

Organisational communication in a strategic change project

Tamsin Kingston

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of International Communication
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Abstract

Internal communication has an important part to play in the success of change initiatives. This research project assessed the success of the communication of a strategic change project (Student Max) to employees within an organisation, utilising an educational institution as a case study. The study sought to answer two major research questions:

How effective were the communication strategies employed in Phase 1 of the Student Max project?

What made these strategies effective or ineffective?

It was decided that a largely qualitative approach was the most appropriate method to gather the data required to answer these questions. This study utilised three data collection methods. An online survey was administered to the employees of the organisation, with 136 choosing to participate. Two focus groups were undertaken, one with four participants and one with five. Seven staff from various levels within the organisation were interviewed. The data gathered from these three methods was analysed utilising thematic analysis. Some of the survey questions also produced data that was statistically analysed.

A review of the literature suggested that change is a complex process, with many factors contributing to the success or failure of change initiatives. It also suggested that communication was an important, if not the most important, part of the change process, often meaning the difference between success and failure.

The findings of this thesis support this primacy of communication. Analysis revealed that the communication strategies employed in the Student Max project were a qualified success. The needs of *all* employees were not met, and a variety of problems with the communication were identified. However none of these problems resulted in the communication being ineffective for the organisation as a whole. Some key issues were raised, such as a lack of trust within the organisation, perceived gaps between management and

employees, and a lack of involvement of employees within the change process. A number of barriers to communication effectiveness were also identified, including high workload, timing of communication, lack of coordination of communication, change fatigue, and employee cynicism. In addressing these issues and barriers the organisation has the opportunity to enhance communication effectiveness.

Declaration

Name of candidate: Tamsin Kingston

This Thesis entitled “Organisational communication in a strategic change project” is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of International Communication

CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

- This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2007/681

Candidate Signature:Date:

Student number: 1000057

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Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EFTS	Equivalent Full Time Students
HOS	Head of School

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Chapter 1 Overview

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is a study of the communication of a strategic change project to employees of a tertiary education institution. Communication is an essential part of change projects, often being significant to whether they succeed or fail, and this is especially true in the case of organisational change. A major part of organisational change is getting employees to accept new ways of doing business – often the most difficult part of the process (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Cheney, Christensen, Zorn & Ganesh, 2004; Quirke, 1995). It is, therefore, very important that internal communication with employees informs them about the reasons for the change, their part in the change, and the desired outcomes of the change. This thesis assesses whether the institution being studied achieved effective communication of change with their employees.

1.2 Rationale and background

Globalisation, developments in technology, changes in legislation and government policy, and increased competition have meant that the environment within which organisations operate has become more turbulent (Cheney et al., 2004). Planned organisational change, “change that is brought about through the purposeful efforts of organisational members” (Lewis, Hamel & Richardson, 2001, p. 9), often occurs as a response to this more volatile environment. The tertiary education market in Auckland, New Zealand is characterised by a large number of competitors, a reducing number of students, and consequential struggles to improve or retain market share. It is also a global market, with a significant number of international students choosing to study outside their country of origin. In March 2006 a large educational institution in Auckland initiated a strategic change project called Student Max. This project aimed to differentiate the institution by focussing on a student centred approach to all aspects of their operation. The project slogan was “maximising student enrolment through improved service”.

The project aimed at changing processes and practices within the organisation, improving business systems (both those used by staff and students), and creating a more student-focussed culture. It was recognised that internal communication was a vital part of the initiative; therefore considerable attention was paid to this aspect.

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of internal communication effectiveness during periods of organisational change. As the employee-centred focus taken is not common in the literature, this study will contribute new data to a less investigated area.

Description of the Case

The Student Max project was initiated during February 2006. The educational institution had experienced a drop in student numbers during the previous year, and an accompanying deficit. A mystery shopper exercise that had been undertaken within the institution between December 2005 and February 2006 had demonstrated poor levels of customer service, poor response times, poor enquiry follow-up and inadequate monitoring systems. The institution was very concerned by these results, and resolved to address them through a special project. Led by the Deputy CEO, a steering group of interested parties was gathered from throughout the organisation. This group took some time to gather information to develop a business case for change, culminating in the delivery of three reports outlining a number of significant recommendations to the management committee of the organisation in July 2006. The management committee approved the substance of the change in August 2006, and this was further endorsed by approval from the governing body – the Council - in November 2006. A subcommittee of the steering group was tasked with developing and implementing a communication plan, commencing with the launch of Student Max in September 2006 and continuing over subsequent months. This sub-committee met, developed a plan involving voicemail, email, town hall type meetings and smaller department/area based meetings (see Appendix A for the communication plan).

There were four main facets to the communication plan. Firstly, a launch communication via voicemail was made by the CEO to every telephone on campus that had a voicemail box. This was followed up several hours later by an email to all staff members in the institution who had a staff login. A dedicated email (Studentmaxfeedback) was established, which over the next couple of months sent out Frequently Asked Questions, ran competitions, and provided an opportunity for staff members to feed back anything they wished to the steering committee. The third aspect involved a set of town hall style meetings which were held at both campuses, led by the CEO with members of the Student Max steering committee also present. Finally, some members of the steering committee attended smaller school, department, centre and board meetings to give a brief presentation and answer questions about Student Max. Over 30 of these meetings were held between September and December of 2006. Another innovation that ran through the length of the communication plan was a pop-up screen (outlining the project's progress) that all staff encountered on logging in to their computer. These were used sparingly, with approximately six messages being used during the first year of the Student Max project.

The project itself involved a number of changes to the way the institution operated. The processing of student applications was centralised into one unit, to which staff from the schools were seconded daily to assist with processing. A number of changes were made to software, hardware and the web. An automated letter generation system was developed, with application letters being generated from the centralised unit. The institution's web presence was enhanced, with improvements made to web application facilities enabling them to be extended to all programmes within the institution. An improved web access and re-enrolment system was implemented. Additional information gathered about applicants was stored within the student information system. Faster responses to complex student enquiries were facilitated through an automated work-list system, with individuals within each school (customer service champions) being made responsible for the resolution of items on the work list. The project developed new key

performance indicators for the timing of responses to students at each stage of the application and enrolment process. These indicators were communicated to the institution's staff through the communication strategies outlined above. They were further communicated to both staff and students through Student Charter posters prominently placed throughout the institution. Progress against these key performance indicators was communicated to staff through a combination of institution-wide enrolment meetings with Heads of School, emails and pop up screens.

The researcher was involved in the Student Max project. She was a member of the Student Max steering committee, and the communication sub-committee, and played some part in the communication of the project. This enabled the researcher to have access to information such as the communication plan, and access to channels of communication undertaken by the project such as the Studentmaxfeedback email. This resulted in the researcher being very well informed both about the project and the way it was communicated to staff.

1.3 Objectives and aims

The Student Max initiative was a multi-phase project, making it important to assess the success of the communication of the first phase, to ensure that lessons learnt were implemented in subsequent phases. The institution studied also recognised that internal communication was an area of weakness that needed to be addressed, and was supportive of this research being undertaken to determine ways improvements could be made. The aim of this research project was to use several data collection techniques to determine the success of communicating change to the institutional community. The project also aimed to determine what it was about the communications that made them successful or unsuccessful. The results of an initial survey were utilised immediately to implement early lessons, and a more in-depth analysis of data collected using focus groups and interviews will inform further institutional projects and long term communication strategies within the institution.

1.4 Research questions

This research seeks to answer two major questions:

How effective were the communication strategies employed in Phase 1 of the Student Max project?

What made these strategies effective or ineffective?

Sub-questions that arose during the research were:

Were the channels used by staff to get information about Student Max different from those normally used?

Were some channels more effective than others? If so, why?

Did the identity of the communicators affect the way the communication was received?

Was trust a factor in determining how communication was received?

Nature of the information sought

The nature of the information sought in the research process was the experiences and perceptions of the staff at the institution - both the senders and the receivers of the communications that were undertaken during the Student Max project. Information was sought from staff members at a variety of levels and occupations within the institution. Examination was undertaken of the types of communication, which communication channels were most commonly utilised, and who was delivering the communication. Feedback on the effectiveness of the communication and what factors affected it were also sought.

1.5 Methodology

This project is a largely qualitative case study, using several data collection methods. Data gathered from participants was analysed to answer the research questions and sub-questions outlined above. The project utilised an

online survey, interviews and focus groups. Subjects for the survey were recruited by emailing the link to an online survey tool to all staff in the institution. Participants were invited in the survey to indicate their interest in participating in the focus group. Two focus group sessions were undertaken, one with allied (mainly administrative) staff and one with academic staff. Themes that had emerged, both from the literature and the survey analysis, were explored in the focus group sessions. The focus groups facilitated a closer examination of the experiences of the two groups of staff – and delved more deeply into communication channels, and what affected the perception of the communication. The focus groups also examined how the communication was received, whether the communication could have been improved, and, if so, what they suggested to improve communication. Individual interviews were undertaken with seven people from various levels and occupational groups within the organisation – both communicators and employees - and further explored those themes.

1.6 Delimitations

The study is of the communication strategies for the Student Max project undertaken over a period of one year, from September 2006 until late 2007. It studies one organisation, utilising case study methodology.

1.7 Thesis outline

Chapter One provides an overall outline of the research, supplies some context to the reasons for the study, outlines the research questions that the research sought to answer, and briefly outlines how the data was gathered.

Chapter Two is a review of the literature as it pertains to the subject being studied – change management and the communication of change.

Chapter Three examines in some detail the research methodology, the sample, the types of data collection employed in the research and the research procedure. It also explores further the data analysis methods

undertaken in order for the data gathered to be able to contribute to answering the research questions. The chapter examines ethical issues raised by the research, and the mitigations undertaken by the researcher. A discussion on limitations to the study concludes the chapter.

Chapter Four sets out the findings of the research and discusses them in the context of the literature and the research sub-questions.

Chapter Five contains the conclusions about the research questions. It also discusses implications for practice. Limitations of the research are also identified, and future research directions suggested.

Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The literature on change management is extensive (Leppitt, 2006, Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999), resulting in part from the desire of organisations to manage the change process more effectively. On examination of this literature it became obvious that a major factor in the success or failure of organisational change is the communication processes undertaken during the change initiative (Dolphin, 2005, Goodman & Truss, 2004; Kotter, 1999). Prior to conducting this research the author considered it was important, therefore, to both examine literature outlining theories and research on change management, and then more specifically communication within the change process. It was also considered necessary to focus this examination, as there is very extensive academic and practitioner literature pertaining to the field of change management. This literature review focuses on the literature relevant to organisational change management and the communication of change. This review does not aim to be an exhaustive examination of change management literature.

This review of the literature details the often conflicting viewpoints on change management and the varying roles communication is ascribed in the change management process. It examines what researchers and theorists see as the process for successful change, with a focus on the implementation of change, as this is probably the area most reported (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Change management and change communication models are examined and assessed. Throughout the literature review the tensions between 'management and organisational' theorists and 'communication' theorists are explored within the context of planned organisational change. The review concludes with a discussion on gaps and future directions in the literature.

2.2 Organisational change

Organisational change is not an easy process (Nelson & Coxhead, 1997; Preskill & Torres, 1999); in excess of 70% of change efforts fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Lewis and Seibold (1998) suggest that implementation of changes to technologies may have even higher failure rates, sometimes up to 75%. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that this area is studied a great deal, with a resulting vast body of organisational change literature.

2.2.1 Defining organisational change

Change, whether intentional or unintentional, can be simply described as “the differences between two (or more) successive conditions, states or moments of time” (Ford & Ford, 1995, p. 543). However, organisational change could never be called a simple process owing to the multiple actors involved in change processes. As Ford and Ford further outline, organisational change requires a change agent to bring in an intended state or result that previously did not exist. Perhaps the most useful definition of planned organisational change discovered in the literature was “change that is brought about through the purposeful efforts of organisational members ...” (Lewis et al., 2001, p. 9).

2.2.2 The context of organisational change

There are a number of reasons why organisations may perceive the need to change including new technology, increased competition, changes in the nature of their business, globalisation and changes in the legislative framework within which they operate. Changes in technology have resulted in changes to the way organisations are structured, their processes, and their ways of communicating with their staff. Employees no longer need to be based in the same building, city or country, as a result of communication technologies such as the internet, computers and mobile phones. Increased globalisation has also prompted organisational change (Burnes, 2004; Cheney et al., 2004). For many organisations, their competitors and consumers were once local, regional, and possibly national. However, increasingly, organisations now have to compete in a global marketplace, with their competitors, consumers, suppliers and employees possibly all being

international (Zorn, Page & Cheney, 2000). Organisations need to be able to respond to changes in the requirements of their customers and the actions of their competitors (Quirke, 1995). Increasing worldwide industrialisation and a need to adapt to legislative requirements also force organisational change (Byers, 1997). Associated with globalisation and technological changes is the changing nature of workforces. Whereas once workforces were relatively homogenous (Preskill & Torres, 1999), the modern workforce is increasingly diverse, creating the necessity to adapt to their needs. Quirke (1995) agrees, also suggesting that changes in employee values and in the roles of employees and managers are encouraging change. Hammer (1996) suggests that the factors above have forced organisations to change radically, and to re-engineer their business completely or face failure. These multiple imperatives for change have resulted in most organisations continually undertaking varying degrees of change.

Virtually all organisations are affected by one or more of the factors outlined above and, thus, change is seen by many as inevitable (Burnes, 2004; Champy & Nohria, 1996; Lawler & Worley, 2006). However, this inevitability may not be a result of the actual need to change, but more the result of a perception that change is good, therefore, organisations should undergo constant change. Zorn et al. (2000) suggest that a “new managerial discourse embodies a powerful bias towards change now operating in boardrooms and on shop floors, a bias that is seldom questioned” (p. 517). They suggest that this results in a “discursive closure” regarding the need to change, where alternatives to the prevailing framing of an issue are not considered around the idea of change in organisations. This has resulted in a climate where those who question change are labelled as out of touch. This is a refreshing and persuasive alternative view to the management literature, which seldom questions the need for organisational change.

2.2.3 The language of change

It is interesting to note that change management literature has developed its own language to differentiate between aspects of change. Byers (1991, cited in Cheney et al., 2004), suggests that a whole new lexicon has been

developed to describe organisational change, and the literature reviewed suggests he may be right. Phrases and words such as organisational transformation, re-engineering, downsizing, rightsizing, continuous change, continuous improvement, learning organisations, restructuring, process re-engineering and business scope re-engineering are all used to describe particular types and levels of organisational change. Preskill and Torres (1999) go so far as to assert that, in response to change, organisations have “reconceptualised and reconfigured themselves into virtual organisations, network organisations, boundaryless organisations, web organisations and empowered organisations” (p. 10); all additions to the change lexicon.

2.2.4 Types and degrees of change

As the language above suggests, organisational change can take many forms and requires different levels of response. Lewis et al. (2001) differentiate between various types of planned changes including introduction of technologies, programmes, new policies, alterations of organisations’ physical characteristics, changes in staff and role assignments, and introduction of new processes. They suggest that each of these types of change may require different degrees of response from organisations. Cheney et al. (2004) suggest that there are differing degrees of change, and the degree of change often affects the organisation’s requirement to change. First order changes are better described as adjustments as they only involve certain parts of the organisation – they could be a change to a form or process within the institution, usually requiring a low level of change management. A second order change is “when the entity becomes something fundamentally different from what it was” (Cheney et al., 2004, p. 323). This type of change will affect many parts of the entire organisation, and thus the change process will need to be considerably more involved. Second order changes, once fairly rare, are becoming much more prevalent as a result of the factors outlined above. Kotter (1999) calls the most extreme form of second order change ‘transformational change’ as it may transform the way an organisation operates.

Barrett (2008) suggests that the level of change will influence the level of the change communication effort required. Basic change will usually only require simple one directional messages without the need to assess the success of the communication. Strategic change requires a greater communication effort, using several media, with opportunities for dialogue, and a follow-up assessment to ensure that all employees understand the change. Barrett further suggests that major change requires a carefully planned communication effort such as a multi-media communication plan, with employee workshops, lots of opportunity for feedback, and regular evaluation of the success of the communication. It is, therefore, vital that organisations carefully consider the level of change that they are undertaking prior to developing their communication plan, as misjudging the level could result in the communication effort going awry. If, for example, a major change is being made and insufficient communication efforts are undertaken, all affected employees may not be reached by the communication.

2.3 Different styles of literature

There is a considerable body of literature that examines the inevitability as well as the processes and management of change within organisations. This literature can be divided into two main types – scholarly managerial literature and practitioner literature. Scholarly managerial literature covers many different aspects of organisational change, from preparing for change, through implementation of change, to assessment of change. This literature ranges from broad management textbooks (Schermerhorn, 1989) which address change as merely one, albeit important, area of management concern, to books and articles that focus on change management in particular (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Paton & McCalman, 2000; Sopow, 2006). Case studies of change and what made it successful (or not) are also prevalent in the literature (Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Pollock, 2000). There is a considerable body of literature that proposes theories and models of change (Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990; Leppitt, 2006), some of which are outlined later in this review. Another interesting subfield of this literature is that critiquing practitioner literature (Jackson, 2001).

Practitioner literature is more “how-to” in nature, and outlines the authors’ particular suggestions about how managers should manage change (Larkin & Larkin, 1994), or examples of how others have managed change (Kanter, 1989). Practitioner literature also includes that written by those whom many call ‘management gurus’, often espousing their particular theory of change (Gladwell, 2001) and how it can be managed (Hammer, 1996; Iacocca, 1984). As these more ‘popular’ books are read by many executives it is important not to neglect this body of work. There is, however, considerable criticism by more scholarly authors of practitioner literature (Jackson, 2001; Lewis, Schmisser, Stephens & Weir, 2006) and the use that managers make of it (Zorn et al., 2000). Interestingly, Lewis et al. (2006) found that much of the practitioner literature either overtly or covertly draws from the theories and concepts outlined in more scholarly literature. The examination of literature undertaken for this review supports this assertion.

2.4 Communication within the change process

2.4.1 The significance of communication in change management

There can be no doubt that communication is a very important part of the change process; however, the role and degree of importance ascribed to communication varies in the literature. Although change management literature, whether managerial, practitioner or communication oriented, is in general agreement that communication is a vital part of the change process (Kotter, 1999), managerial change literature tends to allocate less importance to communication (Cheney et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2006; Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Much of the managerial change literature mentions communication as a factor to be considered in the change management process, but it is seldom a primary consideration. Paton and McCalman (2000), for example, mention communication merely as a tool for managers. However, some management theorists do see it as important, exemplified by the fact that Kanter et al. (1992) have communication as one of their ten commandments for change, and Kotter (1999) has communication as one of his steps to transforming an organisation.

This perception that communication is seen merely as one of many parts of the change management process, rather than the primary consideration of the process is not supported by more communication focussed scholars. This has led them to criticise the managerial change literature for its lack of communication focus. Frahm and Brown (2005a) suggest that much of the management and practitioner literature is written from what they call the instrumental perspective, where communication is seen merely as an instrument to manage change. Lewis et al. (2006) suggest that practitioner books “boil tactics for communication down to sound bites and general philosophy” (p. 132) and need to be contextualised by the reader before any advice is applied. Barrett (2002) and Wadman (2006) suggest that because many organisations do not realise the importance of communication, they do not attribute the same importance to communication as to financial and operational aspects of change initiatives. They perceive that this oversight often results in the failure of these initiatives. The importance of internal communication in particular, and its role in the eventual success of change, is perceived to be an area that many organisations neglect (Dolphin, 2005; Nelson & Coxhead, 1997).

In contrast to the managerial change literature, communication scholars place considerably more importance on the role of communication in the change management process. Barrett (2002) asserts “without effective employee communication, change is impossible and change management fails” (p. 219). This primacy of communication is supported by other examinations of change processes and change practitioners (Carney, 2000; D’Aprix, 1996; Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Nelson & Coxhead, 1997). Ford and Ford (1995) present a constructionist perspective suggesting that communication is not just a tool to be used within the change process, and that “change is a phenomenon that occurs within communication” (p. 542). Change is seen as a subset of communication and that “producing intentional change ... is a matter of deliberately bringing into existence, through communication, a new reality or set of social structures” (p. 542). Thus, they theorise that rather than change merely producing and being supported by communication, communication

constructs the change, a contention supported by other scholars in the field (Cheney et al., 2004; Lewis & Seibold, 1998).

There is therefore quite a gap between these two fields of study. The communication scholarship is persuasive, as it is difficult to imagine any organisational change being possible without communication – how would employees discover that there was a need to change, how the change was to happen, and what results were expected of them without there being a communication effort? It is therefore useful to examine the role and importance of internal communication within organisations during the process of change.

2.4.2 The importance of internal communication in change programmes

As alluded to earlier, organisational change often requires employees to change the way they do things, thus a significant aspect of trying to manage the change process is internal communication with employees, who are 'crucial' to organisations (Daly, Teague & Kitchen, 2003). Internal communication within organisations is much more than the classic transmission model of communication – where a message is sent by the sender and received by the receiver. Internal communication in this context can be defined as communication within an organisation, between different groups and individuals at different levels and with different specialisations, that is designed to organise day-to-day activities (Dolphin, 2005). As such, it is complex and multi-faceted form of communication. Cheney et al. (2004) agree, emphasising that organisational communication is very complex in nature, as it includes a variety of different aspects including symbols such as logos or artefacts, and structures such as policies and procedures. They also mention other organisational communications such as discrete messages, interactions, relationships, narratives and meetings. These are but a small subset of the communicative opportunities that exist within an organisation. This complexity may result in internal communication efforts being unsuccessful, owing to a lack of recognition of the breadth that the change communication must cover. Quirke (1995) stresses that an added complexity when considering internal communication is that those responsible for the

change process within the organisation will probably have differing concepts about what organisational communication actually means. This may result in confusion about who is responsible for communication; it can also result in tensions and may set up communications to fail.

Dolphin (2005) argues that internal communication is strategically very important to organisations, particularly in times of stress and change. Internal communication is particularly important as it facilitates corporate identification, where employees identify with their organisation, and leads to better informed employees who understand the corporate goals and philosophy. This improved understanding in turn enhances employee commitment to the organisation (Goodman & Truss, 2004) and makes them more receptive to change (Tourish & Hargie, 1998). Corporate identification and commitment is likely to improve the chances of successful implementation of change.

Dolphin (2005) interviewed British communication executives and found that every successful change programme had a “strong communication effort” and “internal communications had played a crucial role” (p. 180). Dolphin (2005) concluded that “it is possible that change programmes without effective internal communication campaigns could not succeed” (p. 183). Nelson and Coxhead (1997) agree that internal communication is a very important factor in the success of change efforts.

An effective internal communication process during the first stages of re-engineering ... will help to increase employee buy-in (at all levels), decrease resistance to change and create a process that will give a distinct competitive advantage to an organisation. (p. 30)

The empirical research on the importance of internal communication therefore provides significant support for focussing on it during any change management process. However, one of the difficulties for a manager reading the literature is that the literature, managerial, practitioner and communication-focussed, does not agree on what exactly comprises an effective internal communication process or campaign, often suggesting very different strategies, or giving differing weight to different aspects.

Thus, internal communication is vital for ensuring that all the organisational players know their part in the change process, know what the change entails, know what results are desired and have a plan to achieve this. Next it is useful to examine models that have been developed in the literature to suggest ideal ways of undertaking change management and change communication.

2.5 Models in the Literature

2.5.1 Change management models

It is important to examine the change management models that have developed, as they have strongly informed the implementation strategies and practices that have been undertaken within organisations (Frahm & Brown, 2005b). In the 1940's Lewin's (1996) seminal research proposed a model of managed change that suggested three phases should occur to make change successful. Firstly the equilibrium of the organisation needs to be destabilised to set the stage for change. Lewin called this part of the process unfreezing, as the organisational norms are unfrozen to allow change to take place. The second phase was implementing the change – what Lewin called moving. The final part of the process involved stabilising the organisation with the change being the new accepted behaviour – refreezing being the description for this part of the process. This model has dominated the change management literature since it was developed over sixty years ago, and has been developed further in other literature. Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), for example, use the same three stages as the basis of an expanded model of phases within which change agents act. Leppitt's (2006) change model is also very similar, although the phases are named strategy development, strategy planning, strategy implementation-change management, and performance management. Kotter (1999) also follows a similar path in his set of steps to transform an organisation. His first five steps are; establishing a sense of urgency, forming a powerful guiding coalition, creating a vision, communicating the vision, and empowering others to act on the vision. These seem to be unfreezing the organisation for change. The next two steps, planning for and creating short term wins and consolidating improvements,

and producing still more change, are part of the moving process. Kotter's final step is institutionalising new approaches – what Lewin would call refreezing.

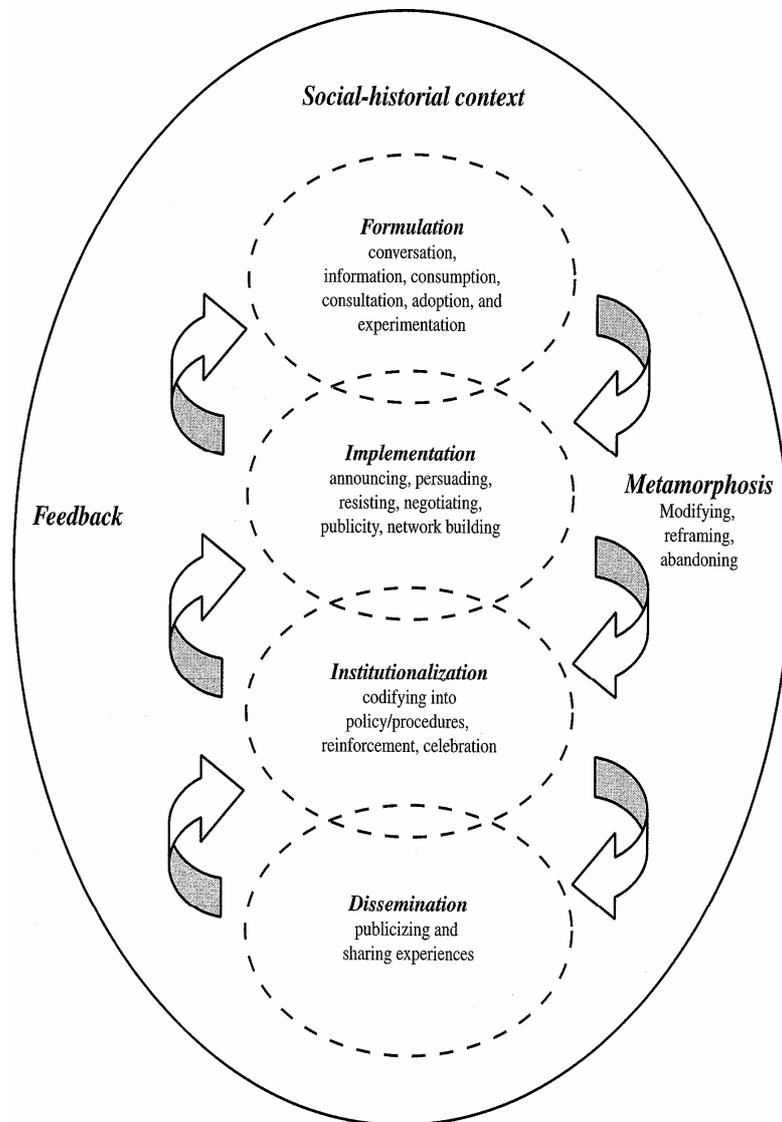
Some literature, however, suggests that the model proposed by Lewin is somewhat simplistic, or as Kanter et al. (1992) stated a “quaintly linear and static conception” (p. 10), and it does, on the face of it, seem rather too simple a depiction of a complex process. Following Lewin's contribution to the field, much more complex change models have been developed, although many of them reflect a similar staged approach to those outlined above. In later models there is an emphasis on the fluidity of change, in the sense that stages will often overlap. Change models developed since Lewin often reflect this (Burnes, 2004). The legacy that Lewin may have given to the field is the concept that change does tend to have stages, all of which need to be undertaken for the change to be successful. In contrast, other scholars have proposed radically different models such as the ‘chaotic’ models proposed by complexity theorists (Burnes, 2004), and they do not support a staged approach to change management. It seems, however, that the literature is dominated by staged approaches to the change process.

Other models concentrate on setting the scene for change. For example, Beer et al. (1990) recommend a 5-step model for effective change management which focuses on mobilisation of commitment through developing agreed goals for the change, and a shared vision of how the change might be undertaken. Their Organisational Fitness Profiling model was developed as a result of research on leadership which led them to believe that there are few “heroic leaders” who are capable of effectively leading organisational change. Thus, it is necessary to develop a “generalisable model of strategic transformation that does not rely on a heroic leader” (1990, p. 134). This model suggests that the revitalisation of the organisation should not be pushed from the top, but rather that all areas of the organisation should be involved in first diagnosing the need for change, then in developing the strategy for change. This model further suggests that the revitalisation can then be institutionalised through formal policies, systems and structures. The final step is to monitor and adjust strategies in response

to problems and feedback through the process. This model, however, has some contestable assumptions. The first is that it is possible to jointly diagnose problems and the second that it is possible to institutionalise change without leadership from the top. These are significant assumptions, and may not apply in all organisational contexts. It is also interesting to note that their step by step model still reflects aspects of the Lewin model.

Ford and Ford (1995) suggest that most change models are flawed because they express communication merely as one part of the change model, a step in the process of change, rather than being the context within which change occurs. More communication-centred models have however emerged. The model of change related communication proposed by Cheney et al. (2004) (see Figure 1) suggests communication is contained in and essential to all parts of the change process. Their model works with six major assumptions. Their first assumption is that communication constitutes change. Their second assumption is that change occurs within a social-historical context in that organisations exist within particular contexts and these contexts will differ from organisation to organisation. Any change must therefore take cognisance of this. Another assumption is that discourses relating to change are bi-directional in that communication about change flows in and out of organisations. The organisation does not exist within a vacuum, and outside influences such as management fads and modified practices have an impact. Their fourth assumption is that communication is central to the implementation of planned change, as without communication no-one will know about the change and their part in the implementation. The fifth assumption they suggest is the inevitability that change will often metamorphose, in that the initially proposed change will seldom be reflected in the final changes implemented. Their final assumption is that feedback on the change will occur during the change process, and that this may affect change, resulting in change seldom being a linear process. This model reflects many themes raised in both the management and communication literature. It seems to be one of the more complete models in the literature, and will contribute to the assessment of the Student Max communication undertaken in Chapter 4.

Figure 1 A Model of Change-Related Communication



(Cheney et al, 2004, p. 319)

2.5.2 Models for Communicating Change

There are also models that focus more on the communication of change, rather than trying to model all parts of the change process. Larkin and Larkin (1994) present a very simple model for change communication in large companies, with three major recommendations. Firstly, they suggest that change managers should target front line supervisors, as they are the source of most change communication for employees. Secondly they believe that communication should be face to face where possible – they even go so far

as to say if it is not face to face then it isn't communication. This is in line with their first suggestion that if employees are communicating with their supervisors, the quality of the communication will be better if it is face to face due to the richness of this medium. It seems by richness that Larkin and Larkin mean the ability for employees to discuss the changes and how they will be affected by them, while also giving them opportunities for feedback. Finally, they suggest that organisations should focus on communicating the relative performances of work areas, as most employees do not care as much about the organisation as they do about their own area. This model makes significant assumptions about organisations (Cheney et al., 2004), such as assuming front line supervisors have the communication skills to be able to communicate change effectively to their staff, and that employees do not care about their organisation as a whole. As these assumptions may not apply in all, or even, many workplaces, it seems that this model has some significant weaknesses.

Rather than developing a model, Lewis et al. (2001) suggest six communication strategies that could be chosen when implementing change, with their particular focus being on non-profit organisations. These strategies can be diametrically opposed as they are designed to be chosen by managers given the context of their particular change circumstance. For example, one strategy is to communicate equally to everyone, whereas another strategy is to communicate only with those who need to know. They suggest that change managers choose an implementation communication strategy based on their perceived need for efficiency in communication and the perceived need for consensus building. A problem with this approach is highlighted by Cheney et al. (2004) who feel that this model suggests change is rather static and does not move through different stages, and that this limits its applicability. The proposers of this model admit that the model is perhaps more useful as a guide or as options to be selected from than as a model to be slavishly adhered to, and that communication should always be tailored with stakeholders' needs in mind. As such it provides a change implementer with some interesting communicative choices that could be used, depending on the aim of the particular change initiative.

Goodman and Truss (2004) present a model which outlines four aspects of communication where change managers must make decisions as to what they will do – message, media, channel and approach – and each of these must be considered prior to undertaking the communication. Their change communication wheel emphasises that the organisational context, the purpose of the communication, the change programme characteristics, and the employee response are all important in determining the choices made by the change manager. This model appears to be an extremely useful tool for change managers who may be struggling with their communication strategy and the implementation of the strategy, as it outlines the different considerations that they need to take into account.

The Nelson and Coxhead (1997) model suggests that effective internal communication, particularly of strategic projects, requires a number of processes and events to occur within the organisation. Firstly, the creation of a common language is required to ensure that everyone understands the change. They feel that top management must develop and model consistent behaviours to support the change, and must be seen to be committed to it. They suggest that the organisation needs to raise the self-esteem of employees through sharing (in facilitated workshops). They also emphasise the importance of developing specialist communication personnel to manage the communication process rather than assuming that others will undertake this additional role. They perceive that these factors will ensure the communication of the project is successful – and that this will improve the chances of the project being successful. One of the possible problems with this model is the high level of involvement of all organisational members in the change process, as many organisations may struggle to achieve such levels of consultation whilst maintaining the operation of their core business. Given all managers are not effective communicators, the use of specialised personnel to facilitate the change communication is likely to have significant benefits.

These are but a selection of change management and change communication models outlined in the literature, but several themes recur throughout these models. Most models agree that employees need to be motivated to change, and that communication, particularly by senior management, plays an important part in this motivation. There is also general agreement that change communication must be tailored to the changes being made. There is some agreement that change communication must be tailored to the organisation – there is no ideal communication model that will fit all organisations. Most models include the desirability of opportunities for feedback. Finally, most models agree that communication is an important part of the change process, even if there is disagreement on the degree of importance.

Communicating the need for change within the organisation is essential before implementation of the change can occur. In the way that there are many communication models, there are also many models for implementation of planned change.

2.6 Implementation Literature

The actual implementation of change is probably the most studied area in the literature of change management and change communication, with many of the empirical studies examining this process (Lewis, 2006; Lines, Selart, Espedal & Johansen, 2005; Mabin, Forgeson & Green, 2001). Perhaps understandably, Timmerman (2003) states that “implementation activities are fundamentally communicative” (p. 304). Beer et al. (1990) contend that the implementation of change is usually where organisations fall down – “while senior managers understand the necessity of change to cope with new competitive realities, they often misunderstand what it takes to bring it about” (p. 158).

A number of themes emerge from the literature, both managerial and communication focussed. It is useful for the organisation to choose an implementation approach to guide the change efforts (Lewis & Seibold, 1998;

Nutt, 1986). The importance of creating a convincing and persuasive vision and communicating this effectively is crucial to creating the right environment for change (Kotter, 1996; Nadler, 1981; Quirke, 1995), as is ensuring that the change takes account of the organisational culture and climate (Sopow, 2006). Effective leadership through change agents and the management of the organisation play an important part in effecting the change itself (Mabin et al., 2001), and it is vital that they are able to effectively communicate the change. Internal communication is acknowledged as vital in the effective implementation of organisational change (Dolphin, 2005). To ensure that the change is effectively communicated, appropriate channels must be chosen and utilised effectively (Timmerman, 2003). Poor management of change communication (Elving, 2005), lack of employee involvement in the change process (Beer et al., 1990), uncertainty about the change (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004; Kanter, 1985), and a lack of trust within the organisation (Lines et al., 2005) can result in resistance to the change process by employees, which could significantly impact on the success of a change initiative. Effective communication should mitigate this resistance (Elving, 2005).

2.6.1 Implementation approaches

There can be no doubt that implementation of change is much harder than designing the change (Nelson & Coxhead, 1997), and this may account for the high levels of failure of change efforts. Nutt (1986) suggests that implementation is “a procedure directed by a manager to install planned change in an organisation”(p. 233). Lewis and Seibold (1998) and Timmerman (2003) outline common implementation approaches. They vary from programmed approaches where a coherent plan is followed to its end and is usually led from the top, to adaptive approaches where feedback may modify the change as it is being implemented. Bullock and Batten (1995, cited in Timmerman, 2003) suggest there are four phases of implementation – exploration, planning, action and integration. Nutt’s “Transactional Planned Change Process” (1986, p. 235) has five very similar stages – formulation, concept development, detailing, evaluation and installation. Beer et al. (1990) agree that the first stage of implementation should be exploration, and

recommend that organisations conduct an in depth diagnosis of the issues using staff from all levels of the organisation. Nutt (1986) further examined the various implementation strategies utilised in change management, defining them as intervention, participation, persuasion and edict. His research found that the most successful strategy was intervention. This is where a manager sets new norms, appraises existing performance, states intentions, the change is outlined, the manager shows how the change meets the norms, and then performance is measured against the new norms. Interestingly, intervention was the least utilised in the 91 organisations he studied.

It is interesting to note that all these implementation approaches have a heavy reliance on communication. The literature discussed above emphasises the importance of a change manager determining what approach will be taken prior to commencing the change, in order to improve the chances of the change effort being successful.

2.6.2 Change announcements

The messages, channels, and timing of the initial announcement of change are less studied than much of the implementation process. One reason this announcement is neglected in the literature may be because some researchers include it in the communication of the vision for change. This is unfortunate as although the change announcement may contribute to building the vision, it has an important role of its own in the implementation process. Smeltzer (cited in Lewis & Siebold, 1998, p. 105) found in his study of initial change announcements that two key factors differentiated effective and ineffective strategies. The first was whether there was a large number of inaccurate rumours about the change and, secondly, whether people learned about the change from sources other than management. If either or both of these things occurred the change was much less likely to be successful. This suggests that the planning and timing of the change announcement are very important, to prevent rumours escaping. Grossman (2000) accented the importance of the change announcement at the BBC, outlining the use of a multi-media communication campaign to ensure that all parts of the

organisation heard about the change at virtually the same time. This implies that the change announcement needs to be timed well in order to reach all employees, as much as possible, simultaneously.

2.6.3 Communicating the vision

Nadler (1981) suggests that effective communication of the vision, the future, and the ways that change will occur usually result in improved outcomes. The importance of communicating these aspects is seen as a crucial part of gaining the stakeholders' buy-in into change. There is general acceptance that where communication of the change vision is poor and stakeholders do not accept the need for change, these stakeholders are less likely to adopt the change, and change is therefore less likely to be successful (Dolphin, 2005; Quirke, 1995; Kotter, 1996). Ford and Ford (1995) and Leppitt (2006) suggest that a failure to create a shared understanding amongst participants in the change may occur if the vision is not communicated effectively, which can lead to a failure to create a statement of the reasons for change. This can, in turn, create resistance amongst the participants in the change. Leppitt (2006) supports this contention with his case study of an unsuccessful organisational change. In the study the leadership of the organisation did not effectively communicate a vision and strategy for change, which resulted in a lack of urgency and conviction of the need for change. This failure subsequently played a part in the lack of success of the change initiative. In contrast, Grossman (2000) outlines a situation where communication of the vision was effective and played a significant part in the success of the change programme. Ford and Ford (1995) propose that change is a series of conversations, and breakdowns within these conversations can cause problems in the change process. At the initial stage of the change, this breakdown could occur if the conversation has not reached the people who are, or see themselves as being, in a position to move change forward, and the initiating conversations therefore do not take place. They posit there are several reasons this might occur – initiators may have had initiatives fail or had been ignored in the past (so are afraid to initiate communication about a new change), they may have been punished for their suggested changes in the past, or they may be afraid of how others might see them. It is, therefore,

very important that change strategists or agents are chosen carefully, to ensure they are confident and capable of making the initiating conversations. Thus, it is important that communications of the vision are well designed, and that those disseminating the vision are communicatively capable.

2.6.4 Change agents

The role of change strategists and change agents in the process of change and in the communication of change is also explored in the literature (Kanter et al., 1992; Paton & McCalman, 2000). Change strategists are those who develop the strategy for change and Kanter et al. (1992) suggest they are also those who “articulate the change and capture and mobilize the hearts and minds of the organisation” (p. 378). Change agents are the individuals or groups within the organisation who are responsible for implementing the change. These roles have significant communication responsibilities (Lewis et al., 2006), and, in some cases, the role of strategist and agent are combined (Kanter et al., 1992). Useful characteristics of these agents are outlined in the literature, and chief amongst these is the need for them to have extremely competent communication skills (Grossman, 2000; Kanter et al., 1992). The desirability of having change agents from within or from outside the organisation is also discussed, with most literature agreeing that internal agents have an advantage because of their greater insight into the culture, the mores, and the informal networks within the organisation than would be possessed by external consultants (Grossman & Smith, 2003; Lewis & Seibold, 1998).

2.6.5 Roles of management within change

Another theme to emerge in the literature is the role of senior management in the change process (Carney, 2000; Grossman, 2000; Grossman & Smith, 2003; Hargie, 1999). The involvement of senior management throughout the change process, particularly in the communication of the change, is seen as being very important in ensuring its success. The first role of senior management in the change process is their part in the launch, and in the initial communication of the vision for change. Grossman’s (2000) examination of a major change initiative in the BBC emphasised the importance of the Chief

Executive Officer both leading and effectively communicating the change. Grossman and Smith (2003) also outline the importance of senior management in maintaining the impetus of change once the initial announcement of change has occurred.

O'Rourke (2001) contends that often the sender of the message is of equal importance to the message itself.

Message recipients will judge the value, power, purpose, intent and outcomes of the messages they receive by the source of those messages as much as by the content and intent of the messages themselves (p. 10).

Kanter et al. (1992) agree that the role of the change leader is extremely important in that "they must develop a motivational message that transcends the chaos and encourages other people to begin the hard work of making the vision a reality" (p. 397).

Middle management within organisations are a crucial part of the change process as they are often both the group who have to implement the change initiative, as well as the group who is the primary communicator with employees. As such they are vital to the success of the change. Daly et al. (2003) found that senior managers they interviewed:

Went to great lengths to underscore the importance of line managers, supervisors and middle management in both getting 'buy in' to a change programme and communicating that change to front line staff. (p. 158)

The communication abilities of this level of management organisations also feature in the literature (Kanter et al., 1992; Quirke, 1995; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Kanter (1989) stresses the importance of all managers within an organisation being successful communicators. Zorn et al. (2000) agree that the role of managers in the communication of change is important, examining how this can be positive or negative depending on the skills and viewpoint of the manager. Interpretation by managers can considerably alter the original intent of the change as was evidenced by their case study, where change was heavily interpreted at middle management through a lens of the latest

management fads. Mabin et al. (2001) outline an example where poor communication skills on the part of a manager substantially increased levels of resistance to change amongst the staff.

Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) communication competence model suggests that a communicator must be able to recognise what communication practice is appropriate, have the ability to undertake the communication, and also have the desire to communicate effectively and appropriately. Although this model is not specific to managers it is relevant to this discussion in that if managers are not competent communicators, change efforts could suffer. Preskill and Torres (1999) and Quirke (1995) suggest that most managers are ill prepared for change, and so will struggle during change efforts. Champy and Nohria (1996) suggest that poor abilities of managers are the reasons that business process re-engineering fails, suggesting that managers must change themselves and develop new competencies to succeed in the modern organisation. In addition, Lewis et al. (2001) suggest that many middle managers are keen to avoid conflict, and therefore do not solicit feedback on change as it often results in conflict. Larkin and Larkin (1994) suggest that managers may not communicate bad news with their subordinates as they perceive that their employees might lose confidence in them. There can be no doubt that the success of change relies considerably on the communication skills and abilities of managers, and that they are sometimes not up to the difficult communication expectations that change management brings.

2.6.6 The role of trust

If communications are going to be effective it is important that communicators and their communications are trusted by those with whom they are communicating. If the messages sent by a manager are to have the desired impact it is crucial that they come from a source the receiver knows, respects, understands and trusts (Cheney et al., 2004; O'Rourke, 2001). Quirke (1995) agrees that a climate of trust has considerable impact on how communication is received, and that it is hardest to establish this during times of change. Lines et al. (2005) suggest that the quality of decision-making during

organisational change is significant in producing trust between employees and management, in that if they perceive the decisions about the change to be the right ones, trust levels may improve rather than decrease. They also suggest that participation in the change processes also affects levels of trust within employees, perhaps because the organisation is seen as placing their trust in the employees by involving them in the process. The result of a lack of trust can be that people do not believe the change communication. "Employee research shows that, in the average organisation, people have a healthy suspicion of management's motives and routinely expect a hidden agenda" (Quirke, 1995, p. 99). Similarly, the importance of trust is raised by Dolphin (2005) who states "once a company has lost the faith and goodwill of its employees, it faces an uphill battle trying to correct its errors and rebuild credibility" (p. 174). Lines et al. (2005) emphasise that "organisation change represents a critical episode for the production *and* [italics added] destruction of trust in management" (p. 221). Conversely, however, Clampitt and Williams (2005) found in a study of employee trust that the relationship between trust and communication success was not as significant as they expected, however, this may be the exception rather than the rule as it is not supported by other studies.

Lack of trust can have consequences for use of formal channels of communication. Research by Crampton, Hodge and Mishra (1998) found that the grapevine flourishes when employees do not trust formal organisational communication, suggesting that people seek alternative communication when trust is absent. Most of the literature, therefore, stresses the importance for organisations undertaking change to foster a climate of trust, as this is essential to the success of the change process.

2.6.7 Organisational culture and values

Organisational culture and values can have a significant impact on the success of change. If a change is going to go against the prevailing culture and values of the organisation, it is likely to be resisted by organisational players. Larkin and Larkin (1994) suggest that "to be noticed, communication must contain something that interests the receivers; to change behaviour, it

must touch one of their values.” (1994, p. xii) Sopow (2006) also suggests that failure to understand the role of organisational culture and climate in change often results in the failure of change initiatives. Quirke (1995) has a slightly different viewpoint on this, when he contends that organisations need both a climate that encourages communication, and channels that allow for the flow of communication, for change to be successfully implemented. This could be a challenge in organisations that have more of a top down approach to communication, and should signal to them that they need to consider their approach carefully when undertaking change. It is, therefore, important for change managers to examine their organisation in light of the changes they wish to implement, and plan their change within the context of the culture and values of the organisation. Another perspective to be considered by change managers regarding organisational culture is that they may wish to influence an aspect of the culture through enacting change – and that this may lead to resistance to the change effort.

2.6.8 Resistance to change

Resistance to change is seen by many people as inevitable. How many times has the phrase “nobody likes change” been uttered in business meetings as a reason for opposition to change initiatives? It seems to be accepted, therefore, that organisational change will cause negativity (Clampitt & Williams, 2005; Mabin et al, 2001). It is, therefore, unsurprising that resistance to change is often mentioned in the literature (Cheney et al., 2004; Daniels & Hollifield, 2002; Dolphin, 2005; Kanter et al., 1992; Leppitt, 2006; Quirke, 1995). Common themes that emerge are the importance of recognising and minimising resistance in the change process (Kanter, 1985; Quirke, 1995), and the role of communication in both overcoming (Elving, 2005) and, conversely, producing resistance (Bordia et al., 2004). Kanter et al. (1992) contend that poorly undertaken communication can produce resistance to the specifics of change. In contrast, Coch and French (1996), who undertook the seminal Harwood studies, outline how good communication combined with involvement of affected workers in the change can overcome resistance to change.

It is also, contended, however that resistance can have benefits for the organisation. Mabin et al. (2001) suggest that resistance to change is useful, and can be harnessed by having resisters engage in the change process, work through the difficulties, and probably produce a better change outcome as a result. Cheney et al. (2004) add that resistance can signal to an organisation that the suggested change is actually a bad idea and should be reconsidered. This suggestion is echoed by Kanter et al. (1992) who adds it is vital for feedback channels to be available to allow employees to feed back to change implementers what is concerning them.

Kanter (1985) and Cheney et al. (2004) suggest that there are a number of reasons that employees resist change – most of which are very human factors such as losing control, being uncertain, fearing that they will be unable to change, and fearing that the change will result in negative outcomes such as redundancies. Dolphin (2005) supports Kanter's (1985) contention that uncertainty is one of the major causes of resistance to change -

Employees facing anxiety or high uncertainty regarding issues of great relevance may conjure scenarios that are often worse than the reality, to the extent of even attributing malevolent intentions to management. (p. 174)

Daniels and Hollifield (2002) agree that the uncertainty caused by instability in their working environments significantly affects people and their ability to cope with change. Middle management is not immune to this uncertainty either (Daly et al., 2003), and can result in resistance at this level, which can impact negatively on the change process. Tourish and Hargie (1998) found that change results in staff uncertainty increasing, and staff desire greater amounts of information and more frequent communication during periods of change to overcome this uncertainty. Communication is, therefore, a primary tool in reducing the possibility of uncertainty amongst employees. Clampitt & Williams (2005) agree that communication plays an important part in reducing uncertainty. Uncertainty reduction theory (as outlined in Clampitt & Williams, 2005) posits that when people are uncertain they seek information, communication of this information reduces uncertainty, and with this reduction in uncertainty more positive feelings about change result. On the other hand,

Bordia et al. (2004) suggest that communication can also lead to greater uncertainty, especially when the communication is about things that employees see in a negative light, such as redundancies.

The literature therefore outlines the importance of reducing uncertainty as a way to reduce resistance on the part of employees, and that communication is a very important part of this process. It is also important that communication about change addresses any other issues that may cause people to resist the change. Organisations should also ensure that feedback channels are available for employees to raise their concerns and to facilitate management to react to them.

2.6.9 Importance of feedback opportunities

Opportunities for feedback are generally acknowledged in the literature as an important part of the change process. The efficacy of face-to-face communication (Grossman, 2000) in facilitating the feedback process is explored further below. If the communication cannot be face-to-face, the need of communication to be dialogic (two way) is highlighted in the literature (Grossman, 2000; Nelson & Coxhead, 1997) particularly when the change is a second order change (Frahm & Brown, 2005b). As Kanter et al. (1992) found:

Communication as we use it here goes beyond keeping people informed of change efforts. Real communication requires a dialogue amongst the different change-makers. By listening and responding to concerns, resistance and feedback from all levels, change-makers gain a broader understanding of what the change means to different parts of the organisation and how it will affect them. (p. 388)

The role of feedback in positively influencing the change process is also highlighted (Cheney et al., 2004; Kanter et al., 1992). Feedback may result in improvement of the change process itself. It is also beneficial in communicating that there may be other problems that negatively impact the organisations' capability to change; feedback enables the organisation to address these problems and get back on track.

In contrast, Lewis et al. (2001) in their examination of change in non-profit organisations bring an interesting dimension to the importance of seeking feedback, where feedback is often sought from the great benefactors or public trustees, rather than individuals affected by the change or the organisation itself. They go on to outline that in any change process feedback may not actively be sought by change implementers because they fear conflict and also because they may perceive “how risky the process of soliciting opinions may be for some change initiatives” (Lewis et al., 2001, p. 20).

Despite most literature emphasising the importance of there being channels for feedback, it seems to be neglected in some change processes. Lewis (2006) for example found that implementers spent more time disseminating information than soliciting input, as they saw it as more likely to result in the success of the change programme. Therefore, feedback opportunities may be neglected because of the fear of conflict outlined above, or maybe because of a perception that feedback is not useful or necessary.

Another important part of the feedback process is the final feedback to the employees, after the change has concluded. This feedback to the organisation often assesses the success or failure of the change initiative, and is an area somewhat neglected in the literature (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). Ford and Ford (1995) suggest that a failure to have a conversation of closure to the change can result in the change being perceived as less successful. They suggest this closure conversation may take the form of a summary of what has occurred, who has participated, and what the overall results of the change were. Ford and Ford perceive that without this the participants in the change are likely to feel that their contributions to the change were not valued. Where change has not been so successful the organisation may fear communicating the results of the change, but without it employees may be left unsure of the results and less willing to participate in future change initiatives.

2.6.10 Employee involvement in the change process

Involvement of employees in the actual change process is another theme that emerges in both the management and communication literature. Involvement

of stakeholders, particularly employees, throughout the change process is seen by many as vitally important to the success of the change initiative (Conger, Spreitzer & Lawler, 1999; Grossman & Smith, 2003). In their thematic analysis of 'popular' books on organisational change, Lewis et al. (2006) found this by far the most prominent theme, with four times more mention of this than of communication. More specifically, Nelson and Coxhead (1997) found that internal communication was the key to involvement of stakeholders as, without it, meaningful contribution was not possible. Mabin et al. (2001) in comparing two managerial styles in the same change initiative found where employees were involved in the process there was less resistance to change and more co-operation in implementing the change whereas those less involved were resistant and unhappy about the change.

In contrast, Lewis (2006) found in a study of employee perspectives that:

More surprising perhaps was the finding that involvement of those staff at the lowest levels of the organisation in decision-making about the change was not considered part of the recipe for success. In fact, it was found to be negatively related to change success from employee perspectives. (p. 41)

However, it must be said that the general trend in the literature is that employee involvement positively impacts on the success of change.

2.6.11 Communication channels

It is very important that everyone in an organisation has access to communication about any change. It is also important that the right communication channels are utilised and that they are effective in getting the right messages out to the organisation, and also allow feedback from the organisation. This field is rich in theoretical propositions of how media might be chosen, but these are not specific to change communication, rather to communication in general. Although these theories are not change communication focussed, they have significant relevance to this topic in that change implementers must make conscious choices about the channels they will use during the change process.

Media richness theory proposed by Daft and Lengel (outlined in Cheney et al., 2004) for example suggests that the particular types of media chosen should be appropriate to both the message and the task one wishes to perform. Media richness denotes the information-carrying capacity of the medium – and capacity is determined by four things: the possibility for instant feedback, the ability to convey multiple communication cues, the capacity for nonverbal communication and the potential to tailor messages to personal circumstances. Face to face interaction is seen as the most rich communication medium – and this rich medium should be used for equivocal messages (where they are open to interpretation). This theory is only “weakly supported by research” (Cheney et al., 2004, p. 354) and removes the rational choices made by individuals.

The social influence model proposed by Fulk, Schmitz and Steinfield (1990, cited in Timmerman, 2003) suggests that media choices are not only made as a result of the message and the task, but also of the experience within the organisation of the communicator, the influence of others, and the communication patterns within the organisation. Timmerman further suggests the dual capacity model goes further and illustrates that communication media convey not only data but also symbols; the type of media chosen can convey a message.

Timmerman (2003) emphasises the importance of the channel chosen being appropriate to the style of implementation an organisation chooses. For example, an organisation that has chosen a formal programmatic implementation approach might utilise more formal, one way communication channels, whereas this could be completely inappropriate for a company that was chosen an adaptive approach where feedback is an important part of the approach.

Quirke (1995) suggests that “the majority of existing channels are designed for effective downward communication” (p. 15). To allow feedback it is important that the channels chosen for change communication also allow upward communication and two-way dialogue. Much of the literature

accentuates the importance of face to face communication (Goodman & Truss, 2004; Quirke, 1995), especially at senior management and supervisor level, due mainly to the two-way nature of the communication with opportunities for feedback and questioning.

Sometimes the most practical communication channel is not always the most effective channel. In a major change project at the US airline Northwest, a series of videos was used to communicate a change to staff rapidly, as there were problems getting staff together in meetings when they were all rostered at different times. The lack of opportunities for discussion and feedback provided by relying on this channel alone, however, meant that the rumour mill was very active and the messages were skewed in the process (Kanter et al., 1992, p. 401). It is, therefore, suggested in the literature (Grossman, 2000) that it is useful to have a multi-channel approach, if possible, to maximise the opportunity for people both to hear the messages about change and also to contribute their viewpoints.

Goodman and Truss (2004) provide another viewpoint on this topic suggesting it is also important that communication media and timing change to suit the phase of change that the organisation is moving through – the medium used to launch the change may not necessarily be appropriate to use in the continued communication of the change process. An organisation that does not recognise this and uses just one medium for all communication may find their efforts being less effective.

It is also important not to neglect less formal channels of communication, which Crampton et al. (1998) suggest dominate organisational communication. This dominance is supported by Lewis's (2006) study which found that employees perceived that informal channels were most often used for providing and soliciting input from employees" (p. 40) during change. Varyingly called the 'grapevine', the 'rumour mill' and 'gossip', informal discussions of change will always occur. These are of course not controllable by the organisation, which can cause change agents some

concern, for fear that the change could be derailed by very active informal communication networks (Tourish & Hargie, 1998).

Informal communication becomes more utilised “when employees perceive the need for information, such as in a crisis, and thus may even feel that management is purposefully withholding information” (Byers, 1997, p. 49). This is particularly relevant as change often results from crisis situations. A review of research by Crampton et al. (1998) suggests that, although the grapevine has a high level of accuracy (between 75% and 90%); it is the 10-25% that is wrong that can cause problems for organisations.

Informal communication channels can, however, be utilised by the change agents (Goodman & Truss, 2004), and also provide staff with an outlet to express their feelings about the change in a supportive environment (Byers, 1997; Crampton et al., 1998). A factual case study in Page and Zorn (2007) describes the deliberate use by management of the grapevine to achieve an organisational aim. Given the significant part informal communication plays, it is important that organisations do not ignore the role of it within the change process.

2.7 Differing perspectives of change

The literature also suggests that the experience of different players in a change process may create extremely different perceptions of the change process. Gade (2000, in Daniels & Hollifield, 2002) outlines a case where managers and employees had radically different viewpoints, so different in fact that it was hard to believe that they were talking about the same experiences. Pollock (2000) outlines a similar disconnect between change managers and employees within a university context, where the change managers saw chaos, and the employees saw normal university life. This supports the need for change managers to consider carefully the culture of the organisation when deciding how to implement and communicate change

Lewis and Seibold (1998) suggest that the majority of studies are taken from a managerial perspective, and that the focus is on the implementers of change rather than on those who are being affected by the change. They feel this lack of employees' points of view have resulted in a gap in the literature. Byers (1997) suggests that this may be the result of literature being dominated by functionalist theorists, and that an interpretive approach more prevalent since the 1980's might result in more examination of the "socially constructed nature of organisational life" (p. 211) rather than a managerial focus. A re-balance in perspective certainly has been evident in more recent studies, where many of the studies explore employee perceptions of change. In an attempt to redress the balance Lewis (2006) undertook a study of employee perspectives of change communication. Interestingly the issues raised by employees that emerged from his study differed from what one might call a managerial perspective only degree. The major difference was that employees placed different levels of importance on some factors within the change communication from that reflected in the managerial literature. However, it could be contended that there is a managerial focus, as much of the literature still looks at change from the organisational interest rather than focussing on the effects of change on the individual.

2.8 Evaluation of change communication

An important part of the change process is assessing whether it was a success or not. This evaluation is often neglected (Ford & Ford, 1995; Preskill & Torres, 1999) resulting in the organisation not learning from the process, with the potential of making the same mistakes in the future. Although there are a number of change management assessment models suggested in the literature (Carney, 2000), the literature is light on models that directly seek to assess change communication. As Goodman and Truss (2004, p. 220) indicate, there is a "lack of appropriate and rigorous tools to measure the effectiveness of communication during change programmes."

Another way of approaching the assessment is to pose particular questions and/or to specify features that must be met to determine the success of

change. Nutt (1986) found that the definition of success most utilised by change sponsors is whether the change was “put to use”. Cheney et al. (2004) suggest that several conditions must be met to determine whether change is a success. Firstly, it must be accepted by key stakeholders. Secondly, the fidelity and uniformity of the change adoption must meet the aims of the change. In this context fidelity is determined by whether the intended use of the designer and the actual use by the user match, and uniformity is where change is accepted similarly by all users. They also suggest that one needs to determine what the goals of the change agents were and whether they were met. If yes, the change can be considered at least partially successful. Another part of the assessment should be to determine whether there were any unintended consequences of the changes. Timmerman (2003) and Lewis and Seibold (1993, in Timmerman, 2003) suggest that effectiveness of change implementation is not the simple answering of the adopted or rejected question, and agree with Cheney et al. (2004) that fidelity and uniformity are also important. Lewis (2006) highlights that “the respondents’ own assessment of the degree to which change has achieved intended outcomes and has produced a sense that success outweighs failure” (p. 24) is an essential measure. This focus on the perceptions of those affected by the change is refreshing, as the focus in most of the literature is on the organisational viewpoint on whether change was successful.

Adapting these issues to consideration of communication success, an assessment of the change communication could examine whether the key stakeholders felt that they had been communicated to well. It could also examine whether they felt that the communication had achieved the aims of the change managers. Change agents could be asked whether the communication had achieved their aims. Finally, assessment of whether the communication had resulted in unintended consequences could be undertaken, and the results of these examined.

Carney (2000) suggests an assessment model to evaluate the success of change initiatives in a health setting. This model focuses on critical success

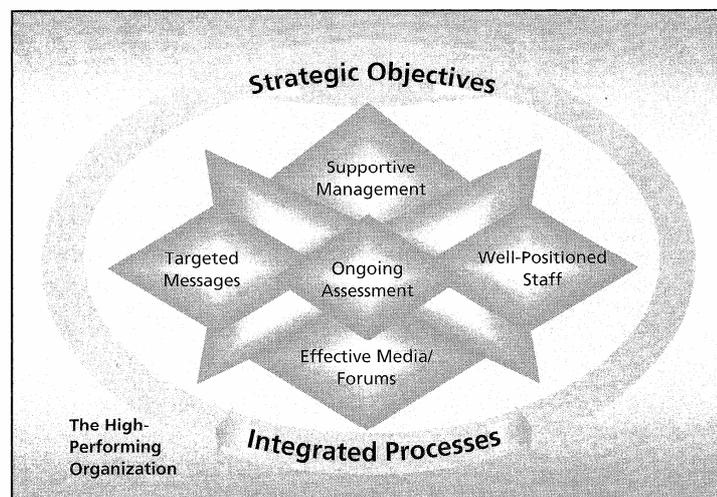
factors, communication process, levels of acceptance/resistance to change, change implementation process and the evaluation process. It does, however, not focus on communication of change, but rather evaluates the broader success of a change process. The communication component of this model focuses on consultation, education, and participation through the process; that the needs of both the staff and the patients are recognised; that participants understand the change dynamic, and that democratic decision-making is involved in the management of the change process (2002, p. 268). A high assessment score for communication in this model would have everyone in the organisation understanding the need for change, agreeing on the methods for change, and understanding the consequences of the change.

Barrett (2002), however, suggests a model targeted specifically on evaluating employee communication with her Strategic Employee Communication Model which provides an analytical tool to assess and improve employee communications. This model was developed from researching high performing companies and determining what worked for those organisations. Barrett outlined five main components that contribute to the success of employee communications. Management must be supportive of the change and must model the communication behaviours they expect of their employees. The staff who are communicating the change need to be well positioned within the organisation, preferably at senior management level. The messages and the channels used must be tailored to the various audiences within the organisation. There should be ongoing assessment of the success of the communication to enable corrective action to take place if messages are not getting through. Finally, the organisation must ensure that there are effective media and forums available to be utilised in the communication efforts, from traditional media to less traditional forums where employees can critically evaluate the change and have an input into moulding the change initiatives.

This model effectively encapsulates many of the considerations proposed in the assessment methods suggested in the literature outlined above. For example whereas the Cheney et al. (2004) change assessment outlines the

need for the goals of the change to have been met, Barrett's (2002) model requires communication to be structured to communicate the company's core strategic objectives to employees – and these objectives could be the goals of a change initiative. The requirement for consultation, education and participation presented in Carney's (2000) model is reflected in the Barrett model's ongoing assessment requirement, which determines whether communication to employees is effective. Barrett's explanation of her model also details the importance of employee involvement through involving them in forums where they can affect the substance of the change initiative. This model will, therefore, be utilised in the assessment of the communication in the findings and discussion section below.

Figure 2 Strategic Employee Communication Model



(Barrett, 2002, p. 309)

2.9 Gaps in the literature

Some scholars suggest change research is less meaningful if the studies conducted are not longitudinal. Van de Ven and Huber (1995) suggest that the study of organisational change focuses on two types of questions. They are firstly, what are the antecedents or consequences of changes in organisational forms or administrative practices and, secondly, how does an organisational change merge, develop, grow or terminate over time? They contend that most research concentrates on the former question, and is less robust as a result. The review of change literature undertaken by Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) suggested that this was indeed important, as one off studies often reflected short term gains that did not last into the long term. For example, the Peters and Waterman (1982) book "In Search of Excellence" profiled successful companies and the reasons for their success. Within five years of the book being published over two-thirds of the companies examined had gone out of business, or were struggling to survive (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). Certainly this literature review supports the contentions of Van de Ven and Huber and Armenakis & Bedeian, as there are few longitudinal studies available in the literature. Addressing this gap would enhance the reliability of the field.

In studies of change management there is a prevalence of studies examining the change from an organisational point of view, rather than from an employee point of view. This has led to a particular bias in the examination of change, as the priorities of the organisation rather than the employees dominate. Because the viewpoints of managers and employees are likely to vary considerably, this concentration on the organisation rather than the employee may have resulted in the literature reflecting a particular slant that need not tell the full story. The literature regarding the communication of change goes some way to redressing this balance as many of these studies focussed on employee perceptions rather than management perceptions. However, even this literature often has an organisational perspective, as the aims of the organisational change are often being assessed, rather than the

effects on employees. Notwithstanding this slight redress, the literature would therefore benefit from more concentration on employees' perspectives.

Another area neglected by the research is that of assessing communication success. Most communication assessment tools are for broad communication audits rather than being tailored expressly to change communication. Timmerman (2003) also notes the lack of literature regarding media selection and communication of change. This area could, therefore, be usefully researched to determine whether media selection theories are applicable to this particular form of communication.

The literature of change management would be enhanced by further integration of the change and communication literature. Frahm and Brown (2005b) suggest that the area of organisational change communication focussing on both the change and the communication is somewhat under-researched in management literature, where communication is often just portrayed as one of the many factors in the change process.

Finally, most of the literature originates from the United States, Europe or Australasia. It was very difficult to source literature from researchers outside these areas, which has resulted in a lack of alternative viewpoints. It would be interesting to see if different cultures have different ways of implementing and communicating change.

Chapter 3 Research Design

3.1 Introduction

When undertaking research one of the initial choices to be made is the nature of the research – quantitative and qualitative being the two most common approaches. Quantitative research is empirical research where the data is usually numerical, and “the key concerns are that measurement is reliable, valid and generalisable in its clear predictions of cause and effect” (Cassell & Symon, 1995, p. 2). Possibly as a result of this greater ease of measurement, quantitative research is often seen as more valid. Qualitative research is empirical research where the data gathered is not likely to be numerical, and theory is often generated from the data collected. Qualitative research is therefore often more interpretive in nature, in that it seeks to interpret the experiences of others in the context of the research, rather than attempting to quantify their reaction to an experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the role of the qualitative researcher, “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Because of the nature of this style of research, the results cannot be generalised to other situations. However, it is no less useful as a result (Brewerton & Millward, 2001).

Cassell and Symon (1995) suggest that organisational research is often qualitative in nature as respondents (organisations or individuals) are often “an active shaper of situations and events” and qualitative research methods “more able to encompass this dynamic situation than quantitative methods” (p. 5). Armenakis and Bedeian’s (1999) analysis of change literature in the 1990s concluded that the use of qualitative methods in organisational change research were becoming increasingly prevalent, perhaps because of this flexibility. Another advantage of qualitative research in examining organisations is that it allows the researcher to adapt and evolve as themes emerge during the research process that are worthy of exploration.

Quantitative research, being more fixed in its focus on reliability and validity, doesn't readily allow this adaptive process. This study attempts to determine the individual experiences of employees at the institution and how they perceived the communication efforts of the project on an individual basis. This examination of personal experiences was better suited to a qualitative approach as the data collection methods utilised allowed exploration of the personal experiences in a way that a quantitative approach may not have. This study is, therefore, a predominantly qualitative study of a single organisation.

A case study methodology is appropriate to this study. One of the reasons for choosing this method is the knowledge of the project and access to information about the project that the researcher has due to having a role on the Student Max steering committee. Although Babbie (1998) suggests that the chief purpose of case studies is description, Hakim (2000) conversely suggests that case studies are also useful in organisations in "policy implementation and evaluation" and in studying "processes of change and adoption" (p. 68), supporting previous research by Yin (1993). Yin also suggests that three things define the research method choice of a case study – it investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, it addresses a situation in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and it uses multiple sources of evidence. His contention is that case studies usually ask how or why questions, the researcher does not require control over what is being researched, and the focus is on contemporary events. If judged by these criteria, this study meets all three criteria.

Meriam (1998), however, cited in Weingardner (2005), contends that "the single most defining characteristic is the delimitation of the unit or study" in that "there is a limit to the number of people who could be interviewed". There is no doubt that there is a limitation to the number of participants for this case study, which looks at one institution, with a finite number of employees. Yin

(1994, cited in Weingardner, 2005), also suggests that “use of a diverse array of evidence to converge on the facts of a case leads to satisfaction of one element of the basic definition of case studies, reliance on multiple sources of evidence”. As a result of this, case studies usually use multiple data sources to enhance their credibility (Cassell & Symon, 1995), also a characteristic of this study.

Yin (1993) also outlines how useful the case study method is in undertaking evaluations of programmes or interventions, and suggests that a case study should involve the following steps:

1. Reviewing all the literature.
2. Accumulating all evidence related to the goals and design of the programme being evaluated.
3. Developing specific hypotheses about the programme being evaluated by constructing a program logic model which outlines the desired outcomes and their relationship to the programme.
4. Developing taxonomies or other schemes for understanding the context within which the programme operates.
5. Finally the researcher should define the key design components, for example the unit of analysis (p. 65).

The case in question is a single-case study of an organisation focussing on the introduction of a strategic project and the accompanying communication. The unit of analysis is the entire organisation. Brewerton and Millward (2001) suggest that the advantage of using a case study is that it allows a more in-depth examination of a particular situation than other designs and it yields rich and enlightening information that may pose questions not considered by the researcher. As this research project aims to inform institutional developments it seems, therefore, that the case study approach is ideal. However, the most compelling reason personally for using a case study approach for this study, with triangulated methods of data collection, is that it allows the research to be

more holistic (Jones & Bugge, 2006), and allows for both description and evaluation.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

This project utilises several different types of data collection, with the data gathered being predominantly qualitative. Unlike quantitative research where validity and reliability can be demonstrated relatively easily (using statistical analysis for example), it is more difficult with qualitative research to prove that the qualitative research is valid and reliable (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). An argument against choosing case study research is that it is also often characterised as not being able to be generalised.

It is, therefore, useful to use several data collection methods to build the credibility of the research as it “suggests that the topic was examined from several different perspectives, which helps build confidence in the findings” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p.115). Cross-checking of findings by utilising several data collection methods will make the findings more valid. “Exclusive reliance on one method, therefore may bias or distort the researcher’s picture of the particular slice of reality that she is investigating” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2003, p. 113), and the use of several methods, will give more confidence in the results (Jones & Bugge, 2006). Cassell and Symon (1995) suggest that triangulating data by using several data collection approaches is particularly important when undertaking organisational research. The three methods utilised in this survey should, therefore, assist in making this research more valid, especially if common themes emerge from the three approaches.

3.2.1 On-Line Survey

The aim of the survey was to collect data on whether the communication to the institution’s community was effective, and to solicit feedback on

improvements for subsequent phases of the project. The survey sought information on the participants themselves (demographics) to determine whether there were differences in the experiences of different populations within the institution; for example, whether they were communicated to differently? The questions were therefore designed to: gather demographic information, determine what communication about the project the participants received, what channels of communication they recalled (their awareness), and the efficacy of particular channels. One of the questions also explored whether the channel satisfied their desire for information about the project. The survey utilised some scaled questions, to measure this effectiveness.

On-line surveys are very useful to the researcher as they are easily administered, participants do the data entry themselves, they allow easy follow-up, and are considerably cheaper than paper administered surveys (Sue & Ritter, 2007). They do, however, have disadvantages when compared with traditional paper based surveys. It is easy for prospective participants to delete the email with the link, whereas disposing of a paper based survey is a more conscious act (Witmer, Colman & Katzman, 1999).

Surveys in general also have some limitations, with the problems of accurate memory of events and social desirability bias. Brewerton and Millward (2001) suggest that individuals' recollections of the area of interest may not always be accurate. They also suggest that social desirability bias may lead people to report events in a more positive way than they might otherwise have. Confidentiality may assist in preventing this occurrence, as there cannot be any comeback on individuals; however, this is very difficult to judge. Lair (in Cheney et al., 2004) indicates the limitations of surveys in organisational research as being limited in depth (they may record perceptions, but not why the perceptions are held), lacking in social context, and they are inherently artificial (experiences may not fit a Likert scale). These limitations suggest that it is important therefore to supplement the survey with other data gathering methods, to confirm the findings.

3.2.2 Focus Groups

The aim of the focus groups was to further explore particular themes as well as what D'Aprix (1996, p. 63) calls "why questions". Cohen et al. (2003) state that with focus groups "the participants' rather than the researcher's agenda can predominate" (p. 288). Another advantage of utilising focus groups is that "the moderator gets the respondents to interact with each other in a way that reveals additional information" (Market Navigation Inc.). This interaction can mean that more information is gathered when group members' comments prompt other group members to also comment – this was certainly evident in the focus groups undertaken in this study. Focus groups are also economical on time, as a number of different viewpoints can be gathered within the one time-period (Downs & Adrian, 2004).

The validity of the data gathered within a focus group is what Krueger (1994) calls "high face validity" (p. 24), thus they tend to be used for particular purposes that are not intended to be generalised to an entire population. This can be seen as a disadvantage of focus groups as a research method (Downs & Adrian, 2004). However, if the purpose of the research is to evaluate a certain programme (as this research is), or product, they are seen as very useful (Downs & Adrian, 2004). This may be why they are one of the premier tools used by marketing companies.

The limitations of focus groups include a degree of lack of control over the actions of the focus group, the possibility that the group will act dysfunctionally, that individuals may dominate, it can be hard to recruit participants, a tired group may not contribute much information, and the information can be hard to analyse (Fern, 2001; Krueger, 1994). However, the researcher considered the benefits outweighed the limitations, and best suited the data gathering needs of the project.

An independent facilitator was engaged to administer the focus groups, because of the researcher's position as a member of the Student Max steering group. This enhanced the validity and reliability of data gathered by avoiding a social desirability bias where participants tell the researcher what

they think the researcher wants to hear. Although the facilitator was experienced at administering focus groups the researcher undertook an extensive briefing to ensure that the facilitator understood the questions, and gave her a brief background of the individuals within the focus groups, as well as providing the background of the project to enable her to contextualise the questions. The questions for this group were semi-structured in that the facilitator was given a set of questions but was able to add questions to delve further to gain all relevant information. Additional questions were also utilised to further clarify some of the points raised. The focus groups were taped and fully transcribed by the note taker and the researcher. In addition, on advice from the literature (Krueger, 1994), a note-taker also took full notes during the focus groups. The focus groups were both approximately one hour in length.

3.2.3 Interviews

The aim of an in-depth interview is to delve more deeply into the experiences of individuals (Cohen et al., 2003). Most participants are familiar with and tend to be comfortable with qualitative interviews in comparison to other research techniques (Cassell & Symon, 1995). They allow the interviewer to almost 'have a conversation' with the interviewee about something of mutual interest, and can be less threatening than other techniques (such as observation). There are a number of different types of qualitative interview. The unstructured interview has no fixed questions in any fixed order, and questions evolve through the interview process. Here the need to quantify and to compare interviews is secondary to gaining rich data from the individual (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). The semi-structured interview has some structure in having some fixed questions, but allows the interviewer to probe more deeply into areas of interest.

Semi-structured interviews have some of the disadvantages that focus groups have, in that they create a lot of data that can be difficult to analyse, there is a risk that the interviewee will try to take over, and that the reliability and validity of the data are reduced when every interviewee is not being asked exactly the same questions in exactly the same order. Cohen et al. (2003) note other validity issues in the possible biases of the interviewer. Their particular

concerns were that the biases of the interviewer can influence both how the interview proceeds and how it is analysed through their own personal characteristics. They suggest that the best way of improving the validity of the data is to minimise the possibility of bias, and one of the most effective ways to do this is to have a highly structured interview where each interviewee has exactly the same experience. However, in this research project, the richness of the data gathered was seen as adequate compensation for the possible reduction in validity. Also, the nature of the research, in assessing the success of communication, meant that there was less focus on validity as an external construct – there were no ‘right’ answers.

The interviews for this project were semi-structured, in that the interviewer sought answers to a particular set of questions but was able to deviate from them, or re-order them, if the interview required it. It also allowed further questions to be asked if new themes emerged during the interview that needed to be explored. It also allowed the raising of issues of concern to the interviewee that may not have been completely relevant to the topic. This ensured that the interviewer was free to explore more deeply the participants’ individual experiences, but also enabled the assessment of the communication of the Student Max project to be fully examined. Themes raised in the survey and focus groups, for example, the issues of trust, were further explored in the interviews.

3.3 Participants and sample

Case studies, by their bounded nature, do not utilise random samples for selecting participants. The participants in this survey were a volunteer sample as all staff at the institution were emailed the link and requested to complete the survey. Those who wished to do so volunteered by completing it. The focus group samples were also volunteers as the researcher requested volunteers for the participants at the conclusion of the survey. Those who wished to added their email to the survey, thus volunteering to participate in a focus group. Twenty-five people volunteered to participate in the focus groups, of whom nine eventually participated. There was some limited

randomness in the selection of the interview participants in that the researcher stuck a virtual pin into names on the staff list then requested the participation of individual staff members; however, once again the sample was restricted to employees at the institution.

Research literature suggests that there are some problems relating to use of volunteers. One concern (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) is that the characteristics of people who volunteer are very different from those who do not and, therefore, the sample cannot be representative. However all participants in ethically undertaken research (whether chosen at random or not) must agree to participate in the research, and therefore could be called volunteers, thereby reducing the possible efficacy of this argument. There is also a concern (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003) about the generalisability of findings from all non-probability samples (of which volunteer samples are one example) – that is, all samples not chosen at random from the general population. However, this type of sample was the only one suitable for this study, because the study examines a particular organisation.

Sandelowski (1995) suggests that “one of the major differences between qualitative and quantitative research approaches is that qualitative approaches typically involve purposeful sampling, while quantitative approaches usually involve probability sampling” (p. 180). The sample for all parts of this research will be purposive, defined by Wimmer and Dominick (2003) as one where participants are “selected for specific characteristics or qualities and eliminates those who fail to meet these criteria” (p. 88), with the criteria in this study being that all participants are staff members within the institution. Cohen et al. (2003) emphasises the importance of sampling in focus groups to ensure “that every participant is the bearer of the particular characteristic required ... otherwise the discussion will lose focus or become unrepresentative” (p. 288). As the research was only administered to staff at the institution, this did not prove difficult. It would have been desirable to have a “proportionate stratified sample where strata are based on their proportions in the population” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003, p. 93) but the ability to do that

depended on whether the number and characteristics of the volunteers allowed it.

At the very least it would have been desirable to have the occupational group proportions of the staff matched in the sample for both the survey and the focus groups, otherwise the study could be considered skewed. However, other demographic considerations, such as gender, are less relevant to this study. There was some deviation from this desired outcome, however. The survey sample was 50% academic staff, 50% allied staff (although 16 staff members chose not to answer this question), whereas the organisational ratio in 2006 was 56% academic staff and 43% allied staff. In the focus groups the sample was 44% academic staff, 66% administrative staff, and in the interviews 43% academic staff, 57% administrative staff. However, the differences were perceived by the researcher as not being significant enough to require further research to be undertaken. This decision was supported when the themes emerging from the different occupational groups tended to be very similar, thus the researcher believes trying to match the demographic profile is likely to have had little effect on the outcome of the research. The three methods used covered a wide variety of staff from both campuses, from academic and allied staff, from school and central service areas, and at management and non-management levels.

Fern (2001) suggests that participants in focus groups should be chosen to have a homogenous cultural value orientation, and that having a group of mixed collectivists and individualists could result in the focus group being somewhat dysfunctional. Fern (2001) and Krueger (1994) also suggest that differing social status, age, ethnicity and gender amongst the participants may also result in the focus group working less well and being less revealing. As the focus groups were chosen from a group of volunteers from a limited pool, these factors were not considered in the choice of individuals.

Krueger (1994) also suggests that it is important that people within the focus group have "certain things in common" (p. 76). The one differentiation made was to split the staff members into academic and non-academic staff. This

was a conscious decision, not only to ensure some commonality of experience but also for a more pragmatic reason. The experience of the researcher is that when these groups are blended there are often power issues that will result in the non-academic staff not being heard. Fern suggests that if one is not able to recruit a group with similar status, age etc then “some of these problems can be minimized by selecting a moderator who is aware of and experienced in working within the cultural value orientation of the focus group members” (p. 29). Cognisance of the potential pitfalls of the differing backgrounds within the focus group participants was, therefore, taken when choosing the facilitator for the focus groups. The facilitator had previously had considerable experience in the organisational context, and was experienced in working with a wide variety of staff. The focus groups did not seem to operate in a dysfunctional manner, so the choice of moderator seems to have been appropriate and effective.

The sample for the interviews was also purposive (as defined by Wimmer & Dominick, 2003), in that particular occupations within the organisation were chosen to ensure data was gathered from a variety of levels within the organisation. It was hoped that interviewing individuals from different levels within the organisation would allow examination of whether their viewpoints differed and the reasons for any differences.

Cohen et al. (2003) outline the difficulties of determining the correct sample size, but note that the “correct sample size depends on the purpose of the study and the nature of the population under study” (p. 93). The difficulty in determining sample size in qualitative research is echoed through much of the literature (Alreck & Settle, 1995; DePaulo, 2000; Hakim, 2000; Sandelowski, 1995). DePaulo (2000) suggests that the sample must be big enough to hear most or all of the perceptions that might be important, whereas Alreck and Settle (1995) suggest that the maximum practical size for a sample is 1000 respondents, and that it is “seldom necessary to sample more than 10 percent of the population to obtain adequate confidence” (p. 62). Another issue with choosing sample size is in assessing what the likely response rate might be – Hakim (2000) suggests that a response rate of less than 50% is inadequate.

The survey was distributed to over 1100 staff at the institution, with a response rate of 12%, exceeding Alreck and Settle's (1995) 10%, but falling below Hakim's (2000) recommended 50%.

Krueger (1994) suggests that to give all individuals an opportunity to speak, five to seven participants is the best sample for a focus group. The focus group of academic staff had four participants and the administrative staff five participants.

A sample of seven participants was interviewed to ensure that all levels of the organisation, from senior management to junior employees, were appropriately represented. This sample also included a mixture of academic and non-academic staff, again to delve into the possible different experiences of different occupational groups. Cohen et al. (2003) recommend that "one conducts interviews with as many people as necessary in order to gain the information sought" (p. 278). As with most research, it would have been desirable to have interviewed more individuals to determine whether additional data could be gained. However, there were limitations to the time that the researcher could spend on this, and as interview transcription is extremely time consuming, a limit was set. As similar themes emerged during the interviews, it could be argued that more interviews might have only confirmed the findings, rather than resulting in the emergence of new information.

3.4 Research Procedure

3.4.1 Online survey

The online survey was developed with the assistance of some of the researchers' colleagues within the institution. The initial survey was tested on some colleagues, and refinements were then made as a result of feedback. Further feedback was obtained from the researcher's supervisor, and the survey further refined. The finalised list of questions was forwarded to the technical area of the institution who put it into the online survey tool Perseus Survey Solutions/EFM (Enterprise Feedback Management) 2.00. The

vagaries of this tool required a couple of minor changes to formatting, and a change to the scaling. The researcher decided not to have the feature that allowed tailored follow-up reminders to non-completing staff members, as this was seen as making the survey appear less anonymous. The survey was emailed to all staff on Wednesday 9 May 2007 and staff were asked to complete it by 21 May 2007. A reminder email was sent several weeks later, and several days extra were given. The raw data from the survey was collated on 31 May 2007 and forwarded to the researcher.

There were 136 survey participants, although some chose not to answer every question in the survey. The covering email (see Appendix C) outlined that the survey results may be used to inform Phase 2 of the project. As a sense of involvement is seen as a way to increase participants in research (Sue & Ritter, 2007), it was hoped that this would encourage more staff than may have otherwise been motivated to complete the survey.

3.4.2 Focus groups

The focus group participants were chosen from those who had volunteered to participate when completing the survey. The researcher contacted the prospective participants by telephone to determine their availability and confirm whether they were still happy to participate. A number of prospective participants were either not available at the proposed time or had workload issues that prevented their attendance at the session. As a result an additional email was sent to academic staff inviting them to participate. Four academic and six non-academic staff were available at the designated times. A confirmatory email was sent several days prior to the session thanking them once again and confirming the date, time and place of the session. At this time one non-academic staff member advised that there could be some difficulty in attending the session due to another important engagement (which did occur). The focus group sessions commenced with the introduction of the facilitator, encouragement to partake of refreshments, and some general introductions (although some staff did know each other). At this time participants were requested to read and sign the participant consent form. The focus groups commenced with the researcher introducing the facilitator

more formally, outlining the purpose and format of the session, and briefly outlining the reasons for the research. The researcher set the tape recorders going and left the room. The taped focus groups were fully transcribed by the researcher and the note-taker. The focus groups were held in August 2007.

3.4.3 Interviews

The researcher chose most of the participants for the interviews in a semi-random manner, utilising an electronic staff list and sticking a virtual pin onto it (the computer cursor), noting down the name of the individual on which the cursor rested. The only exception to this procedure was the senior manager and member of the Student Max steering committee. The categories chosen when doing the searches were head of school/associate head of school, programme director, academic staff member, non-academic staff member, and senior administrator. The researcher contacted the staff members by telephone to outline the research, asked if they were prepared to be interviewed, and if they were agreeable to arrange the interview time and date.

Seven interviews were undertaken. The interviews were held in a place that felt comfortable to the interviewee – these varied between their offices, staffrooms, and meeting rooms. The length of the interviews varied between 30 minutes and 1 hour 24 minutes, depending on how long the interviewee chose to speak about the questions. The interviews were all taped, with the permission of the interviewee, and a full transcript made of the tapes. The interviews were held between October and December 2007.

3.5 Data analyses

As mentioned above, one of the major distinctions in research is between quantitative and qualitative data, which both demand quite different ways to analyse data. Even in projects such as this, where on the face of it the methodology is qualitative, data can be collected in such a way to facilitate

different types of examination. It is, therefore, important for the researcher to choose the appropriate method of data analysis prior to undertaking the research, as this may significantly affect the data gathering process and substance. Qualitative analysis of interviews and focus groups can range from summarising the discussion, to identifying themes, to elaborate coding schemes (Fern, 2001). Summarising the discussion is of limited benefit to the researcher, as little interpretation can occur (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This study, therefore, has utilised the qualitative method of thematic analysis to undertake the data analysis for all the qualitative data in this survey. Thematic analysis seeks to identify prominent or recurrent themes that 'emerge' from qualitative data, and interpret the data in the light of these themes. Themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985, p. 60, cited in Aronsen, 1994). One of the crucial aspects of thematic analysis is establishing what is meant by a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The literature indicates that a theme is not necessarily what is mentioned most – there is no measure of how many times something has to be mentioned to qualify as a theme. Braun and Clarke also underline that when determining key themes, it is not necessarily those that are mentioned most, "but rather on whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question" (p. 81). Themes can either emerge from the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or may be expanded on by an examination of the literature (Aronsen, 1994). Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) suggest that a combination of data, literature and theoretically driven theme development provides a richer analysis.

Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young and Sutton (2005), however, express concern that thematic analysis is often unclear about exactly what is involved and the process by which it is achieved. They are also concerned that it is unclear whether the structure of the analysis should reflect the frequency with which particular themes are reported, or whether the analysis should be weighted towards themes that appear to have a high level of explanatory value. It is, therefore, important that this study is very transparent in regard to

the process decisions, and to the methods determined for establishing themes.

In addition to the thematic analysis, as with many computerised surveys that have scaled questions, some quantitative analysis was undertaken by the computer package itself, which will be interpreted by the researcher. This will be incorporated into the findings.

Procedure

The procedure was developed in light of the literature outlined above and follows that outlined in Braun & Clarke (2006) summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phases of thematic analysis		
1.	Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2.	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3.	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4.	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5.	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6.	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) p. 86

An iterative process was undertaken of reading and rereading the data to saturation to establish the themes. The theme coding used to analyse this research was a combination of inductive and a priori deductive coding.

Inductive coding is a data driven approach where the coding is derived from the text – in this case the qualitative data from the survey, and the transcripts of the focus groups and interviews. A priori deductive coding is where the coding is derived from the research question and the theoretical background. Finally, the Barrett (2002) model was reviewed, and the data re-read a final time to determine whether anything further was exposed in light of this model. This final step was important as the research question requires an assessment of the success of the communication, and this model is one of the few employee communication models discovered in the literature.

3.6 Ethical Issues

There are some ethical considerations to be taken into account with this study. As with all research it was important that the participants gave their informed consent to the research. Participants in all parts of this research were made aware of the fact that the information gathered would be used in this research project as well as utilised by the institution to enhance their change communication. In some research it is not suitable to outline exactly what the study is researching, as, if the participants are aware of exactly what is being measured, their responses could be affected – “information that may prejudice the results of the investigation should be withheld” (Cohen et al., 2003, p.55). This was not considered to be the case in this project, so as part of the consent process, the participants were given a brief outline of the study prior to their becoming involved in the research process. In the survey this was part of the email with the link (see Appendix C for this email). In both the focus groups and the interviews participants were verbally given a general description of the process, the time involved, a broad outline of the study, and an outline of the purpose for which the information was being gathered, as it was not perceived that this would influence the participants. The participants in the survey were considered to have given informed consent through their submitting the survey. The participants in the focus groups and the interviews were asked to sign a consent form to ensure that they understood the research process, and the confidential nature of the research, to protect both the researcher and the institution.

Because the study involved participants giving some personal information one of the ethical considerations was preserving the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. As Cohen et al. (2003) state, “the greater the sensitivity of the information, the more safeguards are called for to protect the privacy of the research participant” (p. 61). This was done in several ways. There was a commitment to confidentiality in the consent form given to participants. The participants were not required to place their name on the survey unless they wished to participate in the focus groups (otherwise it would have been impossible to contact them again). And finally, and extremely importantly, individual participants are not identifiable by any descriptions in the written up research. Several times during the interview process, when sensitive issues were raised, the researcher assured the interviewees of the confidentiality of the process.

The researcher is employed at the institution being studied and was involved in the Student Max project, which raised some additional potential ethical issues. The institute gave consent for the research to be undertaken (see Appendix I). As the researcher is an employee within the institution, the relationship between the participants and the researcher is that of a colleague. However, all participants were employees of the organisation, all responses were anonymous, and all were adults, with no vulnerable groups in the participant groups.

As this project is an evaluation of the communication of a project, thus not dealing with any personal information and personal feelings, it is not envisaged that there is any significant conflict of interest issues. However it was recognised that there could have been issues with perceived conflict of interest and a possible social desirability bias with regard to the focus groups. This bias occurs where participants may be tempted to tell the researcher what they think that the researcher wants to hear rather than what they really think. In order to mitigate this risk, an independent facilitator was employed to administer the focus groups.

3.7 Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The study is only of one organisation, so it is difficult to generalise from this study about other organisations. The sample sizes are quite small, so there could be issues about whether it is representative of the whole organisation. As outlined above, this study used purposive samples, and this brings issues of whether participants who volunteer can be considered as representative.

Another limitation is around the issue of the recall of the participants. There are also possible issues with recall, in that the launch communication was in September 2006, and further communications occurred over the next eight months. Thus, the study required recall of some communications that had occurred up to a year previously.

A limitation in the thematic analysis was that for the purposes of completing this thesis there was only one coder of the data. Ideally, the validity of the coding would be improved by getting at least one other person to code the responses, to ensure that the researcher's bias or other issues had not affected the coding. Discussions did take place with the academic supervisor regarding the appropriateness of the coding, however, given this is an individual project, involvement of others in coding was not possible.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

The three collection methods utilised in this project collected a great deal of data that will be used to answer the research questions. This data included perceptions of a member of the Student Max steering committee, and a wide variety of staff, both academic and allied from different areas and levels within the organisation. As the most appropriate method of analysis of this data that emerged from the research is thematic analysis, this section seeks to outline the themes that emerged from the analysis. Because the survey also produced relevant quantitative data regarding the channel awareness, channel satisfaction, channel effectiveness, and desired levels of communication, some statistical analysis has been undertaken to contribute to the findings. These findings will be discussed in the context of the themes that emerged from the literature, and also the research sub-questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings of the research.

4.1 Establishing the vision

Unsurprisingly, the Student Max steering committee member interviewed (Interviewee 1) had a very strong vision of what the project was trying to change in the organisation. The main focus of all the changes was to improve service to students, and consequentially improve student numbers. Without exception, respondents in the focus groups and interviews were able to state the service improvement aims of the Student Max project; although the terminology differed, the concept was the same. Where some mentioned improving efficiency, others spoke about improving processes, and almost all mentioned that it was for the benefit of students. This implies that, superficially anyway, the vision and aims of the project were well communicated to the organisation. The survey, however, reflected a desire for more communication of both the vision and the reason for the project as it proceeded, with 46.6% of respondents desiring more communication or comprehensive detailed communication of the vision for Phase 2, and 52.5% wanting more or comprehensive information on the reasons for the project (see Table 2). The literature suggests this desire by employees for more

communication than was delivered is not unusual, with a study by Quinn and Hargie (2004) indicating that most participants wanted more information. Goodman and Truss (2004) found that even when a change process had a clear communication strategy in place, a desire for greater levels of communication was evident. This suggests that although the communication of Phase 1 was adequate, the survey respondents wanted more in subsequent phases of the project. The focus groups also raised issues around this area, with another common theme emerging around the need for the project communication to clearly outline what the broader context of the need for change was.

Several survey respondents and Focus Group 1 indicated that they did not know what the problems in the processes had been prior to change, so they found it difficult to determine why change was required. As a Focus Group 1 member put it, “sometimes a bit of a sense of ‘here’s the answer but what was the question?’ – I think that there needed to be a bit more scene-setting at the beginning”. Several survey participants echoed this sentiment, wanting more information about the reasons for the change, with one stating “there seems to [be] various confusion over the motivation of the project. I have been at several meetings and it’s not clear”.

Another minor theme to emerge was a criticism of the methodology of one of the prime pieces of research that prompted the initiation of the project – a mystery shopper exercise. Those that raised this were quite passionate about this being a flaw in convincing the institution that the project was justified. It is perhaps not surprising that an educational institute would be interested in ensuring that a research method was methodologically robust, and future change projects would benefit from ensuring that communication outlines the methodology used to arrive at recommendations. These themes, therefore, suggest that although the institution communicated the aims of the project effectively, it was less successful in communicating the need for change to its employees.

Table 2 Levels of communication desired for subsequent phases of the project

		No communication	Some communication	Same level as before	More communication	Comprehensive detailed communication	Total	Mean	Std Dev
Vision for the project	Count	3	27	33	36	19	118	3.347	1.081
	% by Row	2.5%	22.9%	28.0%	30.5%	16.1%	100.0%		
Reasons for the project	Count	4	20	33	40	23	120	3.483	1.085
	% by Row	3.3%	16.7%	27.5%	33.3%	19.2%	100.0%		
Overall project plans	Count	1	18	26	51	26	122	3.680	0.998
	% by Row	0.8%	14.8%	21.3%	41.8%	21.3%	100.0%		
Regular progress reports	Count	3	20	38	43	16	120	3.408	1.000
	% by Row	2.5%	16.7%	31.7%	35.8%	13.3%	100.0%		
How the project will affect me	Count	4	13	31	49	23	120	3.617	1.022
	% by Row	3.3%	10.8%	25.8%	40.8%	19.2%	100.0%		
Total	Count	15	98	161	219	107	600	N/A	N/A
	% by Row	2.5%	16.3%	26.8%	36.5%	17.8%	100.0%		

4.2 Implementation approaches and change strategy

Interviewee 1 admitted that they were “somewhat of a disciple of Kotter” and that if they had learnt anything from Kotter regarding change it was to “communicate, communicate, communicate, and do it clearly and consistently”. They outlined that there was a conscious desire for the project to change behaviour within the institute, and to do this the basic strategy of the project was to determine organisational standards, communicate these standards, and measure and communicate performance against these standards. Interestingly this strategy closely reflects the intervention

implementation approach outlined by Nutt (1986) detailed in the literature review. Interviewee 1 also outlined that there was a deliberate desire to communicate differently, utilising channels that had not previously been utilised in addition to providing as many face to face communication opportunities as possible.

There is no doubt, therefore, that the change management model utilised in this project was loosely based on that proposed by Kotter (1999) and outlined previously in the literature review. There was a deliberate effort to establish a sense of urgency following the negative findings of the mystery shopper research. A powerful guiding coalition was assembled with overall support from the highest levels of the organisation. A lot of work went into creating a vision to support and direct the change effort, and there was a conscious effort to communicate this vision. Individuals within the organisation were empowered to act upon the vision, through the establishment of several teams within the Student Max steering committee to work on different aspects of the change. The project aimed to create some short term wins via changes in technology to facilitate operations in several parts of the institution, and to consolidate improvements through monitoring of the key performance indicators that had been established. The final stage of institutionalising the new approaches is still a work in progress, as further institutional change has caused suspension of much of Phase 2 of the project.

Thus, there were firm change implementation and communication strategies utilised for the Student Max project. These were only mentioned by Interviewee 1 as the strategies were not ever communicated to the wider institution.

4.3 Change announcements

Lewis (2006) found that successful implementation communication was a major predictor of success of implementation of change.

Creating the sense that employee input is valued and that a leader's vision is clear, combined with the measures to reduce

resistance to change, best predict success as judged by employees (p. 41).

As outlined in Chapter One there were two major change announcements. A voicemail to all staff with a voicemail box was followed several hours later by an email to all staff with an email address that covered the change in more detail. Focus Group 1 did not recall the initial change announcement, however, this was not common amongst most involved in the research, as most survey participants, Focus Group 2 and some of the interviewees recalled either the voicemail or the initial email. The survey for example revealed that 73% were aware of the voicemail message and 86.5% were aware of the email message.

However, although most were aware of these announcements they did not necessarily find them effective means of launching the project. The voicemail in particular was not seen as being a successful channel, with only 21.9% of respondents in the survey feeling that it satisfied their desire for information (the lowest rating in this question) and only 33.3% considering it effective. The email conversely received much higher ratings in both satisfaction (56% satisfied or very satisfied) and effectiveness (56.3% effective or very effective (see Tables 4 and 5). This may reflect the dominance of email as a communication channel within the institution – with participants in the focus groups and interviews, without exception, outlining this as one of their major channels of communication. However even with this domination, as only just over 50% of staff found the email satisfying or effective, this communication could not be called an unqualified success. It seems therefore that the change launch announcements had mixed reception from staff, and could at best only be considered moderately successful.

4.4 Change managers

The literature suggests that the roles of change manager/strategist and that of change agents are key to the management of the change process (Kanter et al., 1992). Although there was some mention of individuals who had the main role in communicating the change in the research, some confusion was

expressed by several survey participants as to the identity of the overall change manager. The fact that a number of different people (the CEO and three Student Max steering committee members) were involved in the major face to face communication efforts may have caused this confusion. It seems that the overall responsibility for leading the project could have been communicated better to reduce the possibility of confusion.

The institution made a decision to utilise internal change agents, as recommended in the literature (Lewis & Seibold, 1998), but this could also have contributed to the confusion, as these individuals' usual responsibilities and their responsibilities as a change agent may have become blurred. Indeed, in a review of the communications about the change there was not any overt mention of any individuals as the change manager or change agents – it seems that these roles were taken on by the individuals concerned.

4.5 Role of management

A number of participants in the focus groups and survey, and some of the interviewees mentioned managers as one of their primary sources of information and communication about change. Several participants in the interviews also stated that they took more note of communications from their managers than other communications. As a survey participant put it, "You're more likely to pay attention to your line manager or HoS if they tell you that something's important rather than a generic all-users e-mail". This reflects the importance that the literature ascribes to managers in the communication process.

Implementation of a change means that many people have to reorient, redirect, or engage in new activities – and they need the motivation, information and skill to do so. Thus, managers need to plan for communication and education: when, how and to whom information will be disseminated. (Kanter, 1989, pp. 510-511).

Those who had a supervisory or management role perceived that they had a particular role in the change communication process. Several interviewees

said that they acted as a filter, and interpreted the change to their staff according to the staff members' needs. They also saw themselves as an important part of the feedback loop – gathering feedback from their staff and forwarding it to the appropriate people. There was some criticism by those at a management level of the communication that they were getting as managers, which they perceived was insufficient for them to be able to answer questions from their staff. One survey participant stated:

Most staff at ground level regularly express dissatisfaction and it is left to managers to allay fears, with little information or ability to positively influence the direction of Student Max.

A lack of specific detail in the broad institutional communication was also mentioned by Focus Group 2 and several interviewees, with gaps in information only being filled in at later meetings or discussions with their peers. Interviewee 6 also outlined a sense of uncertainty and disquiet resulting from their manager not being able to answer questions. As resistance at middle management level is mentioned as an issue in the literature (Daly et al., 2003) this is cause for concern.

Although this discontent was not a dominant theme, the fact that it was raised by several people at a management level suggests that this is a level in which there may not have been enough communication effort made, or communications may have missed the mark. Interestingly, non-managerial staff did not express any discontent with the communication coming from their managers, however this may have been because the research was focussed on Student Max originated communication, rather than their not having an opinion (negative or positive) regarding communication from their manager. It would, however, be interesting to explore the reasons for these differing perceptions further in another research project.

Gaps between senior management and the employees are another theme that emerged from the research. Participants believed that the senior management of the institution were out of touch with what was happening in the rest of the organisation, and that this causes difficulties for the organisation – a theme also found in the literature (Goodman & Truss, 2004).

There was a perception of issues both with communication to the organisation from senior management, and to senior management from the organisation. Focus Group 2 felt that negativity about the project may have arisen as people perceived that senior managers did not know what was happening at the coal face. They felt “senior managers are a bit far removed but the people actually doing the work have the knowledge”. One communication problem perceived by several participants in the research to result from this gap was that communications can miss their aim because senior management are not in touch with the concerns of the rest of the organisation. Another issue raised was that insufficient information on what was happening at the senior management level was being communicated to staff. This perception may be related to issues of trust outlined further below. A further sub-theme to emerge was that staff perceive that they are not being listened to by senior management. A Focus Group 1 participant felt that the whole project could have been initiated earlier if senior management had listened to what staff had been saying “for a long time” about dealings with students. This disconnect, further explored in the section on feedback, should be of considerable concern to the institution.

4.6 Organisational culture not communication friendly

Tourish and Hargie (1998, p. 54) state that, “without a culture that encourages open communication, good ideas may not be channelled upward to those in management who have the responsibility and power to promote and implement them”, and this is very likely to affect the success of the change. The organisational culture of the institution was mentioned overtly by Interviewee 1 who stated “we have yet to develop a communication culture at [institution name]”, and that “we are actually quite poor at talking to each other”.

The communication culture that does exist is implied by other participants in the research, however, with Focus Group 2 calling the lack of involvement at the coal face in implementation “a [institution name] thing” and the institution

being “not used to a truly consultative process”. This perception was echoed by a survey participant wanting:

To see a day when communications projects like this are unnecessary, because our internal communications would have improved so that word of mouth and day-to-day relationships would see no need to market Student Max.

This suggests that all levels of the organisation recognise that the culture of the institution is not seen as supportive of open, multi-directional communication.

4.7 Resistance to change

Resistance to change is an area that emerged quite strongly from the literature. This was seldom mentioned overtly by participants in the research. Kanter (1985) suggests that it is important to recognise resistance and work to overcome it. Interviewee 1 appeared to agree, as he perceived that one of the important things was that comments from employees were acknowledged and responded to, whether they were criticism or not. There were statements gathered that clearly established that there were participants who were resistant to the change. One survey respondent answered a question on ideas for improving communication with “No. It is hard to communicate something which is an unjustified nonsense”. Another commented “just another crappy [institution name] way of implementing something. Reeks as usual of a quadrant one decision.” Focus Group 2 mentioned the fear of the unknown, and that “not everyone embraces change very well” and several interviewees echoed this disquiet that change causes.

The unease expressed regarding the lack of consultation and feedback could also be interpreted as being evidence of some resistance to change. It may also be that the researcher’s involvement in the Student Max project led to participants being less willing to overtly express where resistance to change existed. The fact that the most anonymous part of the research, the survey, revealed the two more vehement comments above may support this contention.

4.8 Communication Channels

The major themes that emerged around the channels used in the Student Max communication were focussed on channel awareness and effectiveness, and what characteristics of the channels made them particularly effective for participants.

4.8.1 Channel awareness and effectiveness

As outlined in Chapter 1, a variety of different channels were utilised by the steering committee to communicate the Student Max project to the institution. The launch communications were a voicemail and an email message from the Chief Executive. Other channels that were delivered to all staff members with access to a computer included a dedicated email address Studentmaxfeedback (known by many staff as the FAQ emails), bright yellow pop-up screen messages that appeared every time a staff member logged into their computer, and the President's Committee notes.

Channels that staff could access, but not delivered to all staff included: staff meetings with presentations from members of the Student Max steering committee (including 3 town hall style meetings with the CEO); ordinary staff meetings; Head of School meetings; Boards of Studies meetings and School Administration Manager forums.

There were also informal channels utilised by staff in their attempts to understand the project, which included gossip/grapevine, networking, and discussions with colleagues, managers and members of the steering committee. The survey attempted to determine the awareness, satisfaction and effectiveness of these channels. Tables 3-5 below detail the survey responses.

Table 3 Levels of awareness by communication channel

		Not at all aware	Low Awareness	Neutral	Aware	Very Aware	Total	Mean	Std Dev
Voicemail message from the CEO	Count	21	10	3	63	29	126	3.548	1.372
	% by Row	16.7%	7.9%	2.4%	50.0%	23.0%	100.0%		
Email from the CEO	Count	3	8	6	74	35	126	4.032	0.894
	% by Row	2.4%	6.3%	4.8%	58.7%	27.8%	100.0%		
Student Max FAQ emails	Count	6	16	7	66	31	126	3.794	1.098
	% by Row	4.8%	12.7%	5.6%	52.4%	24.6%	100.0%		
Bright yellow screen messages on your computer	Count	35	17	10	31	33	126	3.079	1.598
	% by Row	27.8%	13.5%	7.9%	24.6%	26.2%	100.0%		
Staff meeting with a presentation by a student max steering committee member	Count	32	21	22	35	13	123	2.805	1.377
	% by Row	26.0%	17.1%	17.9%	28.5%	10.6%	100.0%		
Staff meeting	Count	33	19	20	38	12	122	2.811	1.387
	% by Row	27.0%	15.6%	16.4%	31.1%	9.8%	100.0%		
Head of School meeting	Count	47	20	21	22	10	120	2.400	1.381
	% by Row	39.2%	16.7%	17.5%	18.3%	8.3%	100.0%		
Board of Studies	Count	52	23	20	17	9	121	2.240	1.336
	% by Row	43.0%	19.0%	16.5%	14.0%	7.4%	100.0%		
School Admin Managers forum	Count	60	11	15	23	12	121	2.306	1.482
	% by Row	49.6%	9.1%	12.4%	19.0%	9.9%	100.0%		
President's Committee notes	Count	22	18	16	42	23	121	3.215	1.398
	% by Row	18.2%	14.9%	13.2%	34.7%	19.0%	100.0%		
Other	Count	33	2	21	5	6	67	2.239	1.372
	% by Row	49.3%	3.0%	31.3%	7.5%	9.0%	100.0%		
Total	Count	344	165	161	416	213	1299	N/A	N/A
	% by Row	26.5%	12.7%	12.4%	32.0%	16.4%	100.0%		

Table 4 Levels of satisfaction of the desire for information by communication channel

		Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total	Mean	Std Dev
Voicemail message from the CEO	Count	17	19	53	22	3	114	2.781	1.011
	% by Row	14.9%	16.7%	46.5%	19.3%	2.6%	100.0%		
Email from the CEO	Count	7	8	37	58	8	118	3.441	0.939
	% by Row	5.9%	6.8%	31.4%	49.2%	6.8%	100.0%		
Student Max FAQ emails	Count	3	5	35	52	21	116	3.716	0.902
	% by Row	2.6%	4.3%	30.2%	44.8%	18.1%	100.0%		
Bright yellow screen messages on your computer	Count	11	17	41	29	11	109	3.110	1.108
	% by Row	10.1%	15.6%	37.6%	26.6%	10.1%	100.0%		
Staff meeting with a presentation by a student max steering committee member	Count	9	8	55	28	7	107	3.150	0.960
	% by Row	8.4%	7.5%	51.4%	26.2%	6.5%	100.0%		
Staff meeting	Count	6	7	60	32	2	107	3.159	0.803
	% by Row	5.6%	6.5%	56.1%	29.9%	1.9%	100.0%		
Head of School meeting	Count	10	5	68	12	2	97	2.907	0.818
	% by Row	10.3%	5.2%	70.1%	12.4%	2.1%	100.0%		
Board of Studies	Count	8	5	69	15	0	97	2.938	0.733
	% by Row	8.2%	5.2%	71.1%	15.5%	0.0%	100.0%		
School Admin Managers forum	Count	10	3	64	11	6	94	3.000	0.916
	% by Row	10.6%	3.2%	68.1%	11.7%	6.4%	100.0%		

President's Committee notes	Count	8	5	52	37	3	105	3.210	0.885
	% by Row	7.6%	4.8%	49.5%	35.2%	2.9%	100.0%		
Other	Count	6	0	27	5	4	42	3.024	1.047
	% by Row	14.3%	0.0%	64.3%	11.9%	9.5%	100.0%		
Total	Count	95	82	561	301	67	1106	N/A	N/A
	% by Row	8.6%	7.4%	50.7%	27.2%	6.1%	100.0%		

Table 5 Levels of effectiveness by communication channel

		Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Neutral	Effective	Very Effective	Total	Mean	Std Dev
Voicemail message from the CEO	Count	26	20	32	35	4	117	2.752	1.203
	% by Row	22.2%	17.1%	27.4%	29.9%	3.4%	100.0%		
Email from the CEO	Count	10	16	26	60	7	119	3.319	1.057
	% by Row	8.4%	13.4%	21.8%	50.4%	5.9%	100.0%		
Student Max FAQ emails	Count	6	10	22	55	25	118	3.703	1.057
	% by Row	5.1%	8.5%	18.6%	46.6%	21.2%	100.0%		
Bright yellow screen messages on your computer	Count	20	16	31	24	20	111	3.072	1.346
	% by Row	18.0%	14.4%	27.9%	21.6%	18.0%	100.0%		
Staff meeting with a presentation by a student max steering committee member	Count	14	7	45	32	7	105	3.105	1.082
	% by Row	13.3%	6.7%	42.9%	30.5%	6.7%	100.0%		
Staff meeting	Count	9	9	49	32	5	104	3.144	0.960
	% by Row	8.7%	8.7%	47.1%	30.8%	4.8%	100.0%		
Head of School meeting	Count	14	9	58	14	2	97	2.804	0.931
	% by Row	14.4%	9.3%	59.8%	14.4%	2.1%	100.0%		

Board of Studies	Count	14	14	58	11	1	98	2.704	0.888
	% by Row	14.3%	14.3%	59.2%	11.2%	1.0%	100.0%		
School Admin Managers forum	Count	13	9	57	12	7	98	2.908	1.016
	% by Row	13.3%	9.2%	58.2%	12.2%	7.1%	100.0%		
President's Committee notes	Count	8	11	49	31	6	105	3.152	0.959
	% by Row	7.6%	10.5%	46.7%	29.5%	5.7%	100.0%		
Other	Count	5	1	24	3	5	38	3.053	1.089
	% by Row	13.2%	2.6%	63.2%	7.9%	13.2%	100.0%		
Total	Count	139	122	451	309	89	1110	N/A	N/A
	% by Row	12.5%	11.0%	40.6%	27.8%	8.0%	100.0%		

The survey found that the highest level of awareness of Student Max communication was of the launch email from the CEO, with 86.5% of respondents being aware of this. This communication also had relatively high levels of satisfaction and effectiveness, with both being the second highest of the channels surveyed. The voicemail message which was the initial launch communication also achieved a high level of awareness, however, only 21.9% felt it satisfied their desire for information, and there was a fairly high level of dissatisfaction, with 31.6% feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

The Frequently Asked Questions/Studentmaxfeedback emails had the second highest level of awareness, with 71% of respondents being aware of them. These emails were also perceived by respondents to give the highest level of satisfaction and the highest level of effectiveness. It may be that the interactive and dialogic nature of these emails, where staff were encouraged to respond to the emails with further questions which were subsequently answered, contributed to these higher levels of satisfaction and effectiveness.

The bright yellow pop-up screen messages that appeared on every staff member's computer on login had a reasonable level of awareness of 50.8%, however, it also had the highest not aware rating of those communications

that were delivered to all staff in the institution. Although this channel had a moderate level of satisfaction of 37.5%, there was also a fairly high level of dissatisfaction for it, with 25.7% of staff being either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied - second only to the voicemail message. The effectiveness of this channel also split respondents, with 39.6% perceiving it as effective or very effective (the third highest rating), and conversely 32% finding it ineffective or very ineffective - second only to the voicemail message in perceived ineffectiveness. The fact that the standard deviation was highest for these pop-up screen messages indicates that the diversity of opinion on these messages was greatest for this channel.

Of the channels delivered to all staff the President's Committee notes enjoyed a reasonable level of awareness of 53.7%, with similar levels of satisfaction and effectiveness in the mid 30 percentile. A limitation in the survey research was not allowing a "not applicable" column in the effectiveness and satisfaction questions, as all staff did not have access to the other channels of communication (such as Head of School meetings, Boards of Studies and School Admin Managers forum), meaning their statistics are less meaningful, and must be treated with caution. Given the limited access, all of these channels have much lower levels of awareness. The satisfaction with all these channels is fairly well balanced between not satisfied and satisfied. Only the School Administration Managers forum was slightly more differentiated, with the ratings for slightly more satisfied or very satisfied (18.1%) higher than dissatisfied or very dissatisfied (13.8 %). With regard to effectiveness, these channels all rated considerably higher in the very ineffective or ineffective. Given the limitation outlined above, it is difficult to determine whether this is because participants in these meetings who completed the survey were unhappy with the channel, or whether some survey participants marked ineffective because they did not have access to the channel.

Other channels of communication that were utilised by respondents in the survey were described as word of mouth, collegial discussions, the grapevine, networking, the direct input of manager, school management team meetings,

online feedback and conversations with steering committee members. Although only 10 participants outlined these alternative channels of communication, they all perceived them as being satisfying and either effective or very effective. It would have been interesting to determine the viewpoints of all participants if the survey had included questions on these more informal communication channels – this could be seen as an omission in the survey design.

The findings of the survey are also echoed to a certain extent in the findings of both the focus groups and the interviews. Almost all the participants indicated a heavy reliance on the use of email for both general communication and the Student Max communication. However, other staff felt that emails were an ineffective way of communicating; indeed the word triage was mentioned several times in describing how emails were often deleted unless the receiver felt that the topic was of direct relevance to them. Some staff also felt that there was email overload, with Interviewee 5 mentioning the possibility of “communication jams” leading to “communication rage”. As stated elsewhere a number of participants felt that two way communication was much more effective, especially in the communication of change.

As in the survey, the yellow screen messages split the focus group and interview respondents. Many participants saw the compulsion of these messages as a positive – with one mentioning “you can’t escape it”, and another “I actually find them effective because they are really annoying, and in that hideous colour”. Also mentioned was the ease of deleting an email compared to having to actively close the messages, which meant that many read them prior to closing. Interviewee 2 perceived that these may have been successful as they were different, in that this type of communication had not been used before. Conversely, Interviewee 5 mentioned these “push messages” in a much more negative light, as they removed one’s choice of when to read them, and suggested that they might be deleted by many staff without being read.

I decide normally when I am in a frame of mind I want to read about it, it is more appropriate and I am in a much more receptive frame of

mind. When I am trying to do something and I get this message I need to get rid of before I can do something else.

Another interesting viewpoint was that of Interviewee 2 who perceived an inequity in that this project was able to utilise this new channel of communication, whereas other staff and projects had not had access to it.

Meetings and discussions with colleagues were also mentioned by the focus group members and interviewees as being effective channels for change communication. Interviewee 6 went so far as to state that word of mouth (particularly in meetings) is good for controversial issues because it means that they could hear other points of view debated. This was echoed by other participants, who appreciated the ability to discuss issues raised by the suggested changes with other staff.

The meetings with members of the steering committee were also liked by a number of participants, particularly as they gave opportunities to raise their own issues and hear responses to them. What Interviewee 7 called the ability to say “yes, but” and the “have you thought of” opportunities given by these meetings was seen as reassuring and reducing anxiety about the changes. Interviewee 5 mentioned that the fact that there were multiple opportunities to attend meetings also made them more effective, as it allowed staff to choose a time that suited them to attend, and probably increased attendance as a result. Several members of Focus Group 1 also mentioned that their participation on other institutional working parties meant that they had another channel of communication open to them, as Student Max was discussed during those meetings.

Interestingly, there was little mention by most of the focus group members and interviewees of their reaction to the voicemail message by the Chief Executive, and when it was mentioned it was negative. Interviewee 7 spoke quite passionately about it, possibly because they disliked it, calling it creepy, perceiving this was probably due to the unfamiliarity of such a message. A survey respondent on hearing the start of the message, thought “Oh no, what have I done wrong now?!” On a lighter note, Interviewee 1 reported hearing

that one staff member, on hearing who the message was from, “jumped to her feet” to listen to the message. Given these reactions, the organisation may need to consider this channel carefully before utilising it again, or at least work to create a more favourable communication climate before using it again.

It is interesting to note that many participants in the focus groups and the interviews utilised much the same channels for Student Max as they did for general institutional communication. Although the new types of communication were mentioned, it is evident that most used the communication channels to which they were most accustomed to source much of their information on the project. Depending on the individual this ranged from email, their manager, informal networks to meetings of various types. This suggests that the institution would be wise to ensure that communication utilises a combination of old and new methods of communication to ensure that it reaches the intended audiences.

Crampton et al. (1998) suggest that informal communication dominates organisational communication. Informal communication such as discussions with colleagues, networking, and the grapevine were all mentioned by participants in this research, but was by no means a dominant theme, perhaps as the research focussed more on the institutional communication about Student Max.

An interesting feature of this feedback on channels is the confirmation that no single channel works for everyone, which parallels the research of Goodman and Truss (2004). Whereas several participants mentioned the desirability of using online staff forums, Interviewee 2 said that these did not work for them. A number of interviewees and some participants in the focus groups advised that email was effective for them; conversely, others stated that they found it ineffective. It is, therefore, interesting to delve further into the characteristics of the channels used in the communication of the project, and how this may have affected participants perceptions of effectiveness.

4.8.2 Channel characteristics

The need for a dialogic not monologue style of communication was a common theme, mentioned both in praise and in condemnation of the communication of the project! Interviewee 1 outlined that there was a deliberate choice to have a lot of face to face communication to allow feedback, demonstrate their personal interest in the project, and show interest in what the employees of the organisation have to say. As they put it “there is no substitute for eyeballing someone making a comment or criticism, being able to answer a question.....”

There was general agreement from all participants in the focus groups and interviews that a dialogue is more effective than a monologue. Many participants mentioned the desirability of two way communication, either in meetings or electronically. Focus Group 2 and several interviewees stated that they enjoyed the use of meetings by the project as they facilitated this two-way communicative process. Several survey participants, both focus groups, and several interviewees mentioned one-on-one and one with many discussions with colleagues as being beneficial. Meetings with the CEO or members of the steering committee where there was opportunity for feedback and discussion were also seen as beneficial by Interviewees 6 and 7.

Conversely, there was a perception by some participants that even when the communication was apparently a dialogue, in essence it was a monologue. Focus Group 1 felt that there was a lack of interest by those communicating in whether the message had been received by the staff at the institution. They felt that meetings were an opportunity for them to be told what the answers were, rather than a real opportunity for a dialogue about the project. With regard to presentations there was a perception that although there was an opportunity for questions, the real aim was just to tell people what was happening, rather than to find out from the audience what they wanted to know and give them an opportunity to contribute. Focus Group 2 echoed this sentiment, though less forcefully. This will be discussed further in the section on feedback below.

The Student Max project deliberately utilised new and different channels of communication to differentiate this communication from general organisational communication. Interviewee 1 mentioned this was an overt choice made at the start of the project, partially to differentiate the project, but also to promote communication reaching as wide an audience as possible. As outlined above, the use of new methods such as the yellow screen pop up and the voicemail message garnered very different responses from the organisation, some positive and some negative. However, there can be no doubt that they were noticed.

A number of participants mentioned the need for multiple channels of communication, though interestingly in different contexts. Interviewee 7 stated “multiple modes methods is really good as it will catch us in the end one way or other”. Interviewee 1 outlined the deliberate use of multiple channels in an attempt to cover all sections of the institutional community. Interviewee 2 (only semi-jokingly) said that more senior [older] staff needed more communication to ensure that they didn’t forget – implying that with so much being communicated every day, repetition is useful to ensure that the message gets through. A member of Focus Group 1 suggested that it was important for communication to be triangulated, with multiple opportunities for communication. One survey respondent also mentioned that the project relied on electronic forms of communication, and, as there were some staff who did not have access to these, the project risked missing this group.

The survey, focus groups and interviews all revealed that there is a reliance within the institution on email as the most utilised and preferred form of communication. There were a variety of reasons for this. Many interviewees stated that they have the email package open at all times on their computer, and mentioned the ease, accessibility and convenience of receiving communication in this way. Interviewee 5 mentioned that they like email as they are “in control of the timing”, that is, they can read messages when they wish, and this sentiment was echoed by others. Several interviewees mentioned the convenience of being able to forward messages on to other staff who might be interested and affected. Another perceived advantage of

email by the same interviewees was that it was in writing and straight from the source, so there was no ambiguity. However as mentioned below in 4.13.1, some participants felt overloaded by the quantity of email they received, and perceived this could affect their receptivity to messages contained in this channel. This heavy reliance on email may be resulting in less rich communication to the institutional community.

4.9 Communication appropriate to recipients

Barrett (2002) suggests to maximise the effectiveness of strategic communication it is very important to tailor messages to particular audiences. The need to have communication appropriate to recipients was a very strong theme in all three data collection methods. Several sub themes were evident – the need to tailor communication to audiences, the need to demonstrate the relevance to the audience, and the need to filter communication.

Many participants felt that the communication of the project was too generic. A member of Focus Group 1 mentioned exposure to a number of presentations which were all essentially the same, and that this was a weakness in the communication. They also mentioned the desirability of supplementing general meetings with meetings with groups to address their particular issues. One participant in the survey suggested that an improvement to communication would be to tailor different messages to different stakeholders hitting the areas that the different groups find important.

Related to this was an oft-mentioned perception that many people did not see the project as being relevant to them, and therefore took less notice of communication. One survey participant suggested ‘for me, effectiveness of communication often relates to things I know about or are relevant to me or my students’, and another said that much of the communication was filtered out as it “did not directly concern research and teaching”.

This need to ensure communication is tailored to get the attention of the individual is supported by Interviewee 3 who stated “I think the facts were

definitely communicated well, it is just that I didn't bother to take them on board." Some administration staff in the focus group saw this as a failure in the communication, as academic staff did not perceive the project as important to them, despite service to students being an institutional issue of significance to all staff. Interviewee 2 suggested that if communication had been more tailored to individual's needs, then uncertainty about the change amongst staff would have been reduced. Several interviewees in management positions mentioned their role as communication filters, communicating issues of direct importance to their staff. The researcher perceived that they felt this was because the communication was too broad and some staff found it difficult to apply to their particular work.

4.10 Uncertainty

As outlined in Chapter Two, there is considerable discussion in the literature of uncertainty and the problems it can cause during change initiatives. Bordia et al. (2004) suggest that communication is one way to overcome uncertainty; and Tourish and Hargie (1998) suggest that the consequential outcome is likely to be more positive. Uncertainty and the effects of uncertainty was a fairly strong theme to emerge in this research. Members of the focus groups and a number of the interviewees stated that they, or their colleagues, felt uncertain at some time during the change process. The major reason for this seemed to be around issues of timing of the communication. Focus Group 2 felt that there was a long lead-in, when rumours emerged, followed by a lot of communication in a short period. A number of interviewees and both focus groups expressed a desire for the communication to have been made earlier. They felt that this would have reduced uncertainty, with Focus Group 2 and Interviewee 2 mentioning the proliferation of rumours as a direct result of communication being too late. Another reason suggested by both focus groups for uncertainty was the feeling that there was a lack of 'big picture' communication that some people desired.

A sub-theme to emerge was that uncertainty can cause people to be less receptive to communication, as they seek information about areas of concern.

Interviewee 6 perceived that uncertainty was caused when their manager could not answer questions, and this led to their being unsettled and wondering if something was being hidden. The possibility of uncertainty causing resistance to change was also raised by one member of Focus Group 2. Most participants felt that while uncertainty was addressed by subsequent communications, if these had occurred earlier some apprehension would have been avoided. Interviewee 2 felt that uncertainty would have been avoided if staff had been more involved in the pre-implementation stages of the process.

Communication also has the potential to lead to greater uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004), especially if the communication is about bad news such as redundancies. A Focus Group 2 member said that uncertainty was caused when “people started to wonder what was going to happen with their job and that sort of threw them”. This fear of change and the effects on the individual were also echoed by several of the interviewees. Conversely, however, some participants felt that the communication supplied was all the information that was needed to prevent uncertainty, with Interviewee 5 expressing that they never felt uncertain because if they needed to find anything further out, they knew who to contact to get information.

Interestingly, while several academic staff members interviewed raised the issue of uncertainty on the part of administration staff members with some vigour, this was not a prominent theme on the part of the administration staff participants. It seems, however, from the comments made by some participants that administration staff had been discussing their discontent with them, so perhaps it was the individuals interviewed that meant this theme was not so strong with this occupational group, rather than uncertainty not existing.

4.11 Lack of buy-in

A very strong theme that emerged across the survey, focus groups and interviews was a desire for involvement of affected staff in discussions about the change, both prior to and during its implementation. Kanter (1985) emphasises the importance of involving participants in the change process to

reduce resistance. There was a perception that the change project of nowhere, which suggests that the creation of the vision was not as effective as it could have been. Many participants would like to have been involved earlier, so they could discuss the change and contribute to the way it was implemented. As a participant in Focus Group 1 put it “It would have been good to know that this is a thought in somebody’s eye rather than ‘tada, Student Max is here, anchors aweigh’”. There was a perception that this lack of pre-implementation involvement meant that subsequent communications were less well received, or were received negatively. Interviewee 2 felt that a lack of input prior to implementation of change meant that people were less likely to become involved in and support the change, and this sentiment was echoed in the focus groups.

One particular occupational group, programme administrators, was mentioned by a number of participants in all three areas of data gathering as a group that should have been more involved in this pre-implementation period. Because of the lack of input some felt that there was not the initial ‘climb on’ by some staff - “I felt the bus had gone” was one comment from a member of Focus Group 1. Interestingly another area raised in Focus Group 1 was that the institutional information did not percolate down to all levels of the organisation, meaning staff did not get to know about issues at the appropriate time. This issue is explored further in the discussion below regarding poor access to information being a barrier to communication.

There was also a perception that staff remained uninvolved because the communication process did not encourage active engagement by staff. Some focus group members and survey participants felt that the communications focussed on provision of information rather than eliciting feedback, which supports the contention of Lewis (2006) that implementers often concentrate on dissemination of information rather than soliciting input. They perceived that the communication was more telling people what the answers were and what they needed to do about it, rather than involving people in the process. Several interviewees felt that being involved would have both reduced uncertainty and made people more receptive to communication. Many

participants in all parts of the research would have liked an ongoing role in the change process.

4.12 Feedback

The importance of feedback in the change process is another important theme to emerge from the literature (Lewis, 2006). Most participants perceived that the project provided sufficient opportunities for feedback during the communication process, and that it could be delivered through a variety of channels. Although some did not recall whether there were opportunities, most did, and a number of the participants had contributed feedback either within their school or at institutional briefings. Conversely, Focus Group 1 perceived that although opportunities for feedback existed, the project team was not really interested in the feedback. This was echoed by several survey participants, one of whom declined to state where they worked stating “Not saying as we make suggestions only to be told that it isnt our business...Or that we are wrong ... or they know best ...”. However, other participants felt that feedback was heard because it was noted, documented and subsequently circulated. Interviewee 7 perceived that the organisation needed to respond to feedback more, and circulate it to a wider audience. They felt that “when we have the briefing sessions and people ask questions, it would be really good if those questions and the responses were communicated to people broadly.” Also mentioned was that the time at meetings for questions and discussion was too short, and future projects should ensure that sufficient time is allocated to these purposes. Another timing issue related to feedback mentioned by several interviewees was that insufficient time was given for considered responses to be made, so often they were rushed or not made at all. Interviewee 6 was similarly disappointed by the response time to feedback that had been given. They felt their feedback was slow to be responded to – for example, when their school had a particular issue it was too long before a steering committee member was able to meet with them and respond to their issues. Although not expressed directly, the desire for an assessment of the project discussed in 4.16 may be evidence that other areas also desired feedback on their issues.

The importance of having a variety of feedback channels was a sub-theme to emerge. Participants appreciated there being multiple ways to do this, with opportunities including online responses (via email), meetings and informal discussions. Again the issue of particular channels not working for some staff was raised, with Interviewee 2 mentioning the staff forum as one that did not work for them, but that it worked for their colleagues. The lack of use by the Student Max project of the staff (online) forum was outlined by a number of participants in the survey and also by Focus Group 1, who felt that this would have been a good feedback channel for it to have utilised.

Another interesting perception by Interviewee 2 was that because senior staff within the organisation tended to get more communication about projects, they had more opportunities for feedback. It was felt that the filtering of information through the institution led to a reduction of opportunities for feedback from more junior staff, and that this could be to the detriment of the institution as their ideas are not heard. This could contribute to the gap perceived between senior management and staff within the institution outlined elsewhere.

4.13 Communication Barriers

Lawler and Worley (2006) assert that “most change efforts in established organisations fail to meet expectations because the internal barriers to change are so strong”. It is, therefore, unsurprising that barriers to communication being effective and to the change process itself emerged very strongly from this research. A wide variety of themes emerged around what the barriers to communication were, and the problems they caused to staff.

4.13.1 Busy-ness impedes receptiveness

A very strong theme to emerge from the research, that had not emerged from the literature, was that being overworked impeded many participants receptiveness to communication. This manifested itself in several ways. Firstly it was mentioned in the context that the large body of communication to

emerge from and about Student Max was part of an information overload on already busy staff. A number of interviewees mentioned skipping or filing emails, often intending to return to them, but subsequently not finding the time to do so. As mentioned previously, other participants mentioned utilising a type of triage on emails in particular. Secondly, it became evident that busy staff found it difficult to find time to attend face-to-face briefings, with a survey participant stating “there is almost no possibility for me to spend time in face to face briefings given the other demands on my time”. Thirdly, people stated they only took note of what directly affected them and ignored the rest because they were so busy, and perceived that they may have missed communications as a result of this. This supports the necessity outlined above for communication to be appropriate to its recipients.

4.13.2 Timing of communication

Related to the theme of busy-ness above, the timing of communication was another barrier that emerged. A number of participants mentioned that the period of the launch communications and meetings (September/October) was a time of year when they were particularly busy, and variously thus they took less notice of communications, or were unable to attend meetings.

Conversely, Focus Group 2 felt that the communication was “quite cleverly timed”. There were also perceptions expressed by Focus Group 2 and Interviewee 2 that the communication was too late, and that rumours had emerged about the project prior to the communication occurring. It was perceived that this could have caused some uncertainty amongst staff, and that the project communication should have been undertaken earlier to avoid this.

4.13.3 Lack of information given to the right people

Several participants at a middle-managerial level felt that information was not being given to the right people (them), and that this caused difficulty for them when they were asked questions by their staff. It was implied that communications may have been too general, and staff at this level had little more information than their reports, which left them feeling under-informed. Interviewee 6 (a team leader) also mentioned the fact that their manager

couldn't answer their questions, and that this led them to wonder if they were being deceived. Future projects would, therefore, do well to focus more attention on communicating with this level of staff. This perception was not universal, however, with other staff at middle management expressing that they were being communicated to effectively.

This issue was not exclusive to those in management roles however, with some non-management staff also perceiving there was a lack of information given to them, and that this impeded their ability to contribute to solutions for institutional problems. As a member of Focus Group 1 put it:

It seems that suddenly there is a shortage of EFTS. You think it didn't suddenly happen, it must have been a cumulative process over a period of time and why didn't we have intervention back then? ... If we had had that information we could have started to put strategies in place to address it - but too late now. If the information had been available then maybe use the wonderful resources we have in staff and we could have come up with strategies and solutions to stop massively difficult problems with clear cut practical solutions to them.

One survey participant felt that when information was provided it was often presented in a too favourable "rose tinted" manner. Interviewee 1 also commented around this theme, perceiving that the institution was often tentative in its communication with employees, and that this could mean that people were not informed to the level they could be.

Another interesting aspect to this theme, that the wrong or not enough people were being communicated to, was the perception by staff from different occupational groups that other occupational groups had been neglected. For example some administration staff felt that lecturers and programme directors had been less well informed than they should have been. This implies that staff had been discussing this and that there were some other information gaps that may not have emerged during the research.

4.13.4 Difficulties in accessing available information

Outlined above was a theme regarding information not getting to the people who needed it. An associated common theme was the difficulty of finding information, even when it was freely available. The staff share directory (the H: drive) was often mentioned, but seldom in a positive light. As Interviewee 5 put it “there is a lot of information here at [institution name] but sometimes it requires somewhat of a skill to find it” and mentioned a desire for a “GPS for the h drive”. Difficulty in using this drive was seen by many participants in this research as a significant impediment to them being able to access institutional information when they wanted it. Focus Group 1 also mentioned the lack of an archive for project meetings and documents, to enable interested staff to track the progress of a project. This lack of knowledge of available sources was also revealed several times during both focus groups when useful sources of information were outlined, the existence of which other members of the group had no knowledge.

4.13.5 Lack of co-ordination of project communication

An interesting barrier to emerge, particularly from the focus groups, was the lack of co-ordination of projects and the communication of these projects to the institution. It was perceived that when a number of projects are concurrent, communication between projects is often more by accident than by good management. There was a perception that this often leads to duplication of effort. There is also a risk that people will get confused by the different project communications, and be unsure as to where one project finishes and another begins. This was reflected in a comment in the survey, where a respondent mentioned the risk of Student Max being overtaken by the communication of another project. Focus Group 1 suggested that this lack of co-ordination directly affected staff with one member stating “there being a whole lot of disparate units running around in different directions and I don’t think people realise how stressful it is for staff and how de-motivating for staff.”

4.13.6 Change fatigue

The lack of co-ordination outlined above may have contributed to the minor sub-theme to emerge of the frequency of change at the institution and how this was producing change fatigue within the staff. There was a perception by a number of participants that change was pretty constant within the institution, and no sooner had one change been made than another change was being foreshadowed. As Interviewee 4 put it “I thought we have just started adjusting to this, and here we go another change”. The implication from some of those who raised this was that this fatigue both affected the ability of staff to respond well to the change, and also their overall enthusiasm for their job.

4.13.7 Employee cynicism

Several sub-themes that have been classified together as the broad theme of employee cynicism emerged in this research. The sub-theme around trust is outlined elsewhere in this chapter, so is not explored further here. Previous experience of change and its effects on the perception of subsequent changes arose several times in the research. Focus Group 2 raised the fact that people become negative when they see things that have been tried before and moved on from, reappearing in another guise. As one participant put it, “every time this comes we just roll our eyes” – this could also be a symptom of change fatigue. The literature (Reichers, Wanous & Austin, 1997, in Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999) identified that failure of previous change programmes was significant in the production of employee cynicism.

Focus Group 1 noted that people also become cynical when a project is promoted as being very important and requiring them to support it, then the project sponsor moves on to other things and nothing is heard about it again. Focus Group 1 and several interviewees also stated that if previous communication from a source is seen as not quite being the truth, the next time that person communicates people are less likely to want to listen. They perceived that this sort of experience definitely resulted in cynicism about communication when it came from particular individuals within the institution. It was also implied that this cynicism made people less likely to take note of communication during future change efforts.

Although the themes outlined above regarding barriers to communication are focussed mostly on change communication, it seems likely the barriers outlined can be more broadly applied to all internal organisational communication within the institution. The organisation would benefit from working to overcome these barriers, as it is likely that this would result in improved internal communication.

4.14 Receptivity to communication

One area that was not clear following the survey was exactly what made people receptive to communication. This was explored further in the focus groups and interviews, with several themes emerging such as role-related power, trust, credibility of source, communicators being knowledgeable, passion of communicators, familiarity with the communicator, and perceived relevance of the change and the communication to themselves. Some interviewees felt their receptiveness was enhanced by the power and respect for the role of the person communicating with them, as they felt that they needed to take note if the communication came from a senior staff member, or as Interviewee 7 put it a “meaningful title”. For other participants however this had little effect on whether they noted the communication or not, with Interviewee 2 perceiving that communications from the Chief Executive were often epistles and not to be taken much note of. It was felt that communication from people that you know and trust is taken more notice of – as Interviewee 2 said about emails, if you know the person, you will at least read it, and if you have a relationship with a person you are likely to trust communication from them.

A number of participants agreed that the credibility of the source is very important, with Focus Group 1 mentioning a Student Max meeting with some outside consultants whose credibility was drawn into question, and consequently what they were communicating being discounted. The communicator being knowledgeable and passionate about their topic was also seen as important. Interestingly, the motivation of the person communicating

was also seen as important by Focus Group 1 – even if they felt the person was wrong, if the person had the best interests of the institution at heart then they would listen to what they had to say. Another interesting viewpoint on this was Interviewee 6 who stated that they were much more receptive to individualised communication, and took less notice of generic emails to groups or the entire institution.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the relevance of communication to the individual is also important in making them more receptive to the communication. Interviewee 2 mentioned that their area was highly involved in the enrolment process and, therefore, the entire area had a “particular interest in Student Max” which made them very interested in communication about the project, and ensured they attended meetings to find out more. Focus Group 2 felt that receptivity to communication was strongly related to people realising how it applies to them, and if they did not perceive that it applied to them they would take little notice of the communication. Several participants noted that involving employees in both the change and the communication process enhanced receptivity. There can also be no doubt from this research that communication that is a dialogue rather than a monologue will make people engage more with the communication.

4.15 Trust

A strong recurring theme that ran through the research was trust. This came through in the survey, in both focus groups, and in a number of the interviews. The most prevalent sub-theme of trust was around the existence of hidden agendas. This was raised by a number of participants in several different contexts. One survey participant put it very forcefully:

There have been so many schemes, agendas (and, I'm sorry to say, lies) in the past that nobody believes the management's spin any longer ... So you have a climate of mistrust to contend with whenever you're trying to communicate official information top-down.

This is supported by Interviewee 2 who stated:

I do believe or have some concerns that there are some agendas about the future of [institution name] about which the staff are not party to and yes, consequently there is a feeling of mistrust because of those concerns.

A lack of trust led to participants taking less note of communication from particular areas of the institution. Focus Group 1 echoed this perception that what is being said is not the real story, with one participant stating “this is coming from the big Honcho, so we had better listen but we had better read between the lines”.

Another sub-theme emerged around previous bad experiences causing mistrust of subsequent messages from that source. The focus groups stated that when communication came from some areas within the institution it was not trusted – with several participants in Focus Group 1 saying their response was “oh yeah”, and Focus Group 2 stating that they generally trusted people but “if they have been spinning you a yarn you don’t”. Another example of this mistrust was in Focus Group 2 where it was perceived that when consultation occurred during the project (at meetings for example) it was not real consultation, in that decisions had already been made and the consultation process was really just to make people feel included.

Interviewee 1 agreed that there was a lack of trust – but was coming from quite a different point of view. They perceived that management were lacking in trusting employees with sensitive information:

I think people expect to be told information even if it is sensitive and I think we need to respect people enough to want to share the information that is important to us all, whether it is sensitive or not, and I don’t believe what I am told from time to time that staff can’t use sensitive information easily, or we can’t trust staff with this information, or ... we are all in this together really.

This interviewee perceived that the institution was losing an opportunity through this lack of trust, and that this needed to be addressed at an institution wide level. There can be no doubt that this lack of trust is a

significant impediment to effective communication at the institution and this will need to be addressed if the institution wishes to develop a culture of effective communication.

Lines et al. (2005) suggest that quality of decision-making by management in the change process affects trust. The lack of conviction that the project was necessary articulated by a number of the participants in this research may therefore provide some explanation for the lack of trust exhibited above. Lines et al. also suggest that the involvement of employees in the change process is related to trust, as, by involving employees, management are exhibiting trust. The perception by many of the participants in this research that they had not participated in the change process may have subconsciously resulted in feelings of mistrust.

4.16 Lack of evaluative communication

Another theme raised was the lack of evaluative communication for the project – what Kotter (1999) calls “a conscious attempt to show people how the new approaches, behaviours and attitudes have helped improve performance”, and that this had left staff wanting more information. This theme emerged mainly through the survey and focus groups, but was particularly strong in the focus groups. It was perceived that there was a lot of communication early in the project, however this died down as the first phase proceeded, and that Phase 2 had hardly been communicated at all.

A number of participants in the survey stated there was a need for project results to be communicated to the institution, and this was echoed by members of the focus groups. Also mentioned several times was the lack of measurement of success of the project, with this being mentioned as possibly causing the project to not get the credit that was due to it. Interestingly, one member of Focus Group 2 felt that notwithstanding the perceived lack of results, the awareness that the project had created meant that people had “stepped up their game a wee bit”.

This lack of evaluative communication may have been the result of the project being two phases, with some of the second phase being 'taken over' by another institutional project. It is important that the organisation ensures that this area of communication is not neglected in future projects.

4.17 Gaps in communication

Interestingly, some participants felt that there were no significant gaps in the communication of the project, whereas others suggested that there were a number of gaps that needed to be addressed. Some of these have been discussed earlier in this chapter, such as the desire for improved communication of the vision and of specifics about how the change will affect individuals, and lack of evaluation of the success of the project. Several other gaps were suggested. One member of Focus Group 2 felt that new staff joining after the initial communication period would have had no idea what the project was about, and that this needed to be addressed. One of the survey participants emphasised that not all staff had ready access to telephones or computers, so a communication strategy that relied on these was going to miss a section of the institutional population.

4.18 Suggested changes to project communication for the future

Some clear themes emerged when participants were invited to express desired changes to the institution's communication of future projects. The suggested changes closely reflect many of the more negative themes outlined above, with many of them aimed at overcoming the perceived communication barriers and issues. Some participants expressed a desire for unbiased, coherent, co-ordinated communication structures to be developed, with several suggesting establishing a communication role or unit. A number of participants felt that communication should be tailored to the recipients more, to ensure that everyone understands the relevance of the project. There was a desire for communication to be characterised by trust and openness, with plenty of opportunities for discussion and debate. A strong desire for all

communication to be a dialogue, with plenty of opportunities for feedback was raised by a number of participants.

Many participants expressed a desire for involvement and consultation at all levels of the organisation prior to implementation, particularly with those who would be most affected by the change. The use of multiple methods of communication was supported, particularly by the focus groups and several interviewees, as different channels work for different people. Some participants also wanted to see more use of technology in communication, particularly in the utilisation of new technologies to communicate with staff.

4.19 Summary of the main findings

This research deliberately did not ask the question “did the participant think that the communication strategies employed within the project were successful” as it was felt that such a bald question was unlikely to result in useful answers. The closest to this sort of question were those in the survey that asked for feedback on awareness, effectiveness and satisfaction with the communication channels. The survey results suggest that most participants were aware of the communication, and many found at least one channel effective, but to evaluate the success of the communication it is useful to return to the literature. As outlined previously, most of the literature suggests some ways to measure the perceived success of change, but not of change communication, however it is useful to adapt these to evaluate the communication efforts.

Nutt (1986) suggested that one of the determinants of whether change was successful was whether the change manager thought it successful. If one re-orientes this with a communication focus, perhaps a useful question to ask is whether the Student Max steering committee perceived the communication as a success. This research gives us some insight into answering that question. Interviewee 1 perceived that successful communication is “whether the communication is front of mind for the receivers for a period and whether it was received reasonably accurately”. The feedback to this interviewee was

that the project was communicated well, it used novel methods, and that people understood the project. They expressed regret that the project had not audited perceptions to ensure that it was a widely held belief, acknowledging that this was a minor flaw in the project. The levels of awareness revealed in the survey, however, suggest that for many people the project was front of mind. A desire to create a culture of communication within the organisation was another covert aim of Interviewee 1 who however, acknowledged that institution was a long way away from this at present. They perceived that currently there exists a “silo’d” approach to communication which sometimes impedes the flow of information around the organisation. This was seen as something that needs to be addressed.

Lewis (2006), conversely, felt that the change should be assessed by the employees to determine whether they felt it had achieved the desired outcomes and given the staff a sense of it being successful. Again, this question can be asked with a communication focus. The views of employees on the success of the communication varied widely, with some participants perceiving the communication efforts were very successful, and others less impressed. One survey participant stated “it is an exemplar of good practice and change management” and another said “communication aspect of Student Max works well”. One of the members of Focus Group 2 called the communication ‘clever’. Conversely, other survey participants seemed to feel the communication had not met its target with them, as one stated “it has not communicated to me how it would affect me and what I do. There seems to have been an assumption it was nothing to do with me.”

However, looking beyond the statements by participants in the research, the themes outlined above, particularly the variety of barriers to communication, lack of buy in, and communication not always being appropriate to recipients, suggest that a number of the respondents were not happy with all aspects of the communication.

Barrett (2002) in her Strategic Employee Communication Model posited two overarching considerations and five key components to successful

communication with employees. As this is the only model that solely focussed on employee communication it is useful to discuss the findings above in light of this model (see Figure 2). Barrett states that the correlation between the overarching strategic objectives and the employee communication need to be one-to-one. The other overarching consideration was that communication needs to be integrated into the business processes with communication milestones included in the business plan. The strategic objectives for this project were clearly articulated as outlined in 4.1 above. However, given the theme of lack of evaluative communication discussed above, and the perception from some participants that the communication tapered off, it seems that this desired integration of communication into the business processes of the institution was never fully achieved. The closest the institution got to integration was having it as a regular agenda item at the President's Committee, which was then reported in the President's Committee minutes – however this does not achieve the level of integration suggested by Barrett.

Barrett (2002) stresses the importance of top and mid level management being “directly involved in and assume responsibility for communications up, down and across the organisation” (p. 221). Managers must model the behaviour they expect of their employees. A possible weakness identified in the findings above is that some members of middle management felt they did not have enough information to be able to engage adequately with their staff. The third area that Barrett suggests is important is that of having targeted messages with information tailored to the audience that is receiving the communication. As noted in 4.9, there can be no doubt that many participants did not feel that this occurred.

Barrett also emphasises the importance of choosing effective media and forums through which to communicate to employees. Although it is evident from the findings above that not all media suited all employees, a significant proportion of the research participants found the channels utilised in the project satisfying and effective, and felt that they met their informational needs. Barrett obviously envisages that communication specialists will

participate in the change management process, as her fourth factor is that the communication staff must “have a seat at the table” and be part of the senior management team. The institution does not have anyone dedicated to internal communication, so it was reliant on the change manager and change agents to carry on this communication role. Several of these individuals did have this “seat at the table” and were able to participate in organisational decision-making. The research did not investigate this aspect so it is difficult to comment on how this affected the communication process.

Finally, Barrett suggests that formal ongoing assessments of communication need to be undertaken. Although during the initial stages of the process the communication sub-group of the steering committee undertook informal assessments of ‘how things were going’, there was never a formal process undertaken. On reflection, Interviewee 1 thought that it was a “pity we didn’t do a bit of an audit”. It seems, therefore that although the communication efforts met some of Barretts’ requirements for effective employee communication, there were significant areas where it did not.

It appears, therefore, that the communication of the Student Max project was a qualified success; whether one utilises assessments by the change manager, the employees, or models outlined in the literature. The needs of all employees were not met, and a variety of problems with the communication were identified. However, none of these problems resulted in the communication being ineffective for the organisation as a whole. A number of suggestions for improvement were made by participants in the research which could contribute to improvements in internal communication within the organisation. The research also raised issues, such as those around trust and communication barriers, which the organisation would be wise to address, as it seems likely that solving some of these issues are likely to improve communication effectiveness in the future.

Chapter 5 Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

Communication is a vital part of the change process, with poor communication making change more likely to fail. It is, therefore, very important that organisations place a great deal of emphasis on communication of change to employees. The purpose of this thesis was to answer two major questions:

How effective were the communication strategies employed in Phase 1 of the Student Max project?

What made these strategies effective or ineffective?

The research undertaken to answer these questions consisted of a literature review and data gathered from the employees of the organisation through an on-line survey, two focus groups, and seven interviews. The conclusions drawn from this data, as well as implications for practice and suggestions for further research are discussed below.

5.2 Conclusion about the research questions

The research revealed very different perspectives on the success of the communication strategies, confirming that there are no simple answers to the research questions. Some participants considered the communication very effective, whereas others perceived it as totally ineffective, and some fell between these points of view. There was some agreement on the channels that people found more effective, but even this was not definitive. Most participants had a good knowledge of the project, its aims, and some of the project detail, so the initial communication strategies could be seen as very effective. Therefore, at least the visioning and change announcement communication strategies seem to have been quite successful.

However, the findings also revealed significant unease about both the communication and the change management, which indicate that the

strategies had limited effectiveness for some participants. There were signs that the overall communicative efforts may not have been sufficient as a majority of participants expressed a desire for more communication about the project. Several particular occupational groups emerged to whom participants felt the project under-communicated, which suggests that some occupational groups within the institution found the strategies less effective. As these occupational groups were those most involved in the change process it could be concluded that the communicative strategies were too broad in their focus, and that affected groups needed more intensive communication efforts.

The number of barriers to effective communication identified, and other communication issues revealed in the research also suggest that the communication strategies were not as effective as they could have been. Therefore, as discussed at the conclusion of the previous chapter, it seems that although there is no definitive answer to the question of effectiveness, the communication of the Student Max project at least satisfied some of the communication needs of many participants in this research.

Reaching conclusions on the question 'What made strategies effective or ineffective?' is a little easier, as there was more agreement on this by the participants. Effectiveness seemed to have been enhanced by participant involvement in the change process, and opportunities to engage in dialogic communication about the change. Communication effectiveness was enhanced where information was easily accessible, and where the communication channel/s used by the project met the preferences of the participants. Communications were more likely to be effective when the communicator was someone that was trusted, and was perceived to be passionate and knowledgeable.

There were, however, also significant barriers that caused communication strategies to be less effective. One barrier to effectiveness was institutional culture. The institution has yet to establish a communication culture; indeed the existing culture may work to impede effective institution-wide communication. Issues of trust significantly impact on access to information

by employees, and also impede receptivity to communication, particularly when it is seen to originate from senior management. The research concluded that significant barriers to communication effectiveness exist within the organisation. These include: issues around workload; timing of communications; information not getting to the right people; difficulty in finding institutional information, and employee cynicism. Another conclusion is that the communication was made less effective by the fact that many messages were generic, rather than being tailored to the audience. Lack of involvement in the change process is likely to make people less receptive to change communication. Finally, it would have been more effective if some form of evaluative communication on the project itself had been made at the end of the first phase, as this would have given employees in the organisation the opportunity to determine the effectiveness of the project. It would also have provided those involved in the organisational changes with feedback on the project as a whole, as well as the part they played in the changes made.

5.3 Implications for Practice

A number of implications regarding communication within the institution emerged from this research. These have the opportunity to improve change communication within projects significantly, as well as communication within the institution as a whole.

Prior to embarking on future change projects, the institution needs to ensure the reasons for change are communicated to the organisation, with robust research underpinning the project. It is recommended that middle managers within the organisation are more comprehensively briefed about the change in future, and are more integrated into change processes.

There are important issues around a lack of trust within the institution. These issues need to be addressed as they are not only influencing the effectiveness of communication, they are also affecting the successful operation of the institution. Associated to this is a need to address the

perceived gap between senior management and the rest of the institution, perhaps initially through improved communication.

It seems likely that involving employees in change processes prior to implementation would have benefits for both the change process and the communication of the change. Earlier involvement is likely to result in improved buy-in from employees, and also improved receptivity to communication about the change. Feedback from employees on the change prior to implementation may also improve the substance of the change. It is also likely that uncertainty about the change would be reduced, lessening the possibility of resistance to the change. It is also suggested that this would contribute to building trust within the organisation, and may reduce employee cynicism about change.

The institution should continue to use multiple methods of communication to ensure that employees are kept informed. Some of these methods should be dialogic, to ensure that there is potential for discussion and feedback. It would also be very useful for the institution to focus more on tailoring the messages it sends to employees, to ensure that the message fits the interests of the individuals or groups at which they are aimed.

It may be wise for the institution to consider a way of co-ordinating communication within the institution. This is particularly important when multiple projects are occurring, to prevent duplication of effort and to ensure that all projects receive the exposure that they require. In addition, the institution needs to address the issue of the availability of information to employees, as this will improve access to communication and thereby enhance internal communication.

The research also suggests that the institution needs to consider the general desire for more communication, not just of projects, which was expressed by the participants. It seems that employees have a desire to learn more about the 'goings-on' within their organisation. They want to be able to communicate important issues to senior management, and gain feedback on

these issues. This may contribute to reducing the perceived gap between senior management and the rest of the institution, with a possible by-product of improved trust.

5.4 Limitations to the research

As the research proceeded it was felt that it was perhaps too focussed on 'official' communication originating from the Student Max project. This focus was necessary to attempt to answer the research questions posed, but in hindsight the findings would have been richer if other areas of communication within the institution had been investigated.

This study examined the communication of one project within the institution. This has limitations in that it is arguable how it can be generalised to institutional communication as a whole. Perhaps the only indication that this research may be more broadly applicable was that during the research participants' focus sometimes had to be brought back to Student Max, as they started to speak more broadly about communication within the institution in the same terms as they were speaking about that within the Student Max project.

Another limitation of the bounded nature of this study is that it is also difficult to determine whether the findings can be generalised to make assumptions about other organisations. Similar research with other organisations would have to be undertaken to determine this. However, given some of the themes in this research echo those identified in the literature, perhaps this is less of a limitation.

5.5 Future directions for research

An area for further research would be to explore less formal communication methods such as collegial discussions and the grapevine to determine their role in communication practices and communication effectiveness. These were mentioned by participants in this project, but more in passing because of

the focus on the formal project communication. This seems to be an area that has not been extensively researched within New Zealand.

It would be interesting to investigate the personal communication role that managers perceive they have in change processes, as determining this could be of significant benefit in future change initiatives within the institution.

The domination of western perspectives in the literature has resulted in a gap in the examination of how nationality and culture might affect change processes and change communication. Given the multi-cultural nature of the institution it would be interesting to determine whether there is any influence of culture on perceived effectiveness of communication.

Finally, in future, research the scope of the examination of communication within the institution could be widened. It would be interesting to change the frame of reference to the entire institution, and examine it holistically to determine whether the findings from this project can be generalised. It would be useful to undertake a longitudinal study to examine communication within the institution over an extended period of time. This would assist in determining whether the findings were limited to this one project and period in the institutional history. Also, as the findings of this research project will be conveyed to senior management within the institution, further research could also examine whether communication improvements had resulted from this information.

5.6 Conclusion

This case study has in many ways reflected findings from other empirical studies on the communication of change. It contributes to the body of knowledge of employee perspectives of communication during a change process. The findings from this study may assist the institution to develop strategic communication planning within the institution, and ensure that the importance of communication in the success of change initiatives is recognised.

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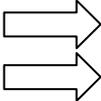
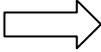
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Appendices

Appendix A: Initial communication plan (with identifying names amended)

	Stakeholders	Interest	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
1	Students, All Staff	Big Picture; Vision and Direction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO Voicemail / email • CEO “Townhall” meetings (2 main campus, 1 satellite campus) • President’s C. Minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO “Townhall” meetings (2 main campus, 1 satellite campus) • President C. Minutes • InUnison article 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO “Townhall” meetings (2 main campus, 1 satellite campus) • President’s C. Minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO “Townhall” meetings (2 main campus, 1 satellite campus) • President’s C Minutes
2	Heads of Schools, Line Managers Board of Studies, Academic Board,	Information and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HoS Mtg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ac Bd Mtg • Bd of Studies Mtg • Schools Mtg 		
3	School Administration Managers, Course Info, Programme Directors, Programme Administrators, Student Affairs	Active Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAMs Mtg 			

Appendix B: Communication List

Global voicemail message (launch communication)	1
Email from CEO (launch communication)	1
Email from CEO (announcing town-hall type meetings)	1
Student Max Feedback emails	
General information	1
Frequently asked questions	5
Competitions	2
Individual responses	12
Progress report	1
Town-hall type meetings with CEO	3
Meetings with presentations by Student Max Committee member	
Head of School meetings	1
	(then monthly – December 2006)
Council meeting	1
School Administration Managers forum meeting	1
	(then monthly – December 2006)
Board of Studies meetings	3
Meetings with Programme Administrators	2
Yellow screen messages	6
President's Committee notes	Fortnightly

Appendix C: Email to all staff announcing the survey

Title: Student Max communication survey

Hi. I am undertaking this research as part of my Master of International Communication degree. This research is focussed on evaluating the communication of Phase 1 of the Student Max project undertaken at [organisation name] late last year.

This research involves filling out a questionnaire which should take about 5 minutes of your time.

Your participation in this research will remain confidential and you will not be identified. Any identifying information will not be released to any other party at any time, however the results are likely to be published and will inform Phase 2 of the Student Max project.

No discomfort, stress or risks to you are anticipated in this research.

Thanks once again for your assistance in my research project.

Tamsin Kingston

Ph: 644 4194

Email: [tkingston@\[organisation name\].ac.nz](mailto:tkingston@[organisation name].ac.nz)

Completion and submission of this survey is taken as informed consent.

Please click on this link to start the questionnaire.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form – Focus Group

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the communication of the Student Max project at this institution.

Procedure:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Participate in a focus group.

The focus group sessions will be 1 hour in length.

Benefits/Risks to you:

No discomfort, stress or risks to you are anticipated in this research.

Voluntary Nature of the Study/Confidentiality

Your participation in this research will remain confidential and you will not be identified in the thesis. The data used in this research will not be released to any other party at any time. Your name will never be connected to your responses. Any identifying information will not be released to any other party at any time, however the results are likely to be published to inform communication practices for other projects at [institution name]. The data gathered in this project will be accessible only to the researcher.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions I had regarding the research project and they have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____
(please print)

Signature of Participant: _____

Thanks very much for your participation!

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 28 March 2007 to 31 March 2008. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (Ph: 09 815 4321 ext.7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix E: Participant Consent Form – Interview

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the communication of the Student Max project at this institution.

Procedure:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Participate in an interview.

Benefits/Risks to you:

No discomfort, stress or risks to you are anticipated in this research.

Voluntary Nature of the Study/Confidentiality

Your participation in this research will remain confidential and you will not be identified in the thesis. The data used in this research will not be released to any other party at any time. Your name will never be connected to your responses. Any identifying information will not be released to any other party at any time, however the results are likely to be published to inform communication practices for other projects at [institution name]. The data gathered in this project will be accessible only to the researcher.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions I had regarding the research project and they have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Participant: _____ Date: _____
(please print)

Signature of Participant: _____

Thanks very much for your participation!

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 28 March 2007 to 31 March 2008. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretariat (Ph: 09 815 4321 ext.7254). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix F: Survey Questions

1 (Level of Awareness): Are you aware of/familiar with the communication channels used in the Student Max project below? Please indicate your level of awareness in the table below.

	Not at all aware	Low awareness	Neutral	Aware	Very aware
Voicemail message from CEO					
Email from CEO					
Student Max FAQ emails					
Bright yellow screen messages on your computer					
Staff meeting with a presentation by a student max steering committee member					
Staff meeting					
Head of School meeting					
Board of Studies					
School Admin Managers forum					
President's Committee notes					
Other					

2: If you selected "Other" in the table above please specify what communication channel it was

3 (Satisfaction Levels): Which channels satisfied your desire for information on the Student Max project? Please indicate your level of satisfaction in the table below.

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Voicemail message from CEO					
Email from CEO					
Student Max FAQ emails					
Bright yellow screen messages on your computer					
Staff meeting with a presentation by a student max steering committee member					
Staff meeting					
Head of School meeting					
Board of Studies					
School Admin Managers forum					
President's Committee notes					
Other					

4: If you selected "Other" in the table above please specify what communication channel it was

5 (Level of Effectiveness): How effective were these communication channels in communicating the details of the project to you? Please indicate the level of effectiveness in the table below.

	Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Neutral	Effective	Very Effective
Voicemail message from CEO					
Email from CEO					
Student Max FAQ emails					
Bright yellow screen messages on your computer					
Staff meeting with a presentation by a student max steering committee member					
Staff meeting					
Head of School meeting					
Board of Studies					
School Admin Managers forum					
President's Committee notes					
Other					

6: If you selected "Other" in the table above please specify what communication channel it was

7: To what degree has Student Max affected the way that you do your work? Please select the option that is relevant to you from the list below

- Has not affected my work at all
- Has affected my work
- Has significantly affected my work.

8 (Level of Communication): In phase 2 of the Student Max project, how much communication about the different areas of the project would you like? Please indicate the level of communication you would like in the table below.

	No communication	Some communication	Same level as before	More communication	Comprehensive detailed communication
Vision for the project					
Reasons for the project					
Overall project plans					
Regular progress reports					
How the project will affect me					

9: Are there any other areas of the StudentMax project that you would like communication about?

10: Do you have any ideas for enhancing communication during projects such as Student Max?, please comment in the box below

11: Is there anything else you would like to say about the communication of the Student Max project?

12: Please select what school you work in from the list below, if you do not work in a school please select Other. You can select more than one area

Other

School of Applied Technology

School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture

School of Built Environment

School of Business

School of Communication

School of Computing and Information Technology

School of Design

School of Education

School of Foundation Studies

School of Health Science

School of Language Studies

School of Natural Sciences

School of Performing and Screen Arts

School of Sport

Te Pae Whanake – School of Community Development

13: If you selected "Other" please specify what area you work in eg Institute Relations, Planning

14: What is your occupational group?

Academic Staff Member

Allied Staff Member

15: Do you have staff reporting to you for performance management?

Yes

No

16: On average how many hours per week do you work? Please indicate the number of hours you work in the box below

17: What is your gender?

Male

Female

18: With which ethnic groups do you identify (you may indicate up to 3)?

NZ European/Pakeha

British/Irish

Dutch

Greek

Polish

South Slav

Italian

German

Australian

Other European

New Zealand Maori

Samoan

Cook Island Maori

Tongan

Niuean

Tokelauan

Fijian

Other Pacific Peoples

Filipino

Cambodian

Vietnamese

Other Southeast Asian

Chinese

Indian

Sri Lankan

Japanese

Korean

Other Asian

Middle Eastern

Latin American

African

Other

19: Email Address (for those who were happy to be involved in a focus group).

Appendix G: Focus Group Questions

What does the Student Max Project mean to you?

Where do you usually/normally go to find out information about what is going on at [institution name]? Why there/from them?

Were these sources of information useful to you in the Student Max project?

If yes, what was it about them that made them successful?

If no, why do you think they were not so successful – and what sources were successful instead? And why?

Was the communication of Student Max timely? Were you informed about the project at the right time – and if not, how did it make you feel?

Sometimes we take more (or less) notice when certain people communicate with us. What makes you most receptive to communication? (if need prompters – the person it comes from, the type of communication, or something else). Why do you think this is the case?

And if appropriate – if not revealed by the question above -

In the Student Max project did the identity or role of the person who was communicating with you influence how receptive you were to that communication?

What in your view was missing in the Student Max communication – is there anything that you would have liked to have seen done differently?

Do you have any ideas you would like to share about improving communication at [institution name], especially of projects like Student Max?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix H: Interview questions

Can you tell me what the Student Max project meant to you?

What were the aims of the project?

How, where and from whom do you usually find out your information about whats going on at [institution name]?

What is it about those channels that make them most useful to you?

What channels of communication do you recall with regard to Student Max?

Which were most useful for you?

Is there any time during the student max process that you were left wanting information – did the channels that we have just talked about provide the information that you wanted or were you left wanting more?

Was there any time that you felt uncertain about the changes?

Was the communication timely?

And if appropriate if uncertainty alluded to. Did this lead to you feeling uncertain about the changes?

And if yes. Was this uncertainty addressed by subsequent communication?

Sometimes we take more or less notice depending on who is communicating. What makes you more receptive to communication – the person it comes from, the type of communication (as in the channels), or something else?

If you trust the person from whom the communication is coming does that make you more receptive to the communication?

What opportunities were you given to provide feedback on the Student Max project?

When you gave feedback did you feel it was heard?

What do you consider is your personal responsibility for communication?

What was missing in the student max communication (if anything)? Was there anything you would have liked to have seen done differently?

Do you have any ideas you would like to share about improving communication at [institution name] especially of projects like Student Max?

Is there anything else you would like to say?

And if the interviewee managed staff

How did you communicate the changes in Student Max to the staff that you supervise?

Why did you choose to communicate it in this way?

When staff provided feedback about the changes did you feel that there were channels available for you to feedback to the appropriate people?

If yes. How did you utilise these?

Appendix I Permission to undertake research within the organisation

This appendix has been withheld due to the screen shot compromising the confidentiality of the organisation.