cultural rifts”: large gaps that open when a group of workers (e.g. doctors) has significantly different perspectives and concerns about an issue from another group (e.g. senior executives). Organisational cultures and subcultures are also likely to be influenced by a range of intercultural norms or assumptions arising from national cultures, gender, religion, class, and generational differences (Hofstede and Hofstede 2010). In an increasingly globalised business environment, it is therefore vital for communicators to be sensitive to cultural diversity and dissimilarity (Banks 2002; Kent and Taylor 2011) Robbins (2003) states that language barriers can cause communication gaps.

Communication problems in a work environment hinder workers' performance when left unresolved. Communication barriers should be fixed because of the huge effect that they will have when workers are left unable to communicate with each other's because of differences in language (Foma, Impact of Workplace Diversity, 2014).

Information overload is the phenomenon when there are various platforms available. New platforms are often introduced to improve internal communication but as a result it has become more difficult. Employees feel overwhelmed and inundated with the information they receive and experience. Moreover, access to the Internet and the use of online communication media are not evident for all employees in a diverse organisation (Sutton, le Roux, & Fourie, 2022).

Diversity in demographics creates gaps and inequalities in training and literacy levels and different languages spoken by employees.

In a diverse organisation, it should be considered that it is possible that there is prejudice about race, gender, religion and other beliefs between people working together. Communication managers should be more sensitive and aware that in terms of the messages sent out, the analogies used, and the images used in the communication to avoid prejudice. This example from a company provides more explanation." We send out emails from the CEO for every religious holiday, because if you send out a Christmas message, you cannot assume that everyone is a Christian. And then you must also send a message for all Muslim holidays, and also for all Hindus and all Jewish days etc. I always send out a new year message rather than a Christmas message"(Sutton et al., 2022)

## 3 Case study

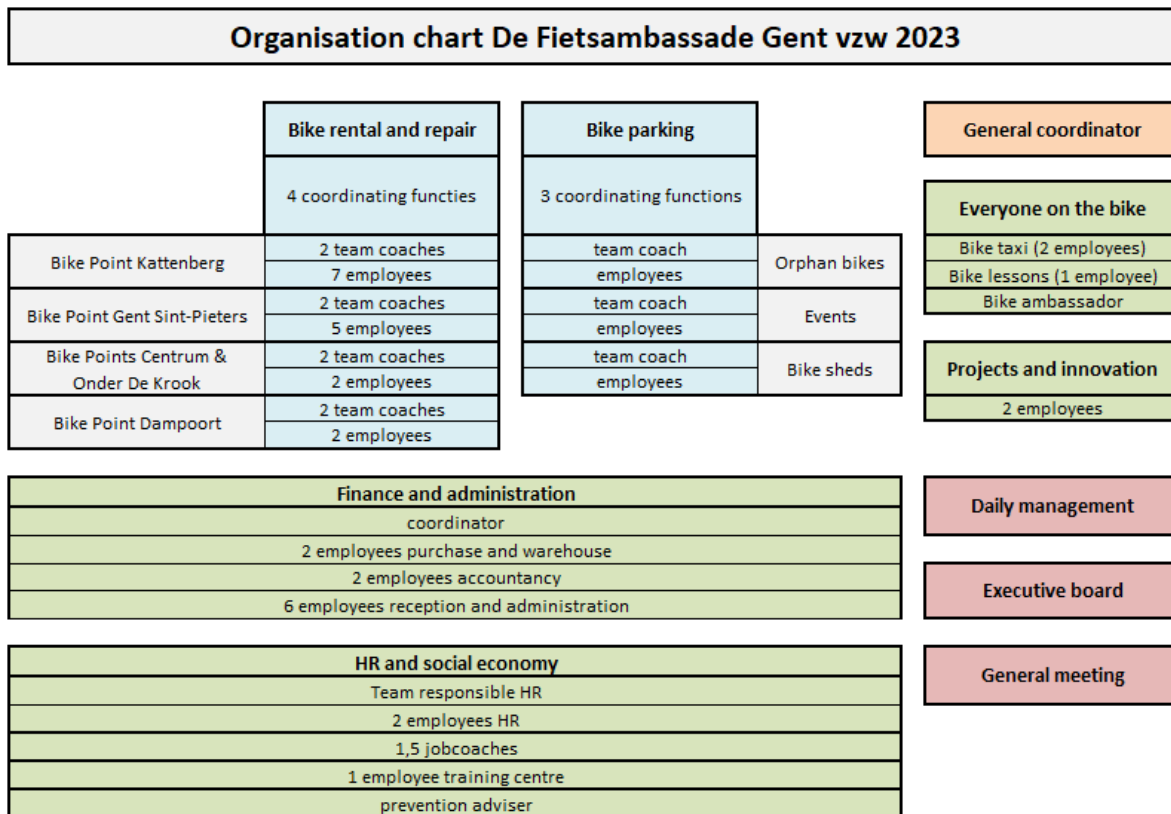
### 3.1 What is De Fietsambassade Gent vzw?

*“De Fietsambassade is pioneer in cycling pleasure”.*

De Fietsambassade Gent vzw is an “EVA” (external independent agency) of the City of Ghent, cofounded by Ghent higher education institutions. They encourage and facilitate the use of bicycles as a sustainable means of transportation in Ghent. This is done by taking responsibility for bike repair and rental, bike parking and orphan bike management. In addition, De Fietsambassade Gent vzw is responsible for the bike taxi for less mobile people in Ghent, cycling lessons, new cycling projects and innovations. Their aim is to achieve better and more sustainable mobility in Ghent. De Fietsambassade Gent vzw is characterised by a recognisable, high-quality, innovative and accessible service. Moreover, they put maximum effort into social employment (Fietsambassade). This means that De Fietsambassade Gent vzw offers work and support to people with reduced employment opportunities. This can be due to several reasons, ranging from a disability to being a newcomer. These people receive tailor-made training, work and support, eventually moving them to jobs in the regular employment circuit (Sociale economie in Ghent, n.d.). The operations of the Fietsambassade Gent vzw are situated in seven locations in Ghent. It is divided in Head Office Kattenberg, Bike Depot and five Bike Points at different locations (De Fietsambassade Gent, n.d.) (Tijdelijke medewerkers voor het bemannen van de fietsparkings tijdens de Gentse Feesten 2023, n.d.).

The organisation chart below shows the structure of De Fietsambassade Gent.

Figure 3 Organisation chart De Fietsambassade



Note. Obtained from internal information De Fietsambassade

### 3.1.1 Diversity in De Fietsambassade Gent vzw

Social employment automatically ensures a great diversity of people and profiles within De Fietsambassade Gent vzw. As diversity is a broad concept, it is important to know what is understood by diversity in this organisation. According to them, it consists of several layers. There are different jobs ranging from labourer to clerk, language diversity, cultural backgrounds, private situations, gender, sexual orientations and physical backgrounds, such as people with disabilities. Diversity in the context of internal communication can be summarised as “diversity are all factors that make different people interpret a given message differently,” according to an employee of team communication in De Fietsambassade Gent. Because diversity is an expansive concept, this thesis will focus on a number of diversity characteristics, namely their function and whether they have a managerial position, use of the Internet and electronic devices or not, age and sex. Firstly, analysing diversity based on job function and managerial position provides insights into diverse perspectives across

different organisational levels. Secondly, considering the usage of the Internet and electronic devices acknowledges the significance of technology in today's digital era but not everyone makes use of it. Thirdly, the inclusion of age as a diversity characteristic recognizes the importance of generational differences in the workplace. According to Wotapka (2019) there is no perfect way to communicate across generations because they all have different norms and these communication differences are causing many problems. Lastly, sex focuses on gender dynamics within organisations (Smith, 2008). Any choice to demarcate concepts, in this case diversity, simultaneously denies diversity, which is inevitable. It is necessary to make abstraction to focus on relevant elements in research (Cops et al., 2015).

### **3.1.2 Internal communication at De Fietsambassade Gent vzw**

The main directions and channels of internal communication within de Fietsambassade are listed below, both formal and informal internal communication. De Fietsambassade Gent vzw has a team communication which is responsible for internal and external communication.

#### **3.1.2.1 Formal communication in De Fietsambassade Gent vzw**

The most important channel for internal communication of team communication is 't Ambassadeurke. 't Ambassadeurke is an internal newsletter with important changes, novelties, dates to put in the agenda etc. that are good to know for all employees (see Example 't Ambassadeurke). 't Ambassadeurke is sent by email to all employees' official work email address.

The teams in the Bike Points and Bike Depot draw up a weekly work schedule, which is a valuable tool for knowing who performs which tasks. This is prepared by the team coaches printed out and distributed.

Reunions are the most time-consuming form of formal internal communication. Individual teams at all locations typically plan weekly or bi-weekly meetings. Team coaches of Bike Points meet each week at Head Office Kattenberg. They are responsible for passing important messages to their team and vice versa. CRANK is the meeting of coordinators, who decide on



policy matters. This meeting is not communicated openly unless a project comes out of it, in which case it is included in 't Ambassadeurke or communicated directly to those involved.

Another way of trying to involve everyone is the "OMI," the meeting with everyone which is organised twice a year. The purpose is to involve everyone and give a voice to everyone.

A more ad hoc way of formal communication is the use of emails, which is a frequent way of communication between employees.

### 3.1.2.2 Informal internal communication at De Fietsambassade Gent vzw

In De Fietsambassade Gent, they pay attention to both work-related internal communication and non-work-related internal communication.

Work-related informal communication can be divided into four scenarios. Employees communicate among themselves on Head Office Kattenberg mostly face-to-face, via a message on Teams, an Outlook email or a phone call. Employees working together at a Bike Point mostly have face-to-face conversations and phone calls. It is common to call each other between employees on different Bike Points or between employees on Head Office Kattenberg and Bike Point. Lastly, there is much communication between employees on Bike Points, Bike Depot and Head Office Kattenberg. Therefore, personal contact, Outlook mail and telephony are important instruments.

Non-work-related informal internal communication includes after works and team day. The monthly afterwork is a time to connect informally and is entirely optional. The team day takes place twice a year. The purpose of this (mandatory) event is to connect and as a token of appreciation. Finally, it is customary to have lunch together, which provides an extra informal moment of contact between colleagues.

### **3.1.3 Challenges for internal communication at De Fietsambassade Gent**

Internal communication at De Fietsambassade Gent poses several challenges.

Firstly, De Fietsambassade Gent has not been around for a long time. In 2017, De Fietsambassade Gent vzw was born from a merger of Fietsendepot Stad Gent, vzw Student En Mobiliteit and vzw Max Mobiel (Fietsambassade), which created various working methods and habits.

Secondly, because of the different locations in Ghent, distance is automatically created between employees, making it more difficult to have personal contact. Many employees of Bike Points and Bike Depot do not (often) use their mailbox, which makes these people harder to reach. Another difficulty is that people on Bike Points work in shifts, which makes it difficult to get everyone together.

Thirdly, the aspect of diversity that creates many opportunities but also implies many challenges. Team communication experiences difficulties reaching everyone. In addition, while conducting this research, many difficulties were encountered in reaching minorities such as those who do not speak Dutch, the so-called language barrier. The diverse nature of tasks within this organization often leads to a lack of clarity or understanding of certain words or jargon among different parties. Furthermore, not everyone is handy with smartphones, computers and the Internet, which makes these people harder to reach. Everyone has diverse backgrounds and knowledge so it is difficult to make a message understandable to everyone without oversimplifying it.

Because this EVA is linked to the City of Ghent, it must follow certain rules such as the language law. This regulation mandates that official communication be conducted exclusively in Dutch (Stad Gent, Engagementsverklaring taalbeleid, 2016) (Stad Gent, 2021).

## 4 Methodology

In this section, the methodology for this case study is explained. Firstly, the study design is explained, followed by the sample and data analysis.

### 4.1 Research design

To gain insights into the organization, reception, and perception of internal communication at De Fietsambassade Gent, qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews.

Firstly, an exploratory research was conducted. This consisted mainly of information obtained during an observation period at De Fietsambassade Gent vzw and 2 exploratory interviews with people from team communication. During the observation period, the formal meetings, informal gatherings, and conversations were observed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the internal communication at De Fietsambassade Gent and identify any areas of concern. This information in combination with the literature formed the basis for drafting the interview guide.

The results of this study were obtained by conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews with a heterogeneous group of employees of De Fietsambassade Gent vzw. The choice of interviews was informed by a study by Kleinman, Stenross, and McMahon (1994):

Respondents may reveal feelings, beliefs and private doubts that contradict or conflict with “what everyone thinks,” including sentiments that break the dominant feeling rules. In other cases, interviewers will discover the anxiety, ambivalence and uncertainty that lie behind respondents’ conformity (Kleinman et al., 1994).

The data from interviews provide an alternative perspective to that recorded by the researcher and support the interpretation of naturally occurring data, in this case of interactions. Taken together, these perspectives can generate new analytical findings (Copland & Creese, 2015).

The interviews conducted in this study used a semi-structured approach. This means that while an interview guide was used as a general framework, additional questions were asked as needed to gather more detailed information. This flexible approach allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' responses and provided a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Silverman, 1998). Semi-structured interviews provide a flexible technique for small-scale research (Drever, 1995).

The interview guide can be consulted in appendix Interview guide, additional questions are not included. To find an answer to the research question and sub questions, the main themes were identified. Firstly, some general information about the respondent to frame his answers and to map the diversity of the sample (Formplus Blog, 2023). Secondly, questions about De Fietsambassade Gent vzw in general and their perception towards working there, because good internal communication ensures employee satisfaction (Ferrão, 2018; Ravina-Ripoll, Galvan-Vela, Sorzano-Rodríguez, & Ruíz-Corrales, 2023). Participants were then queried regarding their utilization of communication channels and the nature of messages received to gain a comprehensive understanding of internal communication within the organisation (Vercic & Spoljaric, 2020). Subsequently, questions were posed regarding the feedback they receive, shedding light on the effectiveness and impact of the feedback mechanisms in place. Finally, general open-ended questions were presented, inviting participants to share their perspectives on strengths and areas of improvement in internal communication practices. These open-ended questions provided a non-threatening environment for participants to express their thoughts freely, making it particularly valuable for articulate respondents. This approach encourages open and unrestricted responses, leading to valuable and insightful feedback from the participants (Cleave, 2017). There were no specific questions asked about diversity because the intention was to deduce these things by working with a diverse sample and whether they answered the questions differently. After each interview, the interview guide was slightly adapted to the answers given and the information acquired (Silverman, 1998).

## 4.2 Sample

In total, 16 interviews, each lasting approximately half an hour, were conducted for this study. These interviews took place between May 9 2023 and June 2 2023. The interviews were conducted face-to-face in Dutch and were recorded using audio recording devices to ensure accurate capture of the conversations and facilitate analysis and review.

The sample was heterogenous, which means that both the theoretical and practical functions were addressed. All Bike Points, the Bike Depot and Head Office Kattenberg were addressed and a sample of diverse employees eventually emerged. In the sample, there is someone with a disability, someone who does not have a smartphone and people with different backgrounds and native languages. In terms of diverse backgrounds, variations were observed in terms of educational levels and unique circumstances that led individuals to engage with De Fietsambassade. The respondents work at different locations, have different functions, other educational backgrounds and whether or not have a directive function. To ensure confidentiality, some data were omitted from the sample overview.

In qualitative interviews such as this, it is important that the interviewee feels that their opinion counts and their input will be appreciated and looked at to break the trust barrier (Silverman, 1998). To establish a certain degree of trust a priori, all the participants had already met the interviewer in an informal setting.

Figure 4 Sample interviews

	Age	Sex	Dutch maternal language?	Function	Location employment	Supervisor?
1	50	M	Yes	Maintenance team	Depot	No
2	46	M	Yes	Team coach	Depot	Yes
3	31	M	Yes	Administrative assistance	Depot	No
4	29	M	No	Expert bike shed team	Depot	Yes
5	59	M	Yes	Call center - receptionist	Head Office Kattenberg	No
6	41	M	Yes	Purchase – warehouse	Head Office Kattenberg – BP Kattenberg	No
7	57	M	Yes	Bike repairer – back up team coach	BP Dampoort	No
8	32	M	Yes	Team coach	BP Dampoort	Yes
9	22	F	Yes	Intern job coach	Head Office Kattenberg	No

10	34	M	Yes	Expert bike repair	BP Kattenberg	No
11	52	M	Yes	Team coach	BP Kattenberg	Yes
12	43	M	Yes	General coordinator	Head Office Kattenberg	Yes
13	42	M	Yes	Team coach	BP Kattenberg	Yes
14	44	M	Yes	Team coach	BP Onder de Krook	Yes
15	53	M	Yes	Bike repairer	BP Onder de Krook	No
16	54	F	Yes	Call center and administration	BP Stadshal Head Office Kattenberg	No

### 4.3 Data-analysis

The interviews were analysed in the programme for qualitative research NVivo, using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set. Braun and Clark (2006) have a framework comprising six steps to analyse the data. The first step is to familiarize with the data and gain an overview of its content. Secondly, coding was conducted, whereby relevant sections of the data were identified and codes were assigned to represent their content (see appendix 9.3 Code). Thirdly, these codes were organised into themes, capturing broader patterns and meanings within the data. Fifthly, the themes were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure their accuracy and relevance. Next, the themes were defined and named to provide clear descriptions of their content and facilitate a better understanding of their implications. Finally, the findings of the analysis are documented in the results section.

## 5 Results

In this part of the dissertation, in-depth interviews with the employees at De Fietsambassade Gent vzw are analysed and combined with the relevant literature from the first chapter. The most common answers and findings are written down here, structured per theme. The following data were obtained from the 15 respondents.

### *De Fietsambassade general – satisfaction*

The majority of the respondents (14 respondents) are very satisfied with their job at De Fietsambassade Gent. 13 respondents answered that they have not yet come to work a single

day against their will. A respondent shares reasons for his fondness for the organisation. ***“Ik werk hier graag door de collega’s, de werksfeer, ik kan redelijk vrij werken, krijg weinig commando’s. Onafhankelijkheid zorgt ook voor vertrouwen, ze houden geen handje vast”- “I love to work here because of the colleague’s, the work environment, I can work fairly independently, receive few commands. Independence also leads to trust, they do not hold my hand.”*** This is mainly because of their colleagues, the varied work and the social purpose of the organisation. Previous research has shown a positive relationship between job and organisational satisfaction and positive perceptions of internal communication (Men, 2014).

#### *De Fietsambassade internal communication – general*

The respondents unanimously agreed that internal communication is very important for the good functioning of an organisation, which has been confirmed by many studies (Benify, 2019; Forbes Coaches Council, 2018), regardless of whether it is a diverse organisation. In a diverse organisation, it is important to adapt the method of communication to the type of diversity, according to 4 respondents. One respondent also emphasized the importance of adapting to the situation, even within the departments of De Fietsambassade. This finding was confirmed by Sedej and Justinek (2013). A respondent stated this quote: ***“Communicatie is overal belangrijk maar hier is de manier waarop je communiceert belangrijk omdat taal soms een probleem is, cultuur... allemaal factoren waar je rekening moet mee houden in de communicatie.”- “Communication is important everywhere, but here the way you communicate is crucial because language can sometimes be a problem, culture... all factors that you have to take into account in communication.”***

Generally, the communication is open. Everyone can find each other’s contact information such as phone numbers for smooth communication. There is a very flat structure and everyone is easily approachable.

While some think (2 respondents) that there is no communication at all, others (6 respondents) appreciate and acknowledge that much attention is paid to internal communication at de Fietsambassade Gent. However, according to them, a certain framework or logical structure is lacking, making communication appear chaotic. This chaotic

nature is also related to the fact that meetings must be conducted when they are planned. Freedom is nice, but 6 respondents struggles that there is no real framework or structure to fall back on. Meetings are frequently not documented or notes are not made available for reference afterward, despite evidence supporting the usefulness of creating and retrieving meeting reports for subsequent sessions (Ramler & Raadgers, 2017).

#### *Formal communication*

Regarding the frequency of meetings, most respondents were satisfied or had no strong opinions (13 respondents). Team meetings occurred fairly frequently, as a weekly or biweekly event. Team coaches find it difficult to gather everyone together, therefore meetings do not always take place and it can take a long time before there is another information session. A report is not always drawn up from these meetings or the report is not followed up.

A minority of respondents (5 respondents) attends OMI. OMI is a meeting with all employees that takes place twice a year where policy and future plans are discussed. Many people cannot attend these meetings because they take place during working hours, which means that not everyone is at work because of the different shifts and the Bike Points are often too busy to miss someone to attend this meeting (6 respondents). A minority is not interested in this cross-team meeting (4 respondents). A respondent who wants to attend OMI but is mostly too busy working said: ***“Jammer dat er enkel rekening wordt gehouden wanneer het beste past voor de mensen op bureau terwijl wij bv woensdag namiddag en vrijdag gesloten zijn”- “It's unfortunate that consideration is only given when it best suits the people in the office, while, for example, we are closed on Wednesday afternoons and Fridays.”***

#### *Informal communication*

Informal communication consists of monthly after works, a biannual team day and WhatsApp groups. The team day is almost unanimously looking forward to (14 respondents). Respondents say ***“Ik wil het voor geen geld van de wereld missen”- “I would not want to miss it for all the money in the world.”*** 3 respondents did cite the pity that teams still creep together rather than getting to know people across teams. One respondent said she really enjoyed the team day itself but rightly carded that ***“Fysieke activiteiten zijn voor velen niet***



**leuk**" - *"Activities with too much physicality are not fun for many"*. Team day is a moment in a diverse organisation where everyone is or seems more easily approachable. Berger (2018) confirms the importance of leaders' visibility.

Respondents from the Bike Points and the Bike Depot hardly have any contact with the other locations, although they do have positive feelings towards these people on the team day, for example. They think this is unfortunate but blame this on the fact that **"iedereen heeft zijn werk"** - *"everyone has their own work"* (3 respondents). One respondent reported having taken part in an internal project with the aim of getting to know each other and improving communication. He says that this project made him feel better about the organisation and more in touch with people at other locations.

The Bike Depot team often uses WhatsApp in the work context as they often work on the road. Pictures are posted of the work they have delivered or questions in case of ambiguity.

Informal communication plays a vital role at De Fietsambassade. While this holds great importance, relying solely on informal communication is not feasible. Formal communication should remain the central aspect of overall communication practices. This viewpoint had been emphasized from an academic perspective (Daniels et al., 1997). A respondent said: **"Het mens-op-mens netwerk werkt momenteel heel goed. Informele communicatie is als de lijm voor de communicatie, waar de formele communicatie de vaste substantie is."** - *"The person-to-person network is currently functioning very well. Informal communication acts as the glue for communication, while formal communication serves as the solid substance."*

*Internal newsletter 't Ambassadeurke*

In general, everyone is satisfied with the internal newsletter 't Ambassadeurke, although according to 2 respondents, it could be more light-hearted from time to time. Not everyone can always understand all the terms and jargon used. For example, when it talks about "project working", this seems like a simple word for the people in the office but is not that easy to understand for all employees. The same applies when discussing a crank set. People in the Bike Points and Bike Depot understand what this is, but this is not as easy for people in the Head Office Kattenberg. Smith (2008) agrees that injudicious use of jargon to the wrong

audience can be alienating. 3 respondents are not interested in the content of 't Ambassadeurke and as a result, do not read it. A respondent who is enthusiast about 't Ambassadeurke says: ***“Het is interessant om te weten waar de andere collega's mee bezig zijn en wat de projecten zijn die op til staan”- “It is interesting to know what other colleagues are working on and what projects are in the pipeline”.***

#### *Electronic communication*

As Koeleman (2018) wrote: 'Management often wrongly thinks that everyone can be informed with a news release on intranet'. In the case of De Fietsambassade Gent, it is not intranet but email, but the message remains the same. Just because information is disseminated quickly and is undistorted does not mean that the intended target group receives and processes it. There are three reasons for this at De Fietsambassade Gent. Firstly, people who are employed for no longer than a certain period do not get an email address so they already cannot pass on certain information like 't Ambassadeurke. Secondly, not all employees use their work email address regularly (4 respondents), this mainly concerns those doing executive work. Finally, there are also employees who do not read 't Ambassadeurke out of lack of time, lack of interest or because emails from De Fietsambassade Gent end up in the spam folder (5 respondents). The fact that electronic communication is not self-evident for everyone has to do with diversity. A respondent said the following about people who do not receive 't Ambassadeurke via email: ***“Sommige mensen hun mailadres staan erin, sommige niet. Niemand checkt wie er in deze lijst zit.” – “Some people have their email addresses included, while others do not. Nobody checks who is on this list.”***

#### *Channels*

For the target group who performs executive work and consequently spend less time on their work computer, the use of multiple channels creates ambiguity. There is no clarity on which channels are used with which message, resulting in messages getting lost (2 respondents). One respondent said it as follows: ***“Er zijn zeer veel verschillende informatiekkanalen, zeer veel vormen van media en daarom is het verwarrend wat je voor wat moet gebruiken.”-***

*“There are numerous information channels and various forms of media, which can lead to confusion regarding the appropriate usage for each.”*

This is confirmed by Hewitt (2006) and Sutton et al.(2022), the ability to distribute information quickly and easily can lead to information overload and overreliance on technology-based channels at the expense of face-to-face communication.

#### *Confidential counsellors*

The confidential counsellors are well known to the respondents (13 respondents know them) but only a small percentage of them would go to them for questions or problems (7 respondents). This is because people prefer their immediate supervisor or someone with whom they have a more personal relationship. In addition to their role as confidential counsellors, they also have other responsibilities within De Fietsambassade, which can create ambiguity about the specific role they are acting in. In addition, respondents are also unaware of what they can turn to their manager for, and for which issues it is best to turn to a confidential counsellor. As one respondent put it: ***“Ik denk dat mensen zich buitengesloten kunnen voelen omdat het niet duidelijk is wie welke verantwoordelijkheid heeft.”*** - *“I think people can feel left out because it is not clear who has what responsibility”*.

#### *Feedback*

In general, 11 respondents were satisfied with the amount and manner in which they receive feedback. People are less enthusiastic about annual performance reviews than about their daily feedback. One respondent, who do not receives much feedback says:

***Ik heb het gevoel dat alles dat kan gezegd worden wordt opgespaard tot het ene jaarlijkse functioneringsgesprek, terwijl als er iets goed of slecht is, kan je dat gewoon zeggen op het moment zelf. Achteraf bij een functioneringsgesprek denk ik: je hebt ook maar iets moeten verzinnen zeker.-***  
*I feel like everything that can be said is saved up for the annual performance review, whereas if there is something good or bad, you can just say it in the moment.*

*Afterwards, during a performance review, I think you probably just had to come up with something.*

In people where this was less the case, respondents acknowledged that this depends heavily on the direct supervisor and was nothing that should be directed by team communication or the policymakers.

#### *Flow of information*

The flow of information is the biggest struggle for communication in De Fietsambassade Gent. Within the teams, this runs well and everyone indicates being sufficiently informed, but at the policy level it runs rougher, according to 10 respondents. If employees look for information, they always find it and communication is very open, but that is part of the bigger problem. Employees prefer information to come to them instead of having to go looking for it. Most employees (10 respondents) are strongly interested in knowing what is going on at De Fietsambassade Gent.

This problem is divided into two issues. On the one hand, there is the feeling that decisions are made over their heads and, on the other hand, the feeling that information does not always flow through (on time) to the people for whom it is necessary to be informed. In 10 of the 15 interviews, it emerged that they feel decisions are made over their heads. This is related to policy issues and matters decided in CRANK meetings. There is dissatisfaction that decisions are made without participation or without those making the decision having practical knowledge of the specific subject. People performing executive work indicate that the policy makers lack insight into and understanding of their work. By visiting more often, better decisions can be made and people could more easily give a say. Some respondents also feel that they cannot always give their input or that they do not know how their ideas can get through to the policymakers. As one respondent aptly put it: ***“De waarde van input wordt soms enigszins onderschat. Op de hoogte zijn van veel zaken werkt motiverend. Soms denk ik dat ik een goed idee heb over iets, maar als ik te laat op de hoogte word gebracht, kan ik niet bijdragen aan het oplossen van het probleem.”*** - *“The value of input is sometimes somewhat underestimated. Being aware of a lot of things works motivating. I sometimes*

*think I have a good idea about something but if I am informed too late I cannot contribute to resolving the problem”.*

Secondly, information does not always flow through the right channels or on time. One respondent described this as follows: **“Als je met veel mensen samenwerkt en mensen vangen iets op, dan loopt het niet altijd via de juiste hiërarchie of kanalen terug”- “If you work with a lot of people and people catch something, it does not always flow back through the right hierarchy or channels”.** The informal network is strong but not many appreciate it when essential information come to them that long way, often too late and by chance. In some cases, employees only get to know about a novelty of De Fietsambassade Gent because external people mention it to them or because the employee subscribes to the external newsletter. This means that the outside world knows about it faster than internal working (2 respondents). This creates uncomfortable situations and an unprofessional image. According to 2 respondents, things occasionally go wrong in work communication among themselves and messages are communicated late without considering the other team’s schedule. This happens exceptionally but causes frustration and stress. Respondents find it important to work together and try to understand each other. A respondent stated this quote: **“Wat doet de andere persoon, waarom doen we het, laten we het samen doen”-“What does the other person do, why do we do it, let’s do it together.”**

#### *Diverse communication*

At team level, diverse communication run well. Team coaches see this as their job to translate between Head Office Kattenberg and their team. According to one respondent, team communication is not supposed to translate for everyone, but this is the task of team communication. He says about this: **“Communicatiemensen zijn te veel bureaumensen om de vertaalslag te maken”- “Communication professionals are too desk-oriented to make the translation effectively.”** Another respondent expressed a different opinion, namely that he thinks all communication-related tasks are reserved for team communication and they should also engage in more on-the-field communication. At this moment, team communication looks for a compromise so that it is understandable to most employees. A personal connection and

knowledge of the person with whom you communicate, are particularly important in diverse communication.

One respondent said the following:

***“Probeer te communiceren; is het allerbelangrijkste. Welke manier maakt niet uit; liefst persoonlijk. Lukt persoonlijk niet, doe het dan op een andere manier.”- “Try to communicate, that is the most important thing. In what way does not matter, preferably in person. If personal does not work, do it in another way. It is sometimes a bit of a struggle and explaining things with “hand and feet”, but in the end we get there.”***

Another respondent said ***“om diversiteit aan te spreken, moet je ook divers communiceren”- “to appeal to diversity, you also have to communicate diversely”***. Diversity in communication channels is crucial as there is no one universal method. By varying the way of communication, including tone, channel, and approach, it is possible to effectively reach and engage different individuals.

## 6 Conclusion

This research aims to provide an answer to the question: "How is internal communication best managed in a diverse organisation?" This inquiry was investigated through qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted at De Fietsambassade Gent, an organisation characterised by diversity.

From this study, it can be concluded that employees of De Fietsambassade Gent are, in general, satisfied with the internal communication within their team but however, there are some frustrations regarding policy information and information flowing through from Head Office Kattenberg to the Bike Points and Bike Depot.

The task information flows well and is effectively managed. Everyone felt that they have enough information to do their jobs properly. In policy information, there are the most frustrations. There is a sense of ignorance in terms of policy. Information on general direction, new projects etc. does not flow well to all layers of the organisation. There were no real

questions about knowledge management in the interviews but this can be inferred from the fact that everyone is easily approachable and that there are no difficulties in this area. Finally, social information. Social information is largely disseminated through the internal newsletter 't Ambassadeurke and WhatsApp groups. Formal and informal communication are strongly interfered but for De Fietsambassade, informal communication is the predominant channel.

While diversity is present within the organisation, it may not be explicitly evident in internal communication practices. Instead, direct managers are primarily responsible for conveying information accurately and appropriately. Furthermore, the management of diversity in internal communication is highly dependent on the specific forms of diversity present within the organisation, as each form may require a distinct approach.

## **6.1 Restrictions and suggestions for further research**

Like any research, this thesis contains limitations due to the choices that had to be made about the scope. Fifteen individuals from various locations were interviewed, which is considered sufficient to achieve data saturation. However, if more time were available, it would have been possible to include individuals who are more difficult to reach, such as those engaged in temporary employment. To expand on these findings, future research could administer a large-scale, anonymous quantitative survey to all employees, using the initial interview findings as a foundation.

While this study focuses on the case of De Fietsambassade Gent, conducting a comparative analysis among diverse organisations characterised by diversity would enhance its breadth. This approach would facilitate a benchmark study and the formulation of best practices. Indeed, in further research, it is possible to narrow down the focus on diversity to a specific element, such as the distinction between leadership positions and non-leadership job positions. This approach would allow for a more in-depth exploration of how internal communication strategies and practices can be tailored to address the specific needs and challenges associated with that aspect of diversity.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the research scope was limited by the necessity to delimit the concept of "diversity." Different forms of diversity may also create

different needs in terms of internal communication. (Araújo & Miranda, 2020). Thus, exploring alternative dimensions of diversity would enrich the understanding of this topic.

## 7 Recommendations

This section attempts to draw some recommendations for internal communication in an organisation characterised by diversity. The themes of the analysis and results correspond to the themes below. The theme of diversity is interwoven in all the recommendations.

### *Formal communication*

To keep everyone informed, also people who do not own an email address or do not check 't Ambassadeurke, put a calendar at each location showing the events taking place in the organisation such as a farewell party or a meeting. The calendar can be completed by anyone but the person in charge ensures that all the important items are on it. In the future, this will appear on digital boards and team communications will also be able to add reminders to this automatically.

To prevent loss of information, a report is made of each meeting and posted on the parent computer desk. This information is available for everyone and in addition, each location with people without Internet prints his own reports so that everyone can check it afterwards.

To plan things such as the OMI as many people as possible should be able to attend. If it is not possible to close all locations so that everyone can be present, it is important to not only look at the availability of one location (often Head Office Kattenberg) but at the whole. The topics that need to be addressed include the organisation's goals, opportunities, threats, as well as short-term and long-term changes (Koeleman, 2018). The CRANK meetings should also be put on the calendar so that everyone knows when new decisions are made. The report of them afterwards can be found on the desk.



### *Informal communication*

At the work level, there is also some frustration related to informal communication. It is important that the different locations first coordinate internally before forwarding externally.

Team day is a popular and fun day for many, but it is important to consider everyone's qualities and to offer a wide range of activities.

### *Internal newsletter 't Ambassadeurke*

The newsletter is an important source of information, therefore, it is important that people who are less computer literate or do not consult it also get hold of this information. Therefore, it is also best to hang this newsletter in areas where employees come frequent such as the refectory. Subjects should not be too difficult but for people who want more information, they can contact the responsible.

To involve diversity, jargon can be explained in a fun way in the internal newsletter. Another idea to get to know everyone is "a day in the life of...". In this narrative, the employee takes the reader on a journey through a typical day at De Fietsambassade, providing an immersive experience of the organization's daily operations and activities. In this way, people get to know each other and the function they perform.

### *Electronic communication*

As electronic communication does not come naturally to all employees, it is important consider this. Because not every employee frequently checks their official email address of De Fietsambassade Gent, it is best to check in the welcoming procedure whether they prefer to receive the newsletter on their work email address or a private email address. Some employees do not look at any email address, so it is best to distribute 't Ambassadeurke on paper and to place it at each location where employees congregate.

### *Channels*

Within De Fietsambassade Gent, there is a multitude of channels and not really a guideline that states when which channel is most appropriate. The channels are Teams, Outlook email, WhatsApp, personal contact, telephone contact and information on paper. It is best to agree that there is only one channel for work-related information. In De Fietsambassade Gent email is recommended as the largest percentage of employees use email, this information can also be retrieved later with a clear subject in the email. People who do not use their email can best be contacted personally in combination with the information on paper.

### *Confidential counsellors*

The existence of confidential counsellors could be emphasised more by hanging their contact information up in a clearly visible place. In addition, it is still unclear for what exactly these confidential counsellors can be contacted so an overview should be given for what issue the employee best goes to his manager or for what manner to the confidential counsellor.

### *Flow of information*

The biggest point of frustration is the information flow. The recommendation is that a certain structure should be offered. Owing to a lack of structure and set procedures, information gets lost. This can be resolved by using an intranet platform. The difficulty in implementing this is that De Fietsambassade is used to a flat structure with open communication so new rules may face opposition (Pardo del Val & Fuentes, 2003).

Another recommendation in this theme is that planned meetings should proceed, even though not everyone can be present. It is also important that meetings are followed up in a report and put in a place where it can be reread. In these meetings, it is the responsibility of the team coaches to pass information that was discussed in the meetings they attended to keep everyone informed.

To avoid in the future that externals discover certain matters earlier, the external newsletter should be sent to all employees who are interested, or all elements of the external newsletter should be included in the internal newsletter.

#### *Diverse communication*

In a diverse organisation, it is important people get to know each other and what exactly makes people “diverse” so that personal communication can be adapted to that. Differences should be considered when communicating, both formal and informal. This means that everyone makes other interpretations, people have other knowledge so organisation-wide communication cannot be too detailed but should offer the possibility to dig deeper into the subject if wanted. Not everyone uses the Internet and email often so all communication in a diverse organisation should also be done on paper as much as possible.

#### *Other*

These recommendations are general in nature and supported by the literature and can push the general feeling about internal communication in a positive direction.

It is important to regularly survey internal communication. This should not be a large survey as it will put people off but rather in the form of a short poll. Employees appreciate it when they are listened to and feel more connected to the organisation as a result. This will also ensure better performance and more satisfied employees. Foma (2014) agreed that the evaluation of diversity (here combined with internal communication) is an important part of management. It helps identify challenges and obstacles and evaluates and adjusts as needed.

The final recommendation is to place a suggestion box at each location. If, for any reason, employees find it difficult to express themselves verbally, an idea box can be a helpful solution. In addition, to share frustrations or criticism, people are often inhibited from sharing it in group or in person. In this bus, employees can express their ideas, suggestions and frustrations through a written and anonymous message (Farnum, Baird, & Ball, 2011).

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## 9 Annexes

### 9.1 Interview guide

#### INLEIDING

Dankjewel voor je tijd. Het komende halfuur ga ik je wat vragen stellen over de interne communicatie hier bij De Fietsambassade. Het is zeker niet de bedoeling om er enkel vraag-antwoord van te maken, maar je mag mij altijd onderbreken en iets toevoegen.

Aan de hand van de interviews bij de verschillende afdelingen hoop ik wat tips en suggesties te kunnen voorstellen.

Mag ik dit gesprek opnemen? Alles zal volledig vertrouwelijk behandeld worden, ik zal dus nergens je naam of functie vermelden

## ALGEMENE INFO

Ik zou graag beginnen met wat algemene informatie over jezelf:

- (naam)
- Hoe oud ben je?
- (geslacht)
- Wat is je moedertaal?

## ALGEMENE INFO FUNCTIE FIETSAMBASSADE

- Hoe lang werk je hier al?
- Wat is je functie binnen de Fietsambassade?  
Wat houdt dit dan precies in?
- Wie is jouw "baas"? Van wie ben jij leidinggevende?

## VRAGEN OVER INTERNE COMMUNICATIE FIETSAMBASSADE

- Wat is de Fietsambassade? Hoe zou je de organisatie uitleggen aan een vriend?
- Werk je hier graag? Waarom wel/ niet?
- Vind je interne communicatie belangrijk?
- Ben je blij met hoe de communicatie momenteel is?
- Kan je altijd alles begrijpen?
  - Zo nee, hoe komt dit? (bepaalde barrières?)

## KANAAL

- Op welke manier communiceer je formeel met je collega's? (teamoverleggen...)
- Op welke manier communiceer je informeel met je collega's?
- Welke vergaderingen volg je allemaal mee? Zijn deze interessant voor jou?
  - Hoe vaak gaan die door?
- Ga je naar de algemene vergadering met iedereen? Waarom wel/niet?
- Ken je 't Ambassadeurke? (interne nieuwsbrief)
  - Lees je het? Waarom wel/ niet?
  - Wat vind je ervan?
- Gebruik je de mailbox van De Fietsambassade?
  - Zo ja, waarom vooral?

- Hoe vaak raadpleeg je dat dan?
- Ga je naar de afterwork/ teamdag?
  - Waarom wel/ niet?
- Weet je bij wie je terecht kunt als er iets is? Zowel op het werk als daarbuiten?

## INHOUD

- Welke boodschappen krijg je meestal? Vind je die interessant?

## FEEDBACK

- Hoe vaak krijg je feedback?
  - Op welke manier wordt dit dan gecommuniceerd?
  - Is deze feedback opbouwend?

## AFSLUITENDE VRAGEN

- Wat vind je goed aan de interne communicatie?
- Wat vind je minder goed aan de interne communicatie?
- Denk je dat interne communicatie even belangrijk is in een diverse organisatie of een organisatie waar diversiteit minder van belang is?
- Heb je nog tips/ vragen/ opmerkingen?

## 9.2 Informed consent

Dit onderzoek gaat over de interne communicatie in een organisatie gekenmerkt door diversiteit, in dit geval De Fietsambassade.

Als participant:

- Heb ik het recht heb om mij op elk moment tijdens het onderzoek, om welke reden dan ook, en zonder verantwoording terug te trekken
- Heb ik het recht om toegang te krijgen tot mijn data
- Heb ik het recht om een rapport te vragen van mijn data
- Ga ik akkoord dat het interview wordt opgenomen

Door dit document te ondertekenen , erken ik bovenstaande informatie goed gelezen en begrepen te hebben. De data verkregen door dit interview mag bewaard, geanalyseerd en gerapporteerd worden, maar dit steeds op een anonieme manier. Bovendien neem ik volledig vrijwillig deel aan dit interview.

Ondergetekende,

.....

### 9.3 Codebook

Name	Files	References
1 - Internal communication = important	10	10
1- Afterwork	0	0
fun	6	6



Name	Files	References
Not necessary	2	2
Did not know	1	1
1- Ambassadeurke	0	0
No interest	3	3
Read it, nice	7	7
Not everyone receives it	2	2
Too few inputs from all locations	2	3
1- Communication above head	10	16
1- Confidential counsellors	0	0
Do not know	2	2
know and go	7	7
know, do not go	6	6

Name	Files	References
1- Diverse communication	4	8
1- effort to communicate	6	6
1- Email	0	0
Check not often	1	1
no email address	4	4
often	7	8
1- Everyone has own work	3	3
1- Feedback good	11	11
feedback not good	4	4
1- Interested in Fietsambassade	10	7
1- Channels	2	3
Good	2	2

Name	Files	References
Many channels	2	2
1- Love to work here	13	13
1- Meetings good	5	5
too many	2	2
1- No communication	2	2
1- Not many communications between locations	8	11
1- OMI	0	0
Go - interested	5	5
Do not go – no interest	4	4
Interest – cannot go	6	6
1- Open communication	8	12
1- Team day	6	6

Name	Files	References
1- Few structure	6	11
No reports of meetings	3	3
1- WhatsApp depot	3	3
1- Another mother tongue	1	1
1- Accessibility	6	7
1- Better than before	1	1
1- Communication in team	4	10
1- Communication Head Office – Bike Points – Bike Depot	12	29
1-Contact job coaches	2	3
1- Physical distance	2	3
1-Lack of reception policy	1	1
1- ‘Kantelaarsgroep’	1	1

Name	Files	References
1-Meer informele dan formele communicatie	1	2
1-Dutch mother tongue	12	12
1-OMI not directly interesting	4	4
1-Personal communication	2	3
1-Political interference	3	3
1-Variation in communication	1	1
1-Freedom	4	4
1-WhatsApp informal communication	7	12

## 9.4 Example 't Ambassadeurke

### Nieuws medewerkers

We verwelkomen een nieuwe medewerker bij De Fietsambassade: **Ayhan** , Welkom!

Enkele collega's veranderen van job of van traject: **Kiano** Waeytens werkt sinds 26 april in Fietspunt Kattenberg en niet meer in Fietspunt Onder De Krook.

We zwaaien ook enkele collega's uit: **Hanne** Vaernewyck (fietstaxi), **Björn** Braeckman (Fietspunt Kattenberg), **Christian** Lucas (Fietsendepot), **Marijke** Van Heurck (BIDON) en **Jan Mohammed** Nassiri (Fietsendepot) nemen afscheid van De Fietsambassade. Heel erg bedankt voor jullie inzet, we wensen jullie veel succes verder!

### Feest 1 jaar Fietstaxi

**Dinsdag 16 mei** bestaat de fietstaxi 1 jaar en we geven een feest!

We organiseren een fietstocht langs belangrijke plaatsen voor de fietstaxi. We sluiten af met een hapje en een drankje.

Iedereen kan mee. Heb je zelf geen fiets of kan je niet (zelfstandig) fietsen?

Schrijf je in en we zoeken samen naar de juiste fiets, riksja of andere oplossing.

Vragen? Mail [fietstaxi.defietsambassade@stad.gent](mailto:fietstaxi.defietsambassade@stad.gent) of bel Saar: [0479 35 65 82](tel:0479356582).

### Evenementen & promomateriaal

Organiseer je een evenement en wil je hiervoor promomateriaal van De Fietsambassade gebruiken? De max!

**Over welk materiaal gaat het?**

Beachvlaggen, stoepborden, partytenten, promobakfiets, regenjassen, parasols.

**Wat moet ik doen om dit te gebruiken?**

Reserveer het materiaal. Stuur hiervoor een mailtje naar [wouter.vanhoutte@stad.gent](mailto:wouter.vanhoutte@stad.gent). Hij bekijkt samen met jou wat mogelijk is en zet het materiaal klaar.