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**Internal Communication and Employee Engagement
Strategies in Finnish Public Relations**

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Internal Communication and Employee Engagement Strategies in Finnish Public Relations

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to explore internal communication and employee engagement strategies in Finnish public relations.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the internal communication and employee engagement strategies in Finnish public relations. preliminary empirical review revealed that transparent internal communication emerged as a pivotal factor influencing employee engagement, with organizations emphasizing open, honest,

and frequent communication witnessing higher engagement levels. Cultural factors play a significant role, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies that align with cultural nuances. Leadership communication proves instrumental in driving engagement, highlighting the importance of leadership development programs focused on communication skills and fostering trust.

Recommendations: Improving internal communication and employee engagement strategies in public relations requires a multifaceted approach that considers transparency, cultural nuances, leadership communication, sustainability initiatives, and cross-functional collaboration. Organizations that heed these recommendations are more likely to foster a culture of engagement, leading to higher productivity, employee satisfaction, and overall business success

Keywords: *Transparency, Collaboration, Feedback, Well-being & Sustainability*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Employee Engagement is a critical component of organizational success, as it directly impacts employee productivity, job satisfaction, and overall business outcomes. It is essential for organizations to monitor and analyze trends in employee engagement using statistical data to make informed decisions and implement strategies that enhance workplace satisfaction. By examining recent research and studies, we can gain insights into the trends and factors influencing employee engagement in the contemporary workplace. Several recent studies have explored the trends in employee engagement through statistical analysis. There was a significant upward trend in employee engagement over the past two years (Smith and Jones, 2021). Only 20% of employees worldwide feel engaged in their jobs (Gallup's State of the Global Workplace, 2021). This statistic underscores the global challenge of low employee engagement, highlighting the need for organizations to focus on strategies that can boost engagement levels and ultimately improve productivity and business outcomes.

Finnish organizations focused on the relationship between remote work and employee engagement (Johnson, 2020). The study employed correlation analysis to reveal a positive correlation between flexible work arrangements and higher levels of employee engagement. These findings highlight the importance of adapting to changing work patterns. Another study by Brown and Wilson (2019) investigated the impact of leadership behavior on employee engagement. Using statistical techniques such as hierarchical linear modeling, they demonstrated that transformational leadership positively influences employee engagement. This underscores the role of leadership in shaping engagement levels within organizations. Variations in engagement trends across sectors, with the technology sector experiencing the highest increases. Such insights can guide organizations in tailoring engagement strategies to suit their specific industry context. Employee engagement levels tend to fluctuate cyclically, with certain periods of the year showing higher levels of engagement (Taylor and Clark, 2017)

Employee engagement is a critical factor in the success of organizations across developed economies such as the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom. In the United States, for instance, only 32% of employees were engaged in their jobs, indicating room for improvement (Harter and Adkins, 2015). In recent years, companies like Google have set an example by implementing innovative strategies to boost engagement, such as offering flexible work arrangements and focusing on employee well-being. These approaches have led to a notable increase in employee engagement levels within the tech industry, demonstrating the positive impact of tailored engagement initiatives.

In Japan, known for its strong work culture, employee engagement has traditionally been high. However, recent statistics indicate a changing landscape. Japan has seen a decline in employee engagement, with only 54% of employees reporting high levels of engagement, down from 68% in previous years (Fujimoto and Kurosawa, 2017). This decline has prompted Japanese companies to reevaluate their traditional work practices and introduce more flexible working arrangements to rekindle engagement levels. Companies like Toyota have started implementing remote work options and employee empowerment initiatives, aiming to adapt to the evolving expectations of the workforce while maintaining high levels of engagement.

Finland, often recognized for its high standard of living and strong social welfare system, has experienced relatively stable employee engagement trends. Finland consistently maintains an

employee engagement rate above 70% (Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2022). This high level of engagement can be attributed to Finland's focus on work-life balance, extensive social support systems, and a strong culture of trust and collaboration within organizations.

In developing economies, the landscape of employee engagement is evolving rapidly. Take India, for example, where the IT industry has been a significant driver of economic growth. In the Indian IT sector, employee engagement levels have steadily increased over the past five years, with 65% of employees reporting high engagement in 2020, compared to 52% in 2015. This growth can be attributed to companies' investments in learning and development programs and initiatives that foster a sense of purpose among employees (Raju & Srivastava, 2019).

Similarly, in Brazil, employee engagement has been on the rise in industries such as banking and finance. Engagement levels in these sectors increased from 45% to 58% between 2016 and 2018, indicating a positive trend. Companies like Banco Bradesco have implemented strategies such as career development pathways and employee recognition programs to enhance engagement. These statistics illustrate how organizations in developing economies are placing a growing emphasis on employee engagement to remain competitive in the global marketplace (Santos and Oliveira, 2018).

Employee engagement and international communication strategies are closely intertwined in the modern global business landscape. Employee engagement refers to the emotional commitment and active involvement of employees in their work and the organization as a whole. Effective international communication strategies are crucial for fostering and maintaining employee engagement in multinational corporations. When employees across different geographical locations feel connected, informed, and valued, their engagement levels tend to be higher. Communication creates a sense of belonging and shared purpose among geographically dispersed employees. Global organizations that invest in robust international communication strategies, including regular updates on company-wide goals, cultural sensitivities, and cross-border collaboration initiatives, tend to have more engaged employees. These communication efforts help employees understand the company's vision and values, no matter where they are located, fostering a sense of alignment and commitment (Wang and Noe, 2017).

Furthermore, the feedback loop between employee engagement and international communication strategies is crucial. Engaged employees are more likely to actively participate in communication initiatives, providing valuable insights and input on how to improve international communication. This collaborative approach not only strengthens employee engagement but also enhances the effectiveness of communication strategies by ensuring they are tailored to the needs and preferences of a diverse, global workforce (Rehman, 2019). Therefore, the synergy between employee engagement and international communication strategies is essential for creating a unified, motivated, and globally connected workforce.

Effective internal communication plays a pivotal role in fostering employee engagement within Finnish public relations organizations. Research has consistently shown that transparent and open communication channels contribute significantly to employees feeling valued and connected to their workplaces (Bergström & Leivonen, 2019). Finnish PR firms that prioritize internal communication strategies create an environment where employees are informed about organizational goals, updates, and developments. When employees feel informed and involved,

their sense of belonging and commitment to the organization is heightened, leading to increased engagement levels (Kuoppala, Näätänen, & Mauno, 2018). By actively involving employees in decision-making processes and maintaining clear lines of communication, Finnish public relations companies can cultivate a culture of engagement that positively impacts employee satisfaction, productivity, and overall organizational success.

Moreover, employee engagement in Finnish public relations is closely linked to the perceived authenticity of internal communication efforts. Authentic communication practices, such as honest and sincere messaging, build trust and credibility between management and employees (Mäkinen & Honkanen, 2020). When PR firms in Finland emphasize authenticity in their internal communications, employees are more likely to align with the organization's values and objectives. This alignment, in turn, boosts employee engagement as individuals identify with the organization's mission and feel a sense of purpose (Vuontisjärvi, Salo, & Sulkunen, 2021). In summary, the integration of effective internal communication and authenticity within Finnish public relations not only enhances employee engagement but also strengthens the overall reputation and performance of PR agencies in the country.

Problem Statement

In the realm of Finnish public relations, the relationship between internal communication strategies and employee engagement is a critical concern. Organizations in Finland, like those worldwide, strive to foster engaged and motivated employees as they play a pivotal role in achieving organizational success. While the significance of internal communication and employee engagement is widely acknowledged, there exists a conceptual gap in understanding the specific dynamics and strategies that can optimize these elements within the unique Finnish context. On the ground, organizations in Finland are grappling with a range of internal communication challenges, including issues related to transparency, cross-functional collaboration, and employee feedback mechanisms. There is a growing body of anecdotal evidence suggesting that traditional communication approaches may not fully resonate with Finnish employees, and there is a need to explore tailored strategies that align with Finnish culture and values. Additionally, organizations are seeking empirical evidence linking specific internal communication practices to enhanced employee engagement outcomes within the Finnish context (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

The exact problem lies in the lack of comprehensive research and empirical evidence on the effectiveness of internal communication and employee engagement strategies in Finnish public relations. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of these factors, there is a dearth of studies that examine their interplay and impact within the Finnish organizational landscape. This knowledge gap is particularly problematic for organizations operating in Finland, as they lack actionable insights into how to design and implement internal communication strategies that resonate with Finnish employees, leading to suboptimal levels of employee engagement and potential adverse effects on organizational performance.

The problem is twofold. Firstly, it is a problem for Finnish organizations striving to improve their internal communication practices and employee engagement levels. These organizations face challenges in aligning their communication approaches with the cultural nuances and expectations of Finnish employees, hindering their ability to create a motivated and engaged workforce. Secondly, it is a problem for the field of public relations research, which lacks a robust body of literature examining the specific dynamics of internal communication and employee engagement

in the Finnish context. This knowledge gap hinders the development of evidence-based strategies that can benefit both practitioners and researchers (Patel & Das, 2021)

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that Finland has a unique cultural and linguistic landscape, characterized by a strong emphasis on transparency, collaboration, and a bilingual population (Finnish and Swedish). As such, there is a pressing need to bridge the existing research gap by conducting empirical studies that explore the effectiveness of internal communication and employee engagement strategies tailored to the Finnish context. To address this knowledge gap, future research should focus on conducting empirical studies that examine the relationship between internal communication practices and employee engagement outcomes within Finnish organizations (Tanaka, & Sato,2020). These studies should consider the cultural and linguistic nuances specific to Finland and provide actionable insights for organizations seeking to enhance their internal communication strategies in a way that resonates with Finnish employees.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory, originally developed by George Homans (1958) and later expanded upon by Peter Blau (1964), posits that human behavior is rooted in a system of reciprocal exchanges. It suggests that individuals engage in actions and relationships that yield rewards and minimize costs. In the context of internal communication and employee engagement, Social Exchange Theory is relevant because it helps us understand how employees perceive their relationship with the organization. When employees receive valuable information, recognition, and support through effective internal communication, they are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement and commitment.

Self-Determination Theory

Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985), Self-Determination Theory focuses on human motivation and the innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It asserts that individuals are most engaged and motivated when they feel a sense of autonomy and control over their actions, competence in their tasks, and a connection to others. This theory is pertinent to the topic as it explains how internal communication strategies that promote employee autonomy, provide opportunities for skill development (competence), and foster positive relationships within the organization can enhance employee engagement. When employees feel their basic psychological needs are met, they are more likely to be engaged and satisfied in their roles.

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication

Two-Way Symmetrical Communication, introduced by James Grunig and Todd Hunt (1984), emphasizes that effective communication should not only disseminate information from the organization to employees but also facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding. It promotes transparency, trust, and a balance of power in communication processes. This theory is highly relevant to the topic of internal communication and employee engagement. By fostering open and transparent communication channels that allow for feedback, concerns, and ideas to flow both ways, organizations can build trust, enhance employee morale, and create an environment where employees feel valued and engaged.

Empirical Review

Smith & Jones (2020) examined the impact of internal communication on employee engagement and organizational performance in a public relations agency. A mixed-methods approach consisting of a survey of 100 employees and 10 semi-structured interviews with managers and leaders were used. The results showed that internal communication was positively related to employee engagement and organizational performance, and that the quality, frequency, and channels of communication were important factors influencing these outcomes. The study suggested that the agency should invest in improving its internal communication practices, such as providing regular feedback, fostering a culture of openness and trust, and using multiple and interactive communication channels.

Kim & Lee (2021) explored the effects of internal communication and employee engagement strategies on public relations outcomes, such as reputation, trust, and stakeholder relationships. A qualitative case study of a public relations campaign conducted by a nonprofit organization that aimed to raise awareness and funds for a social cause. The study revealed that the organization used various internal communication and employee engagement strategies, such as involving employees in the campaign planning and execution, creating a sense of shared purpose and identity, and rewarding and recognizing employee contributions. These strategies enhanced the employees' commitment, motivation, and advocacy for the cause, which in turn improved the public relations outcomes. The study recommended that nonprofit organizations should adopt internal communication and employee engagement strategies that align with their mission and values, and that foster a sense of belonging and empowerment among employees.

Liu & Zhang (2020) investigated the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement in the context of organizational change in a public relations firm. A longitudinal survey of 150 employees before, during, and after a major organizational change initiative that involved restructuring, downsizing, and merging with another firm. The study found that internal communication was a key determinant of employee engagement during organizational change, and that different aspects of communication, such as clarity, consistency, timeliness, and transparency, had different effects on employee engagement at different stages of change. The study advised that public relations firms should adopt a strategic and proactive approach to internal communication during organizational change, and that they should tailor their communication to the specific needs and expectations of employees at different phases of change.

Smith & Johnson (2019) investigated the relationship between transparent internal communication practices and employee engagement within Finnish public relations contexts. Specifically, it seeks to identify the extent to which transparent communication influences employee engagement levels in Finnish organizations. To achieve this, a mixed-method approach was employed. Initially, surveys were distributed to a diverse sample of employees across various Finnish organizations. The surveys included questions about their perceptions of the transparency of internal communication, as well as their self-reported levels of engagement. Subsequently, qualitative interviews are conducted with select employees to gather in-depth insights into their experiences and opinions regarding transparent communication. Data was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify patterns and correlations. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between transparent internal communication and higher levels of employee engagement. Employees who perceived communication as transparent were more likely to be engaged with their work and the organization as a whole. Based findings, it was recommended

that Finnish organizations prioritize and enhance their transparent communication practices. This included clear and honest communication about organizational changes, strategies, and performance. Additionally, organizations should encourage open channels for feedback and employee participation in decision-making processes.

Tanaka & Smith (2021) explored the influence of cultural factors on employee engagement within the public relations domain by conducting a comparative analysis between Japan and the UK. The objective was to understand how cultural nuances impact the drivers of employee engagement in these two diverse cultural contexts. To achieve this goal, a mixed-method approach was adopted. Cross-cultural surveys were distributed to employees working in both Japanese and UK organizations. These surveys contained questions related to communication practices, leadership styles, and individual perceptions of engagement. Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted to gather qualitative insights into cultural influences on engagement. Data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The study found that cultural differences significantly affected the drivers of employee engagement in Japan and the UK. For instance, while autonomy and individualism played a significant role in the UK, collectivism and hierarchy are more prominent factors influencing engagement in Japan. To address these cultural disparities, organizations are advised to tailor their internal communication and engagement strategies to align with the cultural nuances of each country. This may include adjusting leadership styles, communication approaches, and recognition programs to better suit the preferences and expectations of employees in each context.

Patel & Das (2021) delved into the significance of leadership communication in driving employee engagement in the context of developing economies. The primary goal was to explore the impact of leadership communication strategies on employee engagement levels within these unique settings. To achieve this objective, a mixed-method research design was employed. Surveys were distributed among employees working in select developing economies, encompassing a diverse range of industries. These surveys gauge employees' perceptions of leadership communication practices and their self-reported levels of engagement. Additionally, content analysis was conducted on leadership communication materials, such as internal memos, speeches, and newsletters. The findings revealed that effective leadership communication positively influenced employee engagement in developing economies. Organizations with leaders who prioritize open, transparent, and frequent communication with their employees tend to have higher levels of engagement among their workforce. Organizations operating in developing economies were encouraged to invest in leadership communication training and development for their leaders. This includes enhancing leaders' abilities to communicate transparently, engage in two-way dialogue, and effectively convey the organization's mission and values. Additionally, organizations should promote a culture of open communication and encourage leaders to actively seek employee feedback and input.

Johnson & Davis (2022) investigated the relationship between employee well-being programs and internal communication practices in the United States, and how this connection influenced employee engagement. The objective was to determine if organizations that invested in employee well-being initiatives experience enhanced internal communication and, subsequently, higher levels of employee engagement. To achieve this, a quantitative research approach was employed. Surveys were distributed to employees in a diverse sample of US organizations. The surveys assessed employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of internal communication strategies and the

impact of well-being programs on their overall engagement. Statistical analyses, including regression analysis, were conducted to identify the strength of the relationships between these variables. The study found a significant positive correlation between the presence of employee well-being programs, improved internal communication practices, and higher levels of employee engagement. Organizations that prioritized employee well-being tend to experience more open and transparent communication, leading to increased engagement among employees. Based on these findings, it was recommended that US organizations continue to invest in employee well-being programs as a means of fostering a positive work environment. Simultaneously, organizations should ensure that internal communication practices align with the values and goals of their well-being initiatives to maximize their impact on employee engagement.

Walker & Evans (2022) examined the relationship between cross-functional collaboration and employee engagement within public relations agencies in the United Kingdom. The purpose was to explore how collaboration among different teams and departments influences the engagement levels of employees in this specific industry. A qualitative research design is employed in this study. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with employees from various UK public relations agencies, including representatives from different functional areas. These interviews explored their experiences and perceptions regarding collaboration within their organizations and its impact on their engagement. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring themes and patterns. The study revealed that cross-functional collaboration was a significant driver of employee engagement in UK public relations agencies. Employees who participated in collaborative efforts with colleagues from different departments reported higher levels of engagement, as they felt more connected to the organization's mission and goals. To enhance employee engagement in UK public relations agencies, organizations should actively promote cross-functional collaboration. This can be achieved by creating opportunities for teams from different areas to work together on projects, fostering a culture of information sharing, and recognizing and rewarding collaborative efforts.

Yamamoto & Suzuki (2021) investigated how sustainability initiatives undertaken by Japanese manufacturing companies influence employee engagement. Its goal was to understand if a commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility positively affected employees' engagement levels in these organizations. A mixed-method research approach was employed. Surveys were distributed to employees in Japanese manufacturing companies, assessing their perceptions of the organization's sustainability efforts and their engagement levels. Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted with selected employees to gain deeper insights into their experiences. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical techniques, while qualitative data was thematically analyzed. The study found a significant positive relationship between sustainability initiatives and employee engagement in Japanese manufacturing companies. Employees who perceived their organization as socially responsible and environmentally conscious tended to be more engaged in their work. Based on these findings, Japanese manufacturing companies are encouraged to continue their commitment to sustainability initiatives. This includes further integration of sustainable practices into organizational culture and communication strategies, as well as transparent reporting of sustainability efforts to foster a sense of pride and engagement among employees.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data

from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

4.0 FINDINGS

The study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Liu & Zhang (2020) investigated the relationship between internal communication and employee engagement in the context of organizational change in a public relations firm. A longitudinal survey of 150 employees before, during, and after a major organizational change initiative that involved restructuring, downsizing, and merging with another firm. The study found that internal communication was a key determinant of employee engagement during organizational change, and that different aspects of communication, such as clarity, consistency, timeliness, and transparency, had different effects on employee engagement at different stages of change. The study advised that public relations firms should adopt a strategic and proactive approach to internal communication during organizational change, and that they should tailor their communication to the specific needs and expectations of employees at different phases of change. On the other hand, our current study focused on the internal communication and employee engagement strategies in Finnish public relations.

Secondly, the study presented a methodological gap whereby, in their study on the challenges and opportunities of using social media in teaching and learning from the perspectives of online instructors in East African countries; Liu & Zhang (2020) adopted a longitudinal survey of 150 employees before, during, and after a major organizational change initiative that involved restructuring, downsizing, and merging with another firm. The current study on the internal communication and employee engagement strategies in Finnish public relations adopted a desk study research method.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The empirical studies conducted in this research area provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of internal communication and employee engagement strategies within public relations contexts. Firstly, it is evident that transparent internal communication plays a pivotal role in shaping employee engagement levels. The research consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between transparent communication practices and higher employee engagement. Organizations that prioritize open, honest, and frequent communication tend to have more engaged and committed employees. This underscores the importance of fostering an environment where employees feel informed, valued, and part of the decision-making processes.

Secondly, cultural factors exert a substantial influence on the strategies that organizations must adopt to enhance employee engagement. Cross-cultural studies reveal that what works in one cultural context may not be as effective in another. Organizations must tailor their communication and engagement approaches to align with cultural nuances, whether it be the individualism of Western countries or the collectivism of Asian cultures. Understanding these cultural differences is crucial for crafting effective internal communication strategies that resonate with employees and foster engagement. The studies also highlighted the significance of leadership communication in

driving employee engagement. Effective leadership communication practices, such as active listening, providing clear direction, and offering regular feedback, are key drivers of engagement. Leaders who prioritize open dialogue and transparency tend to lead organizations with higher levels of engagement. Therefore, organizations should invest in leadership development programs that focus on enhancing communication skills and fostering a culture of trust and collaboration.

Recommendations

Organizations should prioritize transparent and open communication practices. This includes regular updates on organizational developments, clear articulation of goals and expectations, and channels for employees to provide feedback. Transparent communication fosters trust, empowers employees, and enhances engagement. Additionally, organizations operating across diverse cultural contexts should tailor their communication and engagement strategies to align with cultural nuances. Recognizing and respecting cultural differences is crucial for crafting effective engagement approaches that resonate with employees. Leadership communication also plays a pivotal role in driving employee engagement. Organizations should invest in leadership development programs that focus on improving communication skills among leaders. Leaders should be encouraged to actively engage with employees, listen to their concerns, and provide clear guidance and support.

In addition, organizations can enhance employee engagement by demonstrating commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Transparent reporting of sustainability efforts and involving employees in related initiatives can foster a sense of pride and engagement. Encouraging cross-functional collaboration within organizations can boost employee engagement. Creating opportunities for teams from different areas to work together, fostering a culture of information sharing, and recognizing and rewarding collaborative efforts can enhance engagement levels. In conclusion, improving internal communication and employee engagement strategies in public relations requires a multifaceted approach that considers transparency, cultural nuances, leadership communication, sustainability initiatives, and cross-functional collaboration. Organizations that heed these recommendations are more likely to foster a culture of engagement, leading to higher productivity, employee satisfaction, and overall business success.

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