Exploring Internal Communication Satisfaction:
The case study of a rural K-12 school division

By

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Abstract

In the fast-changing world of communication technologies, it is more important than ever for organizations to understand employee preferences for accessing and receiving information related to company goals, changes and operations. This is especially true in organizations operating in high spatial decentralized environments, such as rural K-12 school divisions, as a lack of information can lead to uncertainty and bypass formal communication channels. While several studies have explored internal communication satisfaction (ICS) in the work environment, minimal research has focused on the preferences and needs of K-12 rural school division employees.

This study seeks to understand school division employees' ICS by exploring a case study of a rural K-12 jurisdiction in southeastern Alberta. Specifically, the research aims to find out the extent employees are satisfied with the communication they receive while working for the school division. To explore this relationship, a mixed-methods research approach was used. This included collecting survey data from all school division staff using an online survey, supplemented through one-on-one interviews with a small number of employees. The lenses of media richness theory (MRT), channel expansion theory (CET), and reception theory (RT), along with five of the eight dimensions that make up the ICS multidimensional construct, were used to evaluate the data. The dimensions chosen for this study included organizational integration, communication climate, communication with supervisors, horizontal information communication, and media quality.

The findings suggest that K-12 rural school division employees are overall satisfied with internal communication processes; however, much like other organizations, they continue to be drawn to more traditional communication methods. As a result, future ICS growth in the rural

K-12 internal communications environment may be limited without changes to support

consistency and the education of newer communication technologies to meet employee

communication satisfaction needs.

     Keywords: internal communication satisfaction, media richness theory, channel expansion

theory, reception theory, internal communication, internal communication channels, rural K-12

school division, internal communication dimensions

I. Introduction

In 2007, when I first transitioned from media journalism to working in organizational communications for a rural K-12 school division, very few online tools were available for sharing information with staff. Websites contained static and unengaging corporate information, while social media was just becoming something people knew existed. With a background in video journalism, I introduced videos to enhance our communication strategies, but even that proved challenging due to the size of media files and the inability of web platforms to host anything other than .flv[1] formats. Graphic design was primarily restricted to those with knowledge of complicated design programs; therefore, newsletters, posters and trifold pamphlets were created in Microsoft Word or Publisher and printed for staff distribution. Back then, production of these materials required days and sometimes weeks to develop, which led to significant delays in the sharing process. At that time, aside from simplistic website traffic counts, no metrics or online tools measured engagement to determine how different messages or channels impacted communication satisfaction. Other organizational sharing practices, which still occur today, consisted primarily of email and phone calls or requesting that information be passed through school principals to their local staff.

Due to the geographical size of the school division (30,000 sq kilometres), school division employees working in different locations rarely connected face-to-face. While people knew of each other, staff seldom connected in-person more than a few times a year with those outside their local work environment, unless their work duties included regular travel. In the mid-2000s, working in communications meant trying different things to see what might satisfy

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[1] FLV is a file format used by Adobe Flash Player and Adobe AIR to store and deliver synchronized audio and video streams over the Internet.

employee needs for information, and because you were never sure, you tried it all. Sometimes it is hard to believe that so much has changed, yet many things remain the same.

By the time I applied to be part of the MACT program in 2019, fast-evolving new technologies had significantly changed the opportunities for organizational information sharing. Communicators now manage multiple websites and various social media channels and can push out phone, text and email messages with the click of a button. Graphic design and video production are accessible to the masses and can be quickly learned through a simple YouTube search. Connecting with someone outside the constraints of scheduled work hours is almost always possible, as everyone has a cell phone and can be reached anytime. Those working in remote offices are no longer restricted to local grapevine conversations. They can easily connect face-to-face with coworkers across the organization through video conferencing tools or find out what's happening through the division website or social media sites. And still, with all this new technology and options for internal communication sharing, I continue to hear, "We need more communication." It is a criticism I'm sure every communicator in every organization has heard throughout their career. With so many options now available to communicators and organizations, it is frustrating that employees still feel they aren't always getting what they need.

Having worked the past 15 years as the Director of Communications for Prairie Rose Public Schools, a rural K-12 school division in southeast Alberta, I am eager to try new opportunities to increase internal communication satisfaction and recognize how modern tools can be leveraged to support employee knowledge and engagement. Unfortunately, there continues to be a reluctance from employees at all levels of the organization to try new options due to what appears to be traditional comforts and uncertainty. Despite many efforts to encourage coworkers and supervisors that there are better options than 'just' email to share information

across the school division, email continues to reign supreme. It is frustrating to collaborate using long email threads sent back and forth with attached Microsoft Word files that need to be downloaded, edited, resaved, uploaded and emailed again, or go through the voicemail menu to retrieve phone messages. Another ongoing challenge is that everyone wants to do their own thing. Unfortunately, there appears to be no commonalities regarding preferences for formal and informal sharing from one individual to another, from supervisor to supervisor, or from one location to the next, with everyone doing what works best for them. Personal preference is particularly challenging from a communications department perspective, as it is impossible to meet the needs of each person based on what they want.

The geographical vastness of rural K-12 school divisions also brings forth additional challenges. One is face-to-face communication, which is not always possible between decision-makers and employees. While previous research is mixed on the advantages of face-to-face communication in a modern setting, overall, it is considered more valuable than other forms of internal communication based on its ability to provide multiple cues to the message recipient (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Cornelissen, 2017). Another challenge is the formation of subcultures which can occur when groups operate outside of the dominant societal standard, resulting in the formation of individual identities. Several factors can contribute to this, the most common being occupation type, workgroups, and geographical location (Fish, 2015), common in rural K-12 school divisions. Subcultures can significantly influence organizations and increase informal communications such as 'grapevines' or 'staff room chatter' that bypass the formal authority and information mechanisms organizations put in place to channel and focus information to employees (Brown & Starkey, 1994). Therefore, when an organization functions in a high spatial differential environment, such as rural K-12 school divisions, it requires

communication strategies that make internal information flow quickly and efficiently to create sources of knowledge for employees (Fish, 2015).

The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified the need for diversity in organizational communication efforts. When many staff shifted to working from home, the transmission of information to employees became more critical than ever. The need for immediate information reemphasized the importance of evaluating evolving and existing internal communication practices, processes and tools that, if left unchecked, can lead to increased anxiety and uncertainty in the workplace (Ecklebe & Löffler, 2021; Li et al., 2021). When there is an absence of information that is reliable or from a trusted source, employees are likely to make assumptions about why things happen (Downs & Adrian, 2004). For organizations to be proactive in developing internal communication strategies, it is first necessary to understand the needs of employee segments so that important identifying aspects are not overlooked. This requires familiarity with your demographics, understanding how people spend their day and prefer to interact, establishing when face-to-face engagement can occur, and knowing what your employees are interested in (Richmond, 2011, as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2013).

For my capstone project, I chose to evaluate internal communication satisfaction (ICS) in a rural K-12 school environment for several reasons. As a Prairie Rose Public Schools employee responsible for communications at the school division, I am familiar with current internal communication practices. By doing this research, I hope to further understand the dynamics of the internal communication environment so that future staff communication efforts are done with purpose and intention. This includes understanding what employees deem most important and where shortfalls exist. It would also be beneficial to examine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic impacted internal communication efforts. As previous research is limited in this area

of study, findings could be used better to understand the needs of employees in times of crisis

and uncertainty.

II. Literature Review

Internal communication is essential for organizations as it connects employees to the business they work for, helps them feel confident in their work, and reduces frustration or uncertainty when opposing views surface (Cornelissen, 2017). When considering the internal audience, timely and reliable information can win an employee's trust and gain cultural credibility (Dolphin, 2005). As a complex system, organizations must consider many factors to achieve internal communication success. This includes organizations having a solid understanding of what it wants to achieve, how the information will reach employees, the channels available for evaluating communications, and other defining factors that can hinder efforts. Recognizing these challenges is important for all organizations as timely, relevant, and consistent communication connects people to their work and the information they need to be successful and appreciated.

In the literature review that follows, a summary of previous research in the internal communication satisfaction (ICS) realm will be explored. The section will conclude with the development of a research question that will be used to guide this study.

1. Literature Review Considerations

A preliminary investigation into internal communication satisfaction (ICS) reveals a significant amount of literature related to the value and role of internal communication on overall employee satisfaction. Primarily, results related to healthcare, the private sector, government and post-secondary institutions appear to dominate the search fields, with other industry sectors, including K-12 education, being less frequently studied. In the instance of K-12 school jurisdictions, most communication research is centred around teacher communication and teaching practices, communications with external stakeholders, or policy documents (Newton,

2015) and not the evaluation of the overall organizational internal communications structure.

There are several possible considerations for this finding: 1) the corporate communication

position in the K-12 sector is a relatively new addition within the past few decades (especially in

smaller school divisions with lower operating budgets), 2) the majority of people who choose to

conduct research in the K-12 field are educators whose focus is not on internal communication

practices, and 3) often schools and teachers are provided high levels of autonomy to act and

operate independently within the overall system. This independence creates structural differences

across employee groups and school locations, making evaluating ICS from a district-level

challenging. Therefore, a review of general literature related to ICS was conducted for this study.

2. Literature Search Methodology

The search included all literature related to internal communication satisfaction (ICS).

Scholar databases proved to be most successful with adding parameters such as peer-reviewed,

publication dates of 2010 and newer, and focusing on scholarly articles in social science and

business management. It was noted that satisfaction and engagement were frequently listed

together in the organizational communications literature but centred on different aspects of

communication satisfaction in the workplace. This led the focus directly on internal

communication satisfaction, with the search narrowed to only include articles that specifically

mentioned 'internal communication' and 'internal communication satisfaction.' The decision

was also made to include 'pandemic' and 'COVID' due to the timing of the research.

3. Understanding Internal Communication

Unlike organizational communication, which is often concerned with communication as a

phenomenon, discipline, or way to describe organizations (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 180;

Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, n.d.), internal communication is used to refer to all forms of

communication that occur within organizations. While the two terms are often referenced

interchangeably, Welch and Jackson (2007) define internal communication as one of the seven

facets of organizational communication along with public relations, public affairs, environmental

communication, investor relations, labour market communications and corporate advertising (p.

181). Within the literature, it is common to find many words used by practitioners and scholars

when discussing internal communication, including; internal relations, employee

communication, internal communications, employee relations, internal public relations and staff

communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 178; Cornelissen, 2017). In most instances, the use

of any of these terms refers specifically to the "function responsible for effective

communications among participants within an organization" (Internal Communications, 2022,

para. 1). From one organization to the next, the methods and processes used to execute this work

can take many forms. This can include producing and delivering messages on behalf of

management, facilitating two-way dialogue across workgroups and locations, and supporting the

communication skill development of employees (para. 1).

Commonly within the literature, scholars refer to a 1989 passage from Frank and

Bronwell when defining internal communication:

> The communications transactions between individuals and/or groups at various levels and
>
> in different areas of specialization are intended to design and redesign organizations,
>
> implement designs, and co-ordinate day-to-day activities (as cited in Welch & Jackson, p.
>
> 178; Vora & Patra, 2017, p. 30).

However, some in the academic community have suggested an over-reliance on archaic internal

communication definitions that focus heavily on process and not people (Welch & Jackson,

2007; Welch, 2019, p. 46). This has led to more recent attempts to redefine internal

communication by scholars, shifting the focus to individuals and not on specific actions

performed by a company:

> The professional management of interactions between all those with an interest or 'a
>
> stake' in a particular organization (Scholes, as cited in Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 182).

> An organization's managed communication system where employees are regarded as a
>
> public or stakeholder group (Yeomans, as cited in Vora & Patra, 2017, p. 30).

Research has shown that better understanding employees' needs can benefit employers.

According to Brandon (1995), internal communication was not given much consideration,

usually consisting of sharing a few pictures or information through company newsletters (para.

2). Only in the past few decades have employers begun to pay attention to the relationship and

benefits between employee morale, satisfaction, engagement, and timely, meaningful

communication with their workers. Much like how a company must adapt to the consumer

market, understanding employee expectations for communications has many advantages for

organizations. Mary Welch's (2019) table entitled *Eras of communication practice* outlines how

employee needs for communication have changed over the last century. Table 1 begins with the

entertainment phenomenon of the 1930s, where employees searched for information that

provided entertainment. This is in stark contrast to current realities, where workers now expect

dialogue and transparency with the information they receive.

Eras	Principal internal communication objectives	Focus of internal communication	Sources
Pre-1939	Entertainment	Recreation, soft news and employee human interest stories.	Dover (1959)
1940s	Information	Promotion opportunities, the activities of the organisation, and productivity.	
1950s	Persuasion	Explaining strategic management decisions to gain employee support.	
1980s	Mutual understanding	Facilitating dialogue and mutual understanding.	Grunig and Hunt (1984)
1990s	Cultural change	Supporting business process reengineering and organisation cultural change initiatives.	Welch (2018)
2000s	Engagement	Contributing to increased employee engagement.	
2010s	Transparency and trust	Achieving greater transparency and rebuilding trust.	

Table 1: Eras of communication practice. Note: Reprinted from "Dimensions of internal communication and implications for employee engagement," by Welch, M., 2019, p. 47, New York, NY, Routledge.

Paying attention to the changes in employee communication needs has routinely proven to have many benefits, yet internal communication is commonly flagged as an issue in large and small organizations (Welch, 2019, p. 45). In a study of communication flow between managers and employees, White et al. (2010) found that in large decentralized organizations, the ability for employees to receive appropriate information was heavily dependent on the communication skills of managers, noting that in some cases, "information does not flow, it trickles" (p. 73). In a time when information moves rapidly through online media, the 'trickling of information' is one to note as it raises new challenges previously not considered by employers. When a change negatively impacts employees, how the organization communicates the news can dramatically affect whether employees view the change as legitimate. This can include learning something new or doing something they are already good at differently (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 62).

i) Dimensions of Internal Communication

The complex nature of communication in organizations requires practitioners to recognize the unique differences that exist under the internal communication umbrella.

High-functioning organizations have long confirmed there are many dimensions to

communication at work (Downs & Adrian, 2004) and tried to make sense of the unique

processes of how messages are encoded and decoded by individuals. This stems back to early

internal communication literature, including a model developed by Shannon and Weaver in 1949,

recognizing that not all messages sent by an organization are the ones received by an employee.

Downs and Adrian (2004) further defined this process as "filtering" or "the filter" suggesting that

outside sources can restrict or prevent intended communication from reaching or being

interpreted the same way by individuals (p. 4). Specifically, people with different perspectives, in

different positions, and working at different geographical locations will look at information

differently, impacting their view of an organization (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 12).

  Welch and Jackson (2007) developed a matrix focusing on four communication

dimensions to further clarify the complex internal communication network. The four dimensions

include; internal line management communication (day-to-day management activities), internal

team peer communication (peer-to-peer or employee-to-employee communication in a group

setting), internal project peer communication (colleagues working on particular projects) and

internal corporate communication (senior management communication downward to all

employees) (Welch, 2019, p. 47). Within each dimension, consideration is given to level,

direction, participants, and content. Table 2 highlights the interconnections between each

dimension, clarifying "who communicates, to whom, in what way, with what content, and for

what purpose?" (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 185).

Dimension	Level	Direction	Participants	Content
1. Internal line management communication	Line managers/ Supervisors	Predominantly two-way	Line managers-employees	Employees' roles Personal impact, e.g., appraisal discussions, team briefings
2. Internal team peer communication	Team colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Team information, e.g., team task discussions
3. Internal project peer communication	Project group colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Project information, e.g., project issues
4. Internal corporate communication	Strategic managers/top management	Predominantly one-way	Strategic managers-all employees	Organisational/ corporate issues, e.g., goals, objectives, new developments, activities and achievements

Table 2: Internal communication matrix. Note: Reprinted from "Rethinking internal communication: A stakeholder approach," by Welch, M. & Jackson, P., 2007, Corporate Communications: An Internal Journal, 12(2), p. 185.

ii) The Connection Between Internal and External Communication

Increasingly, the lines between internal and external communication are blurring (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). In 1981, long before the age of new media, McCallister noted that "the line separating internal and external communication no longer exists" (as cited Dolphin, 2005, p. 172), with Argenti (1998) later echoing that sentiment, cautioning that all employee messages should be tied to the overall corporate communication strategy. This is an important consideration, as the competitive advantage of internal communication comes not only from employee satisfaction and productivity but also from the positive contributions that informed employees can make to the external public relations effort. As was noted by C.M. Howard, "employees can be an organization's best ambassadors or loudest critics, depending on how they get information" (as cited in White et al., 2010, p. 66). What is often forgotten is that a CEO's performance on local TV can be viewed by a mix of both external and internal stakeholders (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 180). This has brought strong caution from researchers, who suggest adding labels to both internal and external communication is fuzzy and should only be done with

careful consideration (Welch & Jackson, 2007). "There is no internal and external content; there is just content" (Ruck, 2019, p. 22). Internal communication has its own identity, but internal and external information sharing are interconnected, which employers need to recognize (Welch & Jackson, 2007).

a) Communication Satisfaction

Hecht defined ICS as a "socio-emotional outcome resulting from communication interactions" consisting of a series of communication situations (as cited in Pološki Vokić et al., 2020, p. 71). These can include interactions of an interpersonal nature, in a group or from an organization. Understanding how these key factors interconnect in the corporate environment has routinely proven beneficial for employers, as lower employee communication satisfaction is connected to decreased loyalty, higher absenteeism, greater employee downturn, and condensed output (Hargie et al., 2002). Downs and Hazen (1977) were among the first to reveal that ICS is a multidimensional construct of eight dimensions. These include communication climate, relationship with supervisors, organizational integration, media quality, horizontal and informal communication, organizational perspective, relationship with subordinates, and personal feedback (Downs & Adrian, 2004). Over the years, many researchers (c.f., Sharma, 2015; Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020; Welch, 2019) have referenced the eight dimensions to evaluate ICS while modifying their chosen instrument to meet specific needs.

b) Internal Communication Satisfaction Audits

One of the earliest models aimed at describing the communications process was developed by Harold Lasswell in the late 1940s, entitled the linear communication model (Downs & Hazen, 2004). Since then, communication audits have been used as a standard method for organizations to evaluate how satisfied their employees are with their internal

communication. Audits provide a company with new information that verifies employee

perceptions while forecasting problems and highlighting strengths. Much like the undertaking of

a financial audit, the communication audit applies three strands to understand internal and

external communication systems. These strands include; the accumulation of information, the

creation of management systems, and accountability (Hargie & Tourish, 1993). The audit

provides a level of accountability for the flow of information within an organization, which helps

detect blockages in the channels of communication that need attention.

Interestingly, it is often assumed that the flow of communication occurs much like that of

the company organizational chart, yet studies have shown this is not usually the case (Downs &

Adrian, 2004). Hargie and Tourish (2009) outline standard measures used to deploy a

communication audit, including questionnaires, interviews, audio/video recordings, live

observation, diary analysis, and self-recording by participants. Each method has limitations and

advantages for the researcher, which should appropriately consider the study focus and the

possibility of success, including time, costs, type of data collected, and disruption (p. 404).

c) **Communication Satisfaction Surveys**

Of the many methods available for auditing ICS, the implementation of surveys for data

collection is most common, based on its considered advantages over other data collection

methods (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 106). Primary benefits include efficiency, a large sample

size, lower costs, assured confidentiality, and the diversity of topics and documentation. As part

of the evaluation of literature for this review, it was noted that a significant number of articles

evaluating ICS were done using a survey/questionnaire approach. A few of these include:

- Sharma (2015) used the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) to explore organizational communication and the perceptions of staff members' level of communication and job satisfaction.

- Mehra and Nickerson (2019) applied a survey methodology, using a 5-point Likert scale to study managers' preferences for different media, perceptions of communication climate, and overall communication satisfaction.

- Pološki Vokić et al. (2020) chose the Internal Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (UPZIK) to find the link between employees' satisfaction with internal communication and trust with employers.

Survey methodology has solidified its place as a predominant method for researching ICS; however, some academics suggest that "when communication professionals are under pressure to measure the effects of communication, the temptation can be to make it simple" (Dahlman & Heide, 2020, p. 119). One caution related to the reliance on statistical data is that quantitative analysis keeps practitioners focused on frequency instead of the impact of the message on the recipient, supporting a one-way transmission view of communication practices.

d) Other Evaluation Considerations

In recent years, scholars have begun to voice concerns about the heavy reliance on the use of survey methodology to measure ICS, suggesting it may not be sufficient in understanding what an employee does with the information they receive (Ruck & Welch, 2012, p. 297). In Dahlman and Heide's (2020) criticism of measurements, they note that usually, information is taken too habitually, without fully reflecting on the "why" and " how" of the findings.

In a study by White et al. (2010), the authors chose a qualitative approach that consisted of interviews with 147 employees. The focus of the study was to explore university employees'

perceptions of information flow, communications preferences, connection to community, and the

relationships between those perceptions and an employee's willingness to advocate for the

organization. The authors cite choosing an interview data collection approach as it allowed them

to understand the process or phenomenon instead of requiring participants to 'choose' a response

that might not be relevant to them. Ruck and Welch (2012) further evaluated the trend of surveys

as the go-to approach for ICS by analyzing 12 studies between 2004 and 2010. They found an

over-reliance on gathering quantitative information that was seldom complemented with a

qualitative or mixed methods approach. Further, they discovered a predominance of assessment

on channels, processes, and volume of communication and not employee needs for content (p.

297). Their findings call on researchers to consider more than one method for assessing ICS,

emphasizing communities, content and dialogue.

4. Internal Communication Satisfaction and the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has likely changed how people work and communicate. In the

spring of 2020, many employees were sent to work from home. As part of this transition, the

responsibility of providing quick, timely and accurate information to employees fell to corporate

internal communication professionals, who are also routinely tasked with maintaining positive

employee morale and organization-employee relationships during uncertainty (Li et al., 2021).

Internal communication transitioned to a focus on crisis communication through disseminating

one-way information to inform employees of new developments, enable collaborative working,

reduce uncertainties, and alleviate feelings of insecurity, stress, and fear (Kim et al., as cited in

Ecklebe & Löffler, 2021, p. 215). At the same time, in person, face-to-face communication that

had previously occurred daily was discouraged, leading to a dependency on digital interactions.

While the use of technology still enabled employees to communicate face to face at a distance,

this required additional efforts, planning and previous knowledge of software applications on behalf of both parties to be successful.

While new research related to COVID-19 continues to be ongoing, some researchers have begun sharing data associated with the initial impact of the pandemic on ICS. Ecklebe & Löffler (2021) explored how the frequency and transparency of communication with employees at the start of the pandemic impacted the overall employee-organizational relationship. A hypothesized structuration model for their study focused on frequency (both at the onset and during), information quality (substantial), two-way communication (participation), accountability, and transparency (secretive) of information as antecedents of perceived internal communication. Ecklebe & Löffler (2021) believed these six factors could predict the perceived quality of communication concerning employees' trustworthiness, commitment, and satisfaction. Their primary findings indicate that sharing substantial (quality) information and its frequency was central to the perception of high-quality crisis communication (p. 225). Further, they found that in times of crisis, especially at the beginning, the need for information is high and that the information provided should be heavily focused on the recipient's needs and not the sender (p. 226).

5. Theoretical Considerations

For evaluating media-related choices and employee preferences, Armengol et al. (2017) identified "two of the most influential" theories used by researchers for understanding the selection and use of communication media in organizations (p. 1). These include media richness theory (MRT) and channel expansion theory (CET). Where MRT considers both the sender's communication medium and task, CET also considers the social context for choosing a medium and the user's experience. While proven beneficial for evaluating ICS, MRT and CET do not

emphasize the sensemaking that occurs once an audience receives a piece of information; therefore, reception theory (RT) will also be evaluated.

a) Media Richness Theory

In the sea of organizational communications theories, media richness theory (MRT) (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Cornelissen, 2017) is considered one of the more popular (Armengol et al., 2017). MRT looks at both the richness of a medium (how it was shared) with the equivocality (potential to have more than one meaning) of a task to determine the effectiveness of the medium (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). Daft and Lengel's (1986) work suggests "there is a richness continuum which encompasses all medium options," based on four characteristics (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020, p. 2). These include immediacy for feedback or interactivity, the use of verbal or nonverbal cues, natural language, and personal focus. Within the richness continuum, face-to-face communication is considered the richest as it allows for the sharing of complex information with a personal focus, whereas written documents, posters and statements are the lowest. Emails, phone calls, videoconferencing, and instant messages fall within the middle of the continuum. Using rich media allows the recipient to engage and provide feedback to one another, while "poor" or lean media focuses on a one-way transmission model where information is not actively discussed amongst participants (Cornelissen, 2017, p. 43).

Employee perceptions of specific media can significantly impact how individuals interact with the content sent through the media. Ruck and Welch (2012) found that minimal attention has been given to employee preferences regarding communication within organizations. In a study of 1,524 employees from 10 large companies, Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić (2020) recorded significant differences in the level of communication satisfaction of employees who were exposed to rich, moderate and some lean media; whereas communication satisfaction of lean

media participants did not seem to have the same impact. While several other studies have confirmed similar findings (c.f., Men, 2014; Cantemir, 2017; Fish, 2015), some authors caution that communication preferences may not be uniform across all employee groups or amongst individuals (Welch, 2012) and that using a one-size-fits-all approach may not lead to successful communication results (White et al., 2010). Men (2014) has also challenged the implications of media richness theory, citing technology development and email as indispensable and constant in employees' daily routines; therefore, its place on the continuum should be re-examined (p. 279). This finding suggests that while MRT provides a useful framework for understanding the preferred channels and media formats of employees (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020), additional considerations related to modern-day employee communication habits require further research.

b) Channel Expansion Theory

While MRT theory investigates how media richness affects selection and use, channel expansion theory (CET) focuses on the circumstances that can lead to rich communication on a given channel. Carlson and Zmud (1999) identified four experiences of an employee as indicators of message and media relevancy. These include experience with the channel, experience with the message topic, experience with the organizational context and experience with communication co-participants (p. 155). Carlson and Zmud (1999) identify these experiences as primary enablers and motivators of channel use, suggesting that for employees to perceive a channel as rich, they must build knowledge bases in each of the four areas. As individuals develop a more robust understanding of knowledge, they can participate more effectively, increasing their perception of the channel or medium becoming richer. At the same

time, should knowledge not improve regardless of time using a channel, an individual's perception of a medium's richness can stall or even decline (p. 155).

c) Reception Theory

In today's modern age, information is everywhere. Therefore, it is unrealistic for employers to assume that all internal information shared with employees is understood and acted upon as intended. While both MRT and CET focus on the channel choice and perceived satisfaction related to using a particular media, additional consideration must also be given to the sensemaking that occurs when an employee receives information. One such research approach is reception theory (RT). While historically used to measure audience reception on traditional media, RT seeks to understand "not what the media do to people, but what people do with the media" (Schrøder, 2019, p. 156).

In his model of encoding and decoding media sources, Stuart Hall theorizes that a margin of understanding exists between the producer and the reader. Therefore, even if a piece of text is encoded with a specific purpose, the reader will likely decode it differently based on countless factors (Dziak, 2021). David Morley, an early author on reception research, defined reception as the "semiotic process through which audiences differently read and make sense of messages which have been transmitted, and act on those meanings, with the context of the rest of their situation and experience" (as cited in Schrøder, 2019, p. 156). Jankowski and Jensen (2002) further add to this understanding, suggesting there are opportunities for several potential meanings to be enacted by an audience in a single piece of information (p. 137). This process of coding and decoding messages by an individual can be impacted by various factors such as the communicator, audience, cultural norms, time period, political atmosphere, and more (Dziak, 2021). When these factors are influenced or changed, so can an audience's perception and

decision to engage with the information. As Stuart Hall's (2022) reception theory suggests, a message receiver does not just passively accept a text or media but negotiates the meaning as either a dominant, professional, negotiated or oppositional member of the audience (para. 20). Whereas a dominant or professional audience member will receive a message and more or less understand it as intended, a negotiated member may not agree with a piece of information yet still accept the overall presentation and intention. This is in contrast to an oppositional audience member who will actively disagree or dislike the message and choose not to accept it (Dziak, 2021, para. 8). These negotiation positions can change over time and are subject to a variety of cultural conditions the audience member is exposed to.

6. Analysis of the Key Literature

An analysis of the literature related to internal communication satisfaction (ICS) revealed the following factors for consideration: 1) key terms, definitions and historical background of internal communication, 2) methods and predominant theories used for evaluating ICS, and 3) considerations for evaluating ICS during times of crisis. A summary of each theme is as follows:

Understanding internal communication. There are varying definitions and discussions within the literature related to internal communication. This discussion brings forth opinions and knowledge from communication, psychology and public relations practices and remains regularly debated amongst academics. While internal communication is often used interchangeably with organizational communication, internal communication is one facet of organizational communication, specifically relating to all communication occurring in an organization. This can include many methods and forms of information sharing and is inconsistent from one organization to the next. As is highlighted in the Welch & Jackson (2007) internal communication matrix, individuals have unique needs and preferences which can impact

their ability to access and make sense of the information they receive. Understanding the needs

of employees has many proven benefits for employers, including improved employee morale,

satisfaction and timely, meaningful communication with their workers (Downs & Adrian, 2004;

Cornelissen, 2017) and yet has not always been a priority. Further, an organization's competitive

advantage is closely linked to employee satisfaction, which requires employers to consider

internal messaging practices carefully. This includes prioritizing internal communication

alongside external communication, as "employees can be an organization's best ambassadors or

loudest critics, depending on how they get information" (White et al., 2010, p. 66).

      Internal communication satisfaction and evaluation. Internal communication

satisfaction (ICS) is a multidimensional construct of eight dimensions (Downs & Hazen, 1977).

The literature suggests that over the years, ICS has overwhelmingly been evaluated using a

quantitative methodology, with most studies choosing a survey strategy for data collection. More

recently, however, it has been argued that while quantitative methods are beneficial at providing

communicators with information to evaluate their efforts, they can be potentially void of the

context and depth required to gain true insight into employee needs and preferences (Ruck &

Welch, 2012). This has prompted modern ICS researchers to advocate for more than one method

when evaluating employee communication satisfaction.

      Considerations for evaluating ICS in a time of crisis. As a result of the COVID-19

pandemic, organizations face new challenges regarding timely and accurate information reaching

their employees. Since the pandemic started, early research indicates that sharing substantial

(quality) information and the frequency with which the information was shared were central to

the perception of high-quality crisis communication (Ecklebe & Löffler, 2021, p. 225) amongst

employees.

Theoretical considerations. Studies have explored connections between channels, media content and frequency of messaging, and employee perception of media value to determine effectiveness. With the selection and use of media identified as core issues in organizational communication (Armengol et al., 2017), several theories have emerged to understand media richness, emotional connection and social influence to increase ICS. Within the literature, historically, media richness theory and channel expansion theory have been lenses for ICS evaluation. More recent research, however, questions whether either theory is sufficient to fully understand how employees make sense of and act on the information they receive. Reception theory fills this gap by exploring how two employees can access the same piece of information and interpret it differently.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of the present study is to fill three purposes, focusing on 'internal communication' as the communication functions, processes and interactions with others that are part of the day-to-day activities of an organization. Firstly, there appears to be a need for further research examining the ICS of employees working in a K-12 school environment. This paper aims to fill that apparent gap in the research. Second, while many studies have explored employee perceptions of satisfaction on a chosen channel, message type, or frequency of communication, very few have gone further to ask specifically what an employee does, or does not do, with the information once they receive it. This study will attempt to address these questions. Finally, with COVID-19 pandemic restrictions lifting at the time this study was conducted, it will be interesting to find out how effective employees felt internal communication efforts were within the rural K-12 school division environment. This feedback will help

contribute to new literature regarding the pandemic and managing internal communication in times of crisis.

Based on these considerations, the following research question has been identified as the focus of this research:

- To what extent are employees satisfied, or not, with the communication they receive while working for a rural K-12 school division?

The next section outlines the methodology chosen for this study, how the data will be analyzed, and the ethical implications of conducting the research.

III. Methods

As was identified through a review of internal communication satisfaction (ICS) literature, most studies measuring ICS have applied a single research approach, primarily using quantitative methods (Men, 2014; Sharma, 2015; Mehra & Nickerson, 2019). To expand on the research in this study area, further exploration is required to gain a more complete understanding of employees' internal communication needs, leading to a richer understanding of the factors at play.

Therefore, a case study approach will be used for this research to gain a broad understanding of rural K-12 employee internal communication satisfaction. Case studies are well-suited when focusing on an individual unit or bounded system for detailed learning about the topic and provide context about the unit being studied (Flyvbjerg, 2011). A case study supports the investigation of a phenomenon in a real-life context, instead of in theoretical terms, by gathering detailed and precise information about a topic when multiple and unique factors are at play (Merrigan et al., 2012, p.145). Further, the focus on examining a single example can be used as a preliminary stage of investigation that can be tested systematically in future studies (Flyvbjerg, 2011), leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the K-12 school system's internal communication dynamics.

1. The Case Study

Located in southeastern Alberta and employing around 475 staff across 30,000 square kilometres, Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS) will serve as the case sample. Serving a predominantly rural student population, the jurisdiction consists of 18 public schools, 18 Hutterite colony schools, one outreach school, and one home education program. Enrollments vary substantially within the public school locations (average enrollment of 151 students per

school), with the smallest having only 20 students and the largest 473. While Hutterite colony

schools are also part of the public school system, they do not accept students from the general

population and operate as one-room schoolhouses (average enrollment of 18 students per

school). Approximately 3,100 students are part of the entire PRPS system. Staff size also differs

considerably at each site, with some locations having less than five employees while others work

with a staff of 35 or more individuals.

Due to the vast geographic nature of the chosen case, internal communication practices

within PRPS rely heavily on sharing information through remote means that include email,

phone/text and video communications. While professional development and monthly in-person

meetings (both at the school sites and in other locations) also allow for information sharing,

one-on-one, face-to-face communication from those in executive leadership roles is primarily

passed along to employees in management positions at each of the school locations and then

filtered down through localized communication channels. The localized approach is not

standardized across the division and heavily depends on the individual sharing the information. It

is currently unknown how much these localized processes differ from one school location to the

next or which employee groups would have greater access to face-to-face personalized

communication.

Therefore, to further supplement the primary research question aimed at understanding

the extent employees are satisfied with the communication they receive while working for a rural

K-12 school division, the following sub-questions will be used to provide a richer understanding

of ICS amongst PRPS employees:

- To what extent does an employee's job assignment impact internal communication
  satisfaction (ICS)?

- All things being equal, what criteria do employees identify as most important when interacting with and acting upon the internal information they receive?

2. Research Design

When choosing the appropriate method for this study, the literature review findings and constraints around the case study were considered. Due to the geographical nature of PRPS and the diversity of responsibilities across employee groups, gaining a widespread understanding of ICS using a single method may not be sufficient to answer the research questions. As this study aims to understand multiple facets of employee internal communication actions, quantitative and qualitative methods should both be considered based on their identified advantages. Whereas a qualitative research method would be best suited for gathering context and emotions from individuals, a quantitative approach can help generate many data points on several topics and provide insight into whether differences can be detected from one employee group to another.

As ICS encompasses many communication functions in an organization (task/work, social maintenance, motivation, innovation, and integration), it is important to choose a method that will allow for a full breadth of information to be collected (Down & Adrian, 2004). Given that the primary research question aims to understand the extent to which rural K-12 employees are satisfied with the communication they receive, the chosen research method must appropriately represent the population of interest. Therefore, a mixed-methods research design has been chosen for this study to understand the multitude of factors at play. Mixed methods employ more than one method and apply the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2009) to produce a fuller picture of the research problem (Halcomb & Hickman, 2015). As a final consideration for a mixed-methods approach, previous ICS research suggests that a changing communication environment requires a new approach to internal

communication assessment "with an emphasis on communities, content and dialogue rather than volume and channels" (Ruck & Welch, 2012, p. 301). Applying a mixed methods approach, therefore, also supports recent literature recommending that internal communication audits, wherein quantitative methods are chosen, "be complemented with other, preferably qualitative (audit) instruments, such as focus groups, or in-depth interviews" (Zwijze-Koning & de Jong, 2007, p. 280).

a) Organization of the Study

The data collection for this study will be conducted in two parts. The first method will employ a quantitative research approach consisting of an online survey sent to 475 PRPS employees. This method was chosen as "survey research focuses on the characteristics of individuals and groups who send and receive messages or share cultures" (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 104). A survey data collection was chosen as the initial data collection method for this component as it supports getting information about a large number of people, can explore specific issues when the researcher is familiar with certain factors in advance and are straightforward and relatively uncomplicated for the person providing feedback (Denscombe, 2010, p. 12). Further, a survey approach will allow respondents an equal opportunity to share their perspectives on internal communication practices and enable the researcher to identify specific patterns that emerge from the population.

There are, however, weaknesses of survey data collection that need to be acknowledged as quantitative methods, such as surveys, do not as readily "tease out intricacies and subtleties of certain facets of social life" (p. 13). Some of these include; participants leaving questions unanswered, incorrect understanding or interpretation of a question without the ability to ask for clarification, restricted response types, lack of personalization, accessibility issues, survey

fatigue and nonresponse bias (Debois, 2019). With nonresponse bias, errors can often be introduced as some selected sample members are unwilling or unable to complete the survey (Alvarez & VanBeselaere, 2005). Online survey collection also requires some level of technical expertise on the part of the participant, requiring respondents to have a basic understanding of tech literacy skills (p. 958). Other considerations that may lead to non-response bias are possible apprehension, or fear of repercussion from their immediate supervisor or employer should the employee complete or not complete the survey.

Though considerable quantitative data, and some qualitative data via open text responses, will be collected through the online survey to better understand employees' complexities and personal experiences, a supplemental qualitative approach will follow the survey data collection. Interviews will be used to gather 'thick descriptions' related to internal communications instances and occurrences in the workplace. Gathering personal perceptions will provide clarification and insight into the survey results and allow the researcher to collect first-hand knowledge of internal communication practices. Noted advantages of conducting interview research include; gaining familiarity with the interviewee and their work environment, more detailed discussion of topic areas, shared knowledge of topics and information the researcher would not have previously considered, an opportunity for the participant to communicate openly to an eager party and new information that can lead the researcher to refine and grow their focus based on the data collected (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 77).

Due to the two-part nature of the data collection outlined above, the two methods will be discussed separately in the following sections to ensure clarity around the processes.

3. Part A - The Survey

    a) Survey Target Population and Participants

    Approximately 475 individuals classified as "non-casual employees" by PRPS will be invited to participate in the survey. These employees include principals, vice-principals, teachers, administrative assistants, educational assistants, librarians, custodians, central office staff (executive team, maintenance, technology, teaching and learning, office administration), and learning support workers (speech and language, counsellors, etc.). The school division also operates 83 transportation routes; however, bus drivers are contracted through outside service providers and are not included in the overall staffing numbers. Casual substitutes (teachers, educational assistants, secretaries, librarians) who are hired to cover employee absenteeism are also not included in the study population due to their inconsistent employment and reduced and sporadic access to internal communications. Individuals eligible to participate in the survey will consist of those identified as "employees" of PRPS.

    b) Survey Data Collection

    Data collected in Part A will be gathered directly from school division employees using the Qualtrics[2] online survey collection tool. To distribute the survey, a list of all school division employees along with employee numbers, work assignments and email addresses will be requested from the Human Resources Department and used with permission of the Head of the public body in accordance with disclosure permissions identified in the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act (Government of Alberta, 2020). This information will be uploaded into the Qualtrics directory. Sending the survey through Qualtrics allows the researcher to personalize the email invitation and anonymize the collected data to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, the Qualtrics software is already approved and paid for by PRPS, so there is no

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[2] Qualtrics is an online research software used for data collection and analysis.

further requirement for the researcher to seek additional permissions or training to use this tool

for data collection. The survey will be deployed over two weeks, with a reminder being sent to

only those who have not completed it after the first week. All responses will be recorded and

stored in Qualtrics until the research is complete, at which time the data will be moved to an

encrypted secure storage location. The researcher aims to collect a minimum of 125 survey

responses, representing approximately 25% of the total employee population.

 To address these instances of possible non-bias responses, the survey will be sent to

employees using a tool they are familiar with (Qualtrics) and has been approved by the school

division email servers. Further, the collection and use of data will be anonymized, and questions

will be developed clearly and concisely based on communication instances that are familiar to all

participants. As an additional measure for measuring non-response bias, those who wish not to

participate will be provided with the opportunity to say why. Several predetermined responses

will be listed, including an option not to disclose a reason. This data may help the researcher

determine if patterns or common themes emerge from non-participants. Further, by allowing the

employee the option to complete the survey in this manner, no additional reminders will be sent

to the employee as their participation will be considered complete.

 Development of the online survey instrument. The survey design was partly informed by

what is currently understood about internal communication practices in PRPS and considering

Creswell's (2009) best practices for evaluating ICS and recommended theory to shape the

questions. As was identified in the literature review, media richness theory (MRT) (Daft &

Lengel, 1986), channel expansion theory (CET) (Carlson & Zmud, 1999), and reception theory

(RT) (Schrøder, 2019) provide theoretical considerations for ICS evaluation while the use of

Likert scale questions, as are used in the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ)

(Downs & Hazen, 1977; Tkalac Verčič, & Špoljarić, 2020), are well suited to this type of

research, allowing respondents to share opinions based on a continuum of perceptions (Merrigan

et al., 2012, p. 73).

      As part of the survey design, employee identifying factors that include first name, last

name, employee number and email address that allow for the survey distribution will not be

linked or recorded as part of the response data or be made available to the researcher. However,

to appropriately categorize the results to gain an understanding of the extent to which certain

demographic factors impact an employee's ICS, details including; staff type (support staff,

teaching certified staff) and staff role (administrative assistant, teacher, principal, etc.) will be

embedded (not entered by participants) in the survey collection to become part of the recorded

data. The use of this information will be outlined to participants in the survey consent form

(Appendix A) to ensure complete transparency about the data collection process. Further, any

potentially identifying information will be aggregated with other results in the final report to

ensure the confidentiality of participants. Upon completing the survey, respondents will be asked

if they are interested in participating in a one-on-one confidential interview (Part B) to further

share their internal communication experiences. A new link, separate from the survey collection

form and not linked to their survey responses, will be included where employees can provide

their name and email address should they choose to participate in Part B of the research process.

      Survey content. The survey will be split into six parts. Section one will ask general

questions to get a sense of the employee's length of employment with the school division, staff

size where the employee works, possible technology restrictions, access to a supervisor, and

insight into the general grapevine activity. Section two focuses on the school division's

communication tools and channels to understand what type of communication an employee

prefers and how they would most like to receive internal information. Section three explores overarching communication themes which look at communication in terms of frequency and engagement. Section four addresses communication satisfaction as directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As it is the predominant method for internal communication amongst Prairie Rose staff, the fifth section will explore communication actions based on email use. The survey will conclude by exploring overall communication considerations where employees can provide open feedback about current practices. It was estimated that the total completion time of the survey will be between 20 and 25 minutes.

Pretesting the survey. Before being distributed, a few employees will be asked to pilot the survey. The testers will be asked to provide feedback on their comprehension of the survey content, overall flow and approximately how long it took to complete. Appropriate changes will be made for length and clarification of wording based on their feedback.

c) Conducting the Survey Research

Survey promotion. Prior to the survey distribution, a promotional digital poster will be emailed to all employees, informing them of the survey's distribution date (Appendix E). School leaders (principals) will also be asked if the poster can be printed and placed in each school location staff room to ensure employees who may not frequently check their email know about the opportunity to provide feedback.

Survey distribution. Using the email distribution function within the Qualtrics directory, the researcher will send an email directly to each employee's inbox. The email will invite the employee to participate in the research study and include other pertinent information related to the survey. This includes; an overview of the research, a reminder that participation and submission of the survey are considered consent on behalf of the participant, an approximate

completion time for the survey, planned use of the data, safeguarding measures to protect

participant confidentiality and a non-identifiable one-time unique link. The survey will remain

open for two weeks. After the first week, a follow-up email will be sent to those who have not

yet responded, reminding them of the survey closing date. This reminder is generated in the

backend of the Qualtrics system and is not based on the researcher's knowledge of who

completed the survey.

4. Part B - Personal Interviews

To gain a deeper understanding of the data captured in the online survey, personal

interviews will be conducted in Part B to gain in-depth knowledge of the organization's

communication dynamics. In addition to learning about employee perceptions, personal

interviews allow the researcher to understand further the opinions, feelings, emotions and

experiences of the individual (Denscombe, 2010) and gauge the information being provided

through non-verbal gestures and expressions that can only be observed during face-to-face

interaction (Downs & Adrian, 2004).

a) Interview Target Population

The population in Part B includes the same 475 non-casual PRPS employees identified in

Part A (Survey Target Population).

b) Interview Sample

When choosing a sample for a research study, it is essential to ensure that "you interview

enough people from sufficient areas of the organization to give a comprehensive view of the

communication" taking place (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 91). To achieve this, the research aims

to interview enough individuals to reach saturation in the data.

c) Interview Data Collection

Participation and consent. At the conclusion of Part A (survey), employees will be asked if they would like to volunteer to participate in a one-on-one interview in Part B. Those who volunteer for an interview will submit their name and email address online. Participants will be chosen based on the researcher's perception of the individual's knowledge of division and local workplace internal communication practices and willingness to be open and transparent with their feedback. Should the submissions of interest exceed the number of interviews planned, participants will be selected on a first-come, first-serve basis, with consideration given to candidates who are expected to fill the knowledge gap held by the other volunteers.

If selected to participate in an interview, the participant will be sent an online consent form (Appendix C) outlining the purpose of the study, the method that will be used to conduct the interviews, information on how to withdraw from the study, how the confidentiality of participants will be protected, how data will be stored, other uses of the report findings and who to contact if they have any questions. Before or during the interview, the interviewee may change their mind about participating in the study and inform the researcher. Should this occur, the employee will be thanked for their willingness to participate, and the interview will be immediately concluded (or cancelled). All email correspondence and participant identifiers will be deleted from the research records.

Development of the interview script. An interview script (Appendix C) was developed to ensure questions were purposefully crafted to get a deeper overall perspective and fill in any potential gaps of information that may be required to answer the primary research question. Developing an interview script allows consistency from one interviewee to the next and ensures each participant is asked questions about the chosen topics (Downs & Adrian, 2004). A

semi-structured, open-ended question design will be used to allow the participants flexibility in their responses. This also allows the researcher to probe further into participants' answers to better understand personal reflections. The interview script will also act as a checklist for the researcher to ensure no steps are missed and appropriate consent is provided.

Content of the interview script. The interview script will focus on ICS perceptions within three key areas. These include; aspects of internal communication in an employee's daily work, district-level communications and personal internal communication preferences. Questions will ask employees to discuss previous internal communication experiences. At the end of the interview, employees will be asked if there is anything else they would like to share regarding internal communication practices that were not previously covered in the earlier questions.

Pretesting the interview script. A pilot of the interview script will be conducted to ensure interviews can be completed in the proposed 30-45 minute time frame and that questions are straightforward and do not result in misleading or apparent responses. As interviews will be conducted following the closure of the survey, additions or revisions to the interview script will be considered based on a preliminary review of the online survey findings.

d) Conducting Interview Research

Following the selection of interview candidates based on the criteria outlined in the *participant and consent* section, the researcher will contact each potential interviewee via email to confirm their participation and inquire about interview schedule preferences. As school division employees are often busy throughout the day and work at various locations across the system, the researcher has chosen to conduct face-to-face video interviews using Zoom[3]. This allows participants the flexibility to participate from any location and outside school hours. Once

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[3] Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service you can use to virtually meet with others - either by video or audio-only or both, all while conducting live chats - and it lets you record those sessions to view later.

the dates and times are determined, a Zoom meeting invitation will be sent to each interviewee

containing an electronic consent form that each participant must complete in advance of their

interview. Upon completion of the consent form, a copy will be returned to the participant for

their reference.

Following Descombe's (2010) guide for conducting interviews, the researcher will begin

each interview by discussing 'easy' things with the participant. This includes reiterating the

purpose of the study and asking the participant if they had any questions related to

confidentiality or the use of the interview data. This will be followed by a series of questions

using a standardized open-ended interview approach. With a standardized approach, participants

are asked identical questions, but the questions are worded so that respondents can provide as

much detailed information as they desire, which allows the researcher to probe with follow-up

questions (Turner, 2010). Primarily, participants will be asked to reflect on internal

communication experiences and describe those experiences in detail. Subsequently, the

researcher will follow up with questions about what happened, why it happened and whether this

type of experience is typical within the organization. This method of inquiry stems from the

Critical Communication Experience Survey[4], which focuses on the perceived behaviours of

individuals, eliminating statements of opinion, generalizations, imprecise evaluations, and

stereotypes (Downs & Adrian, 2004, p. 158).

Upon completion of each interview, the audio/video files will be downloaded from Zoom

and uploaded into the online software SimonSays[5] for transcription. Once transcribed,

participants will be asked to review their interview comments to confirm accuracy. A two-week

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[4] Originally called "critical incident method', the technique focuses on collecting representative samples of observed behaviour by those who experience them (Downs & Adrian, 2004).
[5] Simon Says is an online AI driven transcription platform that transcribes video and audio for export into a text format.

window will be provided in which they can choose to withdraw from the study and/or request changes, deletions or edits to the script. Once the script is approved, the transcript text will then be copied and uploaded into NVivo[6] for organizing and coding. Each participant will be assigned a participant number (i.e. Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to ensure data remains organized. Upon completion of the study, all data will be downloaded from NVivo and moved to an encrypted secure storage location.

5. Addressing Conflict of Interest

As the researcher is also an employee of PRPS and is responsible for district communications, preconceived notions could inevitably be brought into the data analysis process. In recognition of this, bracketing will be conducted to set aside personal beliefs, biases and assumptions. Bracketing is a process that helps the researcher reflect on the data without inserting judgment or personal biases into the findings. As is noted by Tufford and Newman (2010), one method of bracketing involves reflexive journaling where the researcher self-reflects on key aspects, including reasons for undertaking the research, the researcher's place in the power hierarchy of the research, the researcher's belief system, and potential role conflicts with research participants (p. 86). To further address conflict of interest, the researcher will not approach employees to complete the survey or be part of the interview recruitment process. Those who choose to participate in an interview will self-identify through an online form. With only a few interviews required for the study, there is no pressure on individuals to participate as the researcher anticipates sufficient interest. Additionally, at the start of each interview, participants will be reminded that the study is being conducted separately from the researcher's role with the school division, of their ability to review and suggest changes to the transcript of

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[6] NVivo is a data analysis computer software that helps qualitative researchers to organize, analyze and find insights in unstructured or qualitative data like interviews, open-ended survey responses, journal articles, social media and web content.

the interview, and of their right to withdrawal from the study within the two-week timeframe should they change their mind about participating.

6. Coding and Evaluation Methods

All quantifiable survey results will be analyzed within the Qualtrics software using Stats iQ[7] for the survey data. Where open-ended text responses are recorded, the text data will be downloaded from Qualtrics and uploaded into NVivo for coding and organization. The following section outlines the coding process that may be used to categorize the open-ended text survey responses and the interview transcripts.

As is outlined in Johnny Saldaña's (2013) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,* First Cycle coding is done to identify overarching themes from the data. Coding the qualitative data is the process of linking data to an idea and all subsequent data about that same idea (p. 6) This includes applying descriptive coding (summary of ideas) and In Vivo coding (participant words) to the text. In some instances, simultaneous coding of two or more codes may be applied to a section of text to identify relationships between dominant themes and ensure clarification (p. 182).

For the Second Cycle, the First Cycle codes are reviewed and re-coded into common themes and concepts. This includes added second-order tags to detail and enrich the entry (p. 77). For example, data coded under 'technology challenges' could be further redefined as connectivity issues, lack of professional development, restricted access, etc. In the Second Cycle, magnitude coding (sentiment and word frequency) may also be applied to the text. This allows the researcher to compare common themes and sentiment data in the survey results to the interview texts.

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[7] Stats iQ is part of the Qualtrics online software that performs statistical analysis of quantitative datasets.

Throughout the coding process, an analytic memo will be kept to reflect and write about the study's research question, code choices, emergent patterns, possible links and connections amongst codes, problems with the study and possible future directions for research (p. 47).

7. Triangulation

By choosing a mixed-methods approach for the study to collect similar information independently, the researcher plans to achieve triangulation of the results. Triangulation requires multiple data sources, data settings, data collection strategies, and data analytics strategies (Merrigan et al., 2012). Combining a survey strategy of the entire PRPS organization with personal interviews from a few employees may help detect where similarities in the data occur from two different directions and identify areas where commonalities were expected but not found.

8. Validity and Reliability

As case studies aim to provide a "holistic understanding of a topic by understanding it as one part of a dynamic setting" (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 144), the results cannot be generalized to a broader population. However, validity and reliability should occur within the PRPS case study. For validity to occur, the measuring instruments used must be reliable and reproducible in another instance, whereas reliability requires the measuring device to be consistent and accurate (p. 87). The following strategies have been included as part of the research design to obtain validity and reliability of the results:

- Data gathering instruments (survey and interview script) will be pretested for relevancy and clarification before use.

- A mixed-methods approach was chosen as it uses more than one collection method to gather similar yet independent data.

- All interview participants will be provided with the opportunity to review the transcriptions to ensure accuracy.

- The researcher acknowledges the possibility of researcher bias and will try to address this through the process of journaling and self-reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process.

9. Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the research for this study, ethics approval was required by the University of Alberta Ethics Board (REB) and consent from PRPS. As part of the REB application, details related to participants' recruitment, protection and privacy, data storage and security, and use of the research findings were required. Having worked as a long-time employee of PRPS as the Director of Communications, it was also necessary for the researcher to clearly define that the study was being conducted in partial fulfillment of the Masters in Communication and Technology degree and was completely separate from her regular work duties at PRPS. This clarification is included in all communication to be shared with employees regarding participation in the study to ensure there is no unnecessary pressure or sense of obligation to participate.

10. Summary of the Methods

This section outlined the proposed methods that will be used for collecting data to answer the research question aimed at understanding the extent employees working for a rural K-12 school division are satisfied with the internal communication they receive. This included the rationale for choosing a case study using a mixed-methods research approach to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Additionally, details were provided regarding ethical considerations, participant recruitment, data analysis, and measures that will be taken to achieve

triangulation and validity in the data collection. In the following sections, a summary of the results and research outcomes will be presented, along with a discussion of the findings as compared to previous internal communication satisfaction literature.

IV. Research Findings

This chapter will be presented in two sections. First, the survey results will be shared from the online data collection occurring between April 26, 2022, and May 13, 2022. The second section will share key findings from one-on-one interviews with Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS) employees. The interviews took place the week following the closing of the survey collection with three employees who volunteered to participate after completing the survey. Interview data collection was collected within a one-week timeframe. The purpose of this research was to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are employees satisfied, or not, with the communication they receive while working for a rural K-12 school division?

RQ2: To what extent does an employee's job assignment impact internal communication satisfaction (ICS)?

RQ3: All things being equal, what criteria do employees identify as most important when interacting with and acting upon the internal information they receive?

1. Survey Findings

Two days before the survey distribution, each school leader (principal) was asked to print off a promotional poster and place it in their staff room to inform employees of the upcoming research survey and that all staff were eligible to participate. The survey was then emailed to all PRPS employees through Qualtrics using company email addresses that were previously uploaded into the school division's online Qualtrics Directory. A reminder email was sent out to only those who had not completed the survey one week after the initial survey was distributed. Once the survey closed, all data, including closed and open response questions, were analyzed and evaluated within the Qualtrics Reports and Stats iQ database. Of the 475 employees eligible

to participate, 110 responses were recorded, with ten respondents choosing not to participate in the study and opting out after the survey consent section. Responses from the remaining 100 participants are included in the analysis that follows. The findings represent a response rate of 21%.

a) Overview of Prairie Rose Public Schools Employees

To better understand the survey population, participants were asked how many years they have worked for the school division, the size of the location, and whether they primarily work at one location or travel frequently as part of their job assignment.

The majority of respondents are long-time PRPS employees (Figure 1) who have worked for the school division for eight years or more (62%).
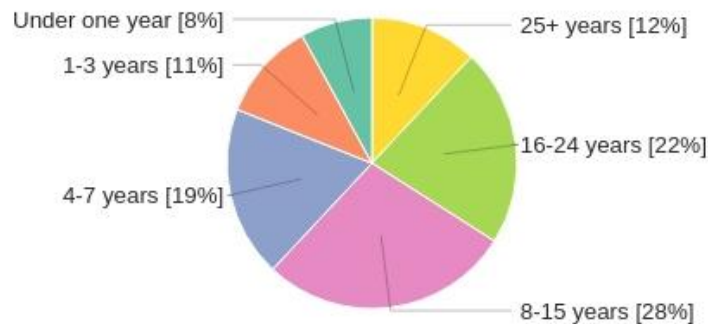
Figure 1: Length of time working as a PRPS employee (n=100).

For staff size, participants were given five options to choose from, ranging from one to 35 or more employees. The categories were then bucketed into two groups (Table 3); smaller staff size (25%) and larger staff size (18%).

1-5 employees	6-15 employees	16-22 employees	23-35 employees	36+ employees
Bucketed Group Smaller Staff Size (0-22 employees)			Bucketed Group Larger Staff Size (26-35+ employees)	
Eligible	Survey		Eligible	Survey

Participants 211	Participation 52 = 24.6%	Participants 264	Participation 48 = 18%

Table 3: Employee participation by staff size grouping.

As some K-12 staff regularly travel as part of their work, respondents were asked to

identify how much of their work was spent at their designated work location. This was

self-determined by each individual. Of the 94 participants who responded to this question, 88%

indicated they primarily work only at their assigned location, 5% occasionally travel as part of

their work duties, and 6% travel daily as part of their job.

Formal administrative classification categorization was embedded and not asked of

participants. Each group was bucketed into one of four categories, as represented in Table 4, to

simplify the data reporting process.

School-Based Support Staff	Division Office Support Staff	School Administrators	Certified Teachers
● Administrative Assistant ● Custodian ● Educational Assistant ● Librarian	● Division Office Maintenance ● Division Office Support ● Division Office Students ● Division Office Technology ● Division Office Administration	● Principals ● Vice-Principals ● Colony Principals	● Teacher Instruction

Table 4: Staff role groupings by staff type.

Figure 2 indicates that the largest survey participant groups included school-based support staff

and certified teachers.
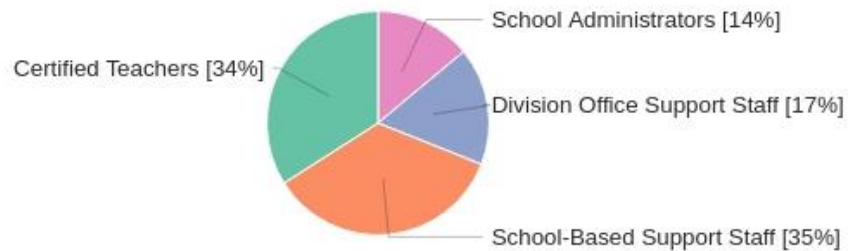
Figure 2: Employee participation by staff role (n=100).

b) Localized Communication Satisfaction

The Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS) staff were asked to identify their level of satisfaction with the internal communication climate at their designated work location. This consisted of answering seven questions using a 5-point modified Likert scale about the workplace communication environment and access to information directly impacting their work. Figure 3 presents the findings, sorted by the overall average response (mean), with those averaging the highest satisfaction at the top and lowest at the bottom.
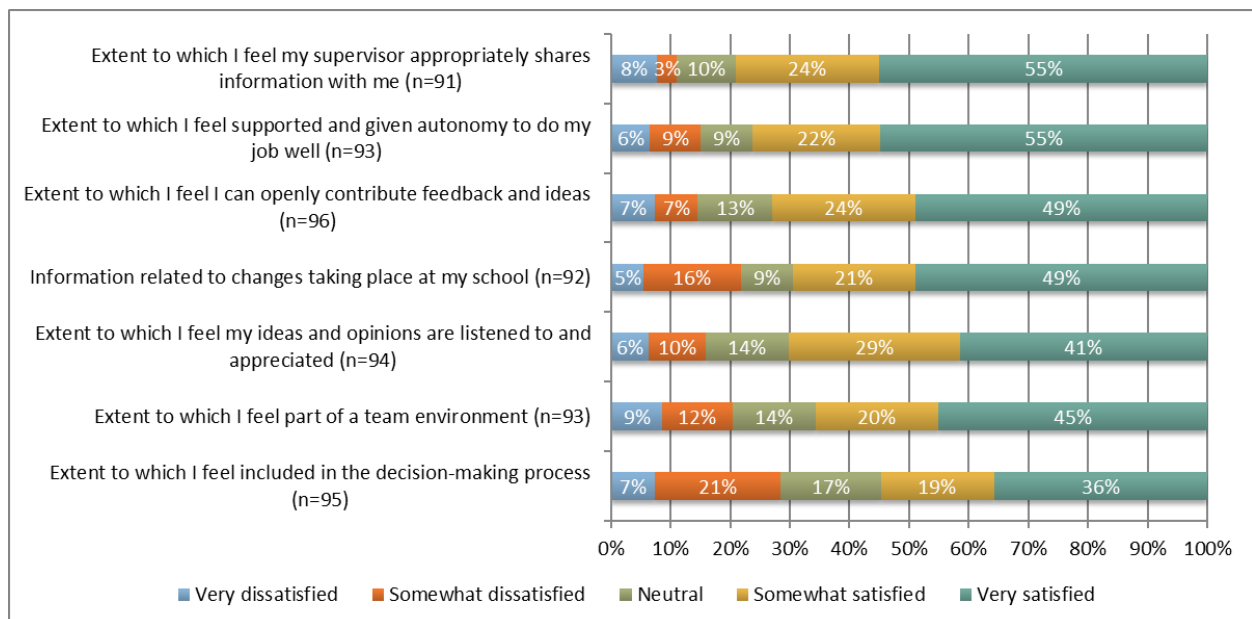
Figure 3: Employee communication satisfaction within their designated work environment.

Over 50% of participants indicated they are 'very satisfied' to 'somewhat satisfied' with the communication and support they receive within their local school location within all the seven categories presented. Using a 5-point scale with five (5) representing very satisfied and one (1) very dissatisfied, the two highest scores were recorded for the "extent to which I feel my supervisor appropriately shares information with me" and the "extent to which I feel supported and given autonomy to do my job well." The lowest score was recorded for the "extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process."

When asked who employees were most likely to approach to get information or clarification about work-related matters, respondents were asked to rate the provided options on a sliding scale, with 0 representing 'not at all' and 100 being the 'most likely.' As is depicted in Table 5, most said they would ask a coworker or direct supervisor. A contact at division office and 'other' were the least likely to be asked. The most commonly reported response in the 'other' category was the learning-instructional coach.

Field	Average Response Rating (0-100)	Responses
My direct supervisor	49.3	94
A coworker	52.4	90
Contact at division office	25.5	76
Other	25.8	19

Table 5: Who PRPS employees approach most often to get clarification about work-related matters.

While the results were overall quite positive, several comments were shared by respondents regarding internal communication practices in their local work environment along with suggestions for improvement:

- There needs to be better communication from Administration. Tired of things being secretive and only on a need-to-know basis. Our opinions are not valued.
- Things are going well, and our school is running quite smoothly.

- My administration team does not look for staff input when it comes time to discuss ideas and/or changes. My administration team tells us what will be happening instead of seeking input from staff members. I would like to have my input/suggestions listened to.
- Communication has been a real problem at my school. Even the information I require to do my job effectively is not always provided and causes a lot of extra work and problems.

c) Division Level Communication Satisfaction

To evaluate information employees receive from the district and their feelings regarding the overall organizational communication environment, similar 5-point modified Likert questions were asked with slight modifications to the wording to represent division-level communications practices appropriately.
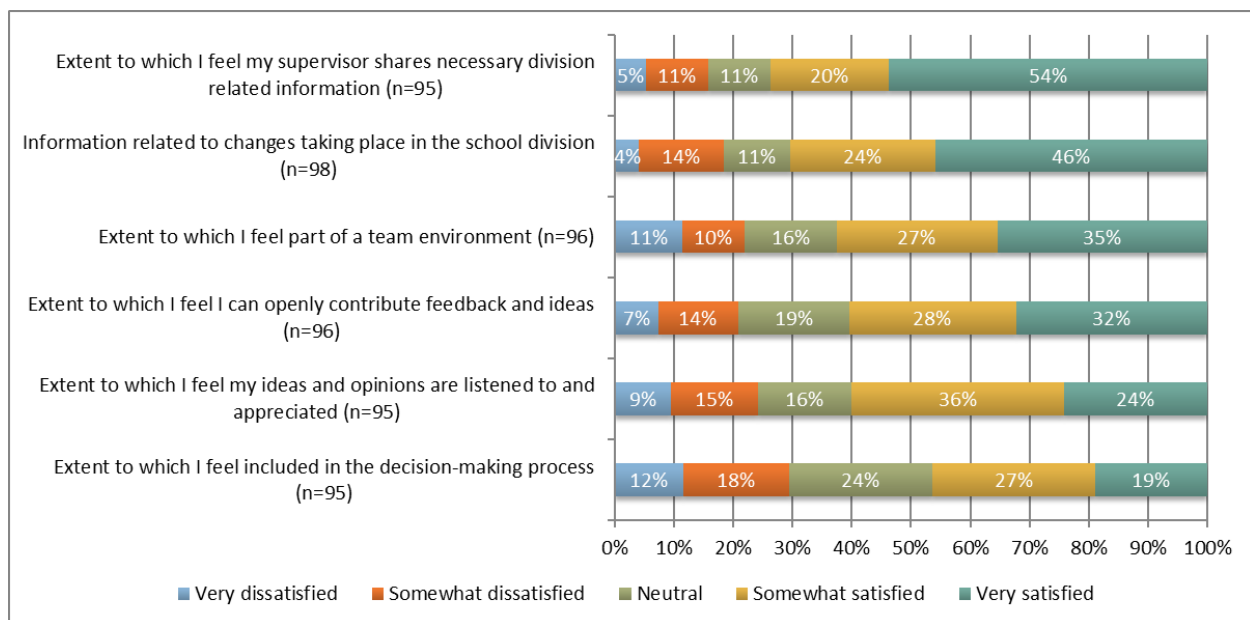
Figure 4: Employee communication satisfaction as it relates to the school division as a whole.

While the results were lower than those at the localized level, as is noted in Figure 4, employee satisfaction primarily fell into the 'very satisfied' and 'somewhat satisfied' categories, with the highest scores recorded for the "extent to which I receive information related to changes taking place in the school division." Again, just as it was at the localized level, the lowest score was recorded for the "extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process." To

determine if certain types of staff members were less likely to be satisfied with how much they felt included in the decision-making process at the division level, the employee staff role groups were analyzed against the "extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process" variable.
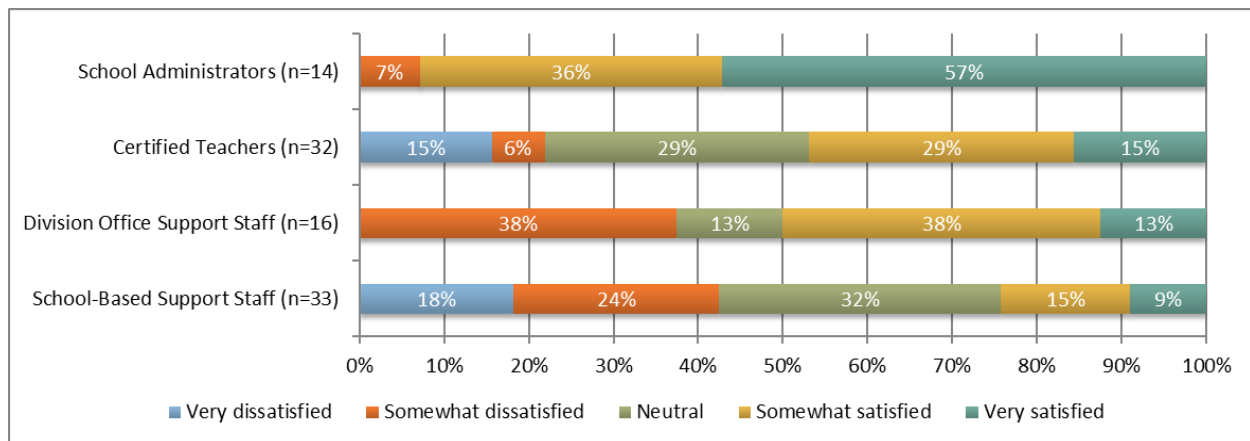
Figure 5: The extent employees feel included in the decision-making process at the division level based on staff role category. A Chi-Squared (34.7) test reveals p < .05.

A Chi-Squared test was performed. Figure 5 reveals that only 24% of school-based support staff employees reported feeling 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' with their inclusion in decision-related matters. This compares to 93% of school administrators. While division office support and certified teachers reported lower satisfaction at the 'very satisfied' level, almost half of both groups reported feeling at least 'somewhat satisfied' overall.

Several employees commented on how they believe their communication satisfaction could be improved when receiving information related to the school division:

- Doesn't need to be a top-down process, so the workers are sitting waiting for a filter-down communication process.
- Utilize employees for the skill set they can bring to the table instead of always relying on past practices - understand what each employee's skill set is and how can be beneficial in discussions and decision-making for the division.
- The head office seems a little disconnected from the rest of us. Feels like they make a decision without talking to others.
- It has been improving slowly.
- Stop deciding what staff "need" to know and just share it all with us.

Employees were also asked about their communication satisfaction related to frequency, accuracy, and informal grapevine information sharing across the district. Most who responded indicated they were either 'very satisfied' or 'somewhat satisfied' in each category, as is represented in Figure 6.
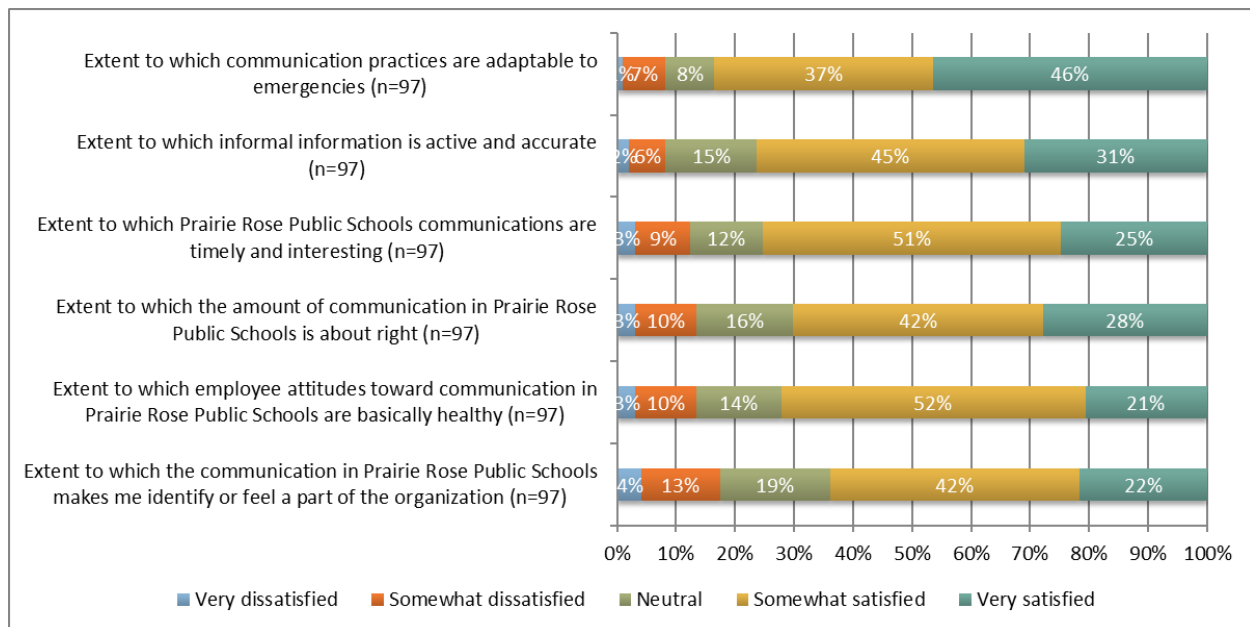
Figure 6: Employee satisfaction regarding timing, accuracy, attitudes and the amount of communication shared across the organization.

As a final question related to Prairie Rose Public Schools' division communication practices, employees were asked to consider how much of the information shared made them feel connected, informed and engaged in current events and initiatives. 31% said they were 'very satisfied,' 35% indicated they were 'somewhat satisfied,' 16% felt 'neutral,' and the remaining 16% identified as 'somewhat dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied.' Of the comments provided regarding how overall communication could be improved, several employees referred to the organization's use of social media, which received positive and negative feedback.

● It is easier to find internal information on social media than it is through any internal capacity.
● I would appreciate more direct information being shared from leaders in a timely fashion - before it hits social media for example.

- I do get frustrated with colleagues who make no/little effort to stay informed and then complain about not knowing things. Insta/Facebook is where lots of staff see things. That is the best place to promote/advocate and paint a positive picture of the wide variety of learning that is happening in PRPS.

d) COVID-19 Communication Considerations

With the research being conducted at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, employees were asked to evaluate how they felt the school division handled internal communication throughout the pandemic and if they thought communications had improved or declined over the past two years.
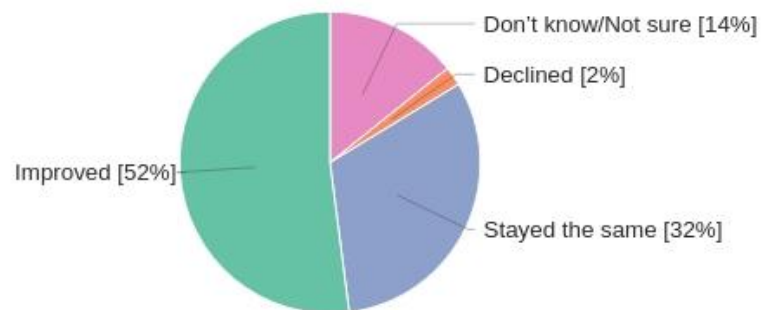
Figure 7: Perceptions of PRPS COVID-19 internal communication efforts (n=98).

As Figure 7 shows, 52% of respondents said that internal communication had improved, while 31.6% believed it had stayed the same. Only 2% indicated it had declined, while 14.3% said they were unsure. Similarly, employee satisfaction related to handling internal communication during the pandemic was relatively high, as presented in Figure 8.
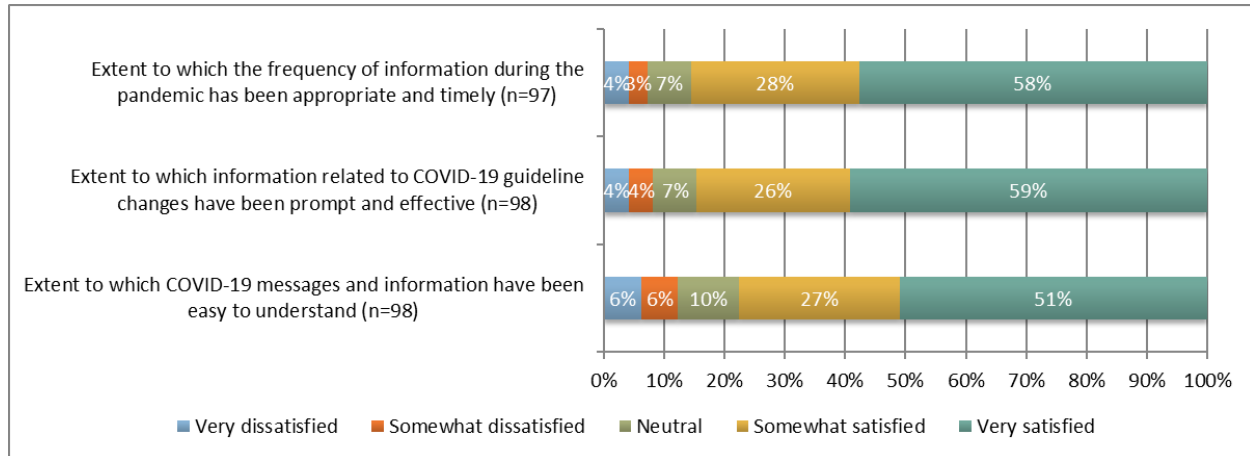
Figure 8: Employee satisfaction related to the handling of internal communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

e) Communication Channels/Methods

Data collection related to the communication channels used by PRPS employees was split into four categories (Table 6), with the most common tools used in the school division categorized into each section.

Instant/Direct Messaging	Face-to-Face Interactions	Video Calls	Informal Information Sharing
• Email • Phone Calls • Text Messages • Teams Chat messaging	• Openly contribute at staff meetings • Initiate one-on-one conversations with a supervisor • Approaching a co-worker to get clarification about work-related matters	• Google Meets • Zoom meetings • Microsoft Teams meetings • Videoconferencing (VC)[8]	• PRPS Website • PRPS Facebook • PRPS Twitter • PRPS Instagram

Table 6: PRPS Internal communication channels/methods by category.

Within each of the four categories, employees rated their use of communication channels based on their ability to easily navigate the channel/method. This was done using a sliding scale from

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[8] PRPS uses Polycom videoconferencing software to connect students and teachers to other classrooms across the school division. While previously used to connect to outside locations, it is now primarily used for instructional purposes.

0-100, with 100 representing full comfort and ease of navigation. Employees were then asked to indicate their preference for using each channel.

i. Instant/Direct Messaging (technology)

For instant/direct messaging, as is shown in Table 7, PRPS employees found that equally text messages, email and phone calls were the easiest to navigate, with Teams Chat Messaging being the least familiar.

Instant/Direct Messaging (technology): I can navigate and use the channel/method with ease.		
Field	*Ease of Use Rating by Average (0=Difficult, 100=Easy)*	*Responses*
Text messages	94.9	91
Email	92.7	95
Phone calls	91.2	92
Teams Chat messaging	68.9	83

Table 7: Instant/direct messaging (technology) preferences based on an employee's ease of navigating the channel/method.

When asked which instant/direct messaging tool respondents preferred to ensure they receive information in a timely manner (Figure 9), email (90.8%) was the top choice. Teams Chat messaging (34.7%) was the channel/method most unfamiliar to those who participated.
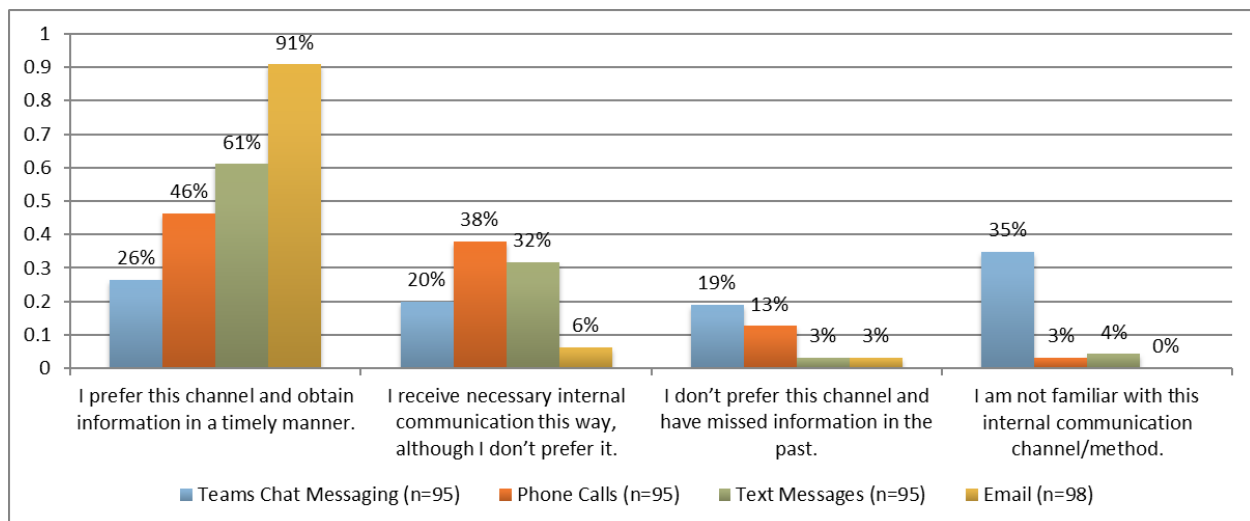
Figure 9: Employee preferences for instant/direct messaging (technology) channels/methods.

ii. Personal Face-to-Face Interactions

As shown in Table 8, PRPS employees found that all face-to-face methods were equally effective.

Personal Face-to-Face Interactions: I can navigate and use the channel/method with ease.		
Field	*Ease of Use Rating by Average (0=Difficult, 100=Easy)*	*Responses*
Approach a coworker to get clarification about work-related matters	88.5	95
Initiate one-on-one conversations with a coworker	86.7	96
Openly contribute at staff meetings	80.8	91

Table 8: Personal face-to-face messaging preferences based on an employee's ease of navigating the channel/method.

In terms of overall preference between the three face-to-face communication methods provided, all were identified to be almost equally important by employees (Figure 10). However, of the three face-to-face options, the staff meetings category had the largest percentage that indicated that they didn't prefer communication via this method and had missed information in the past.
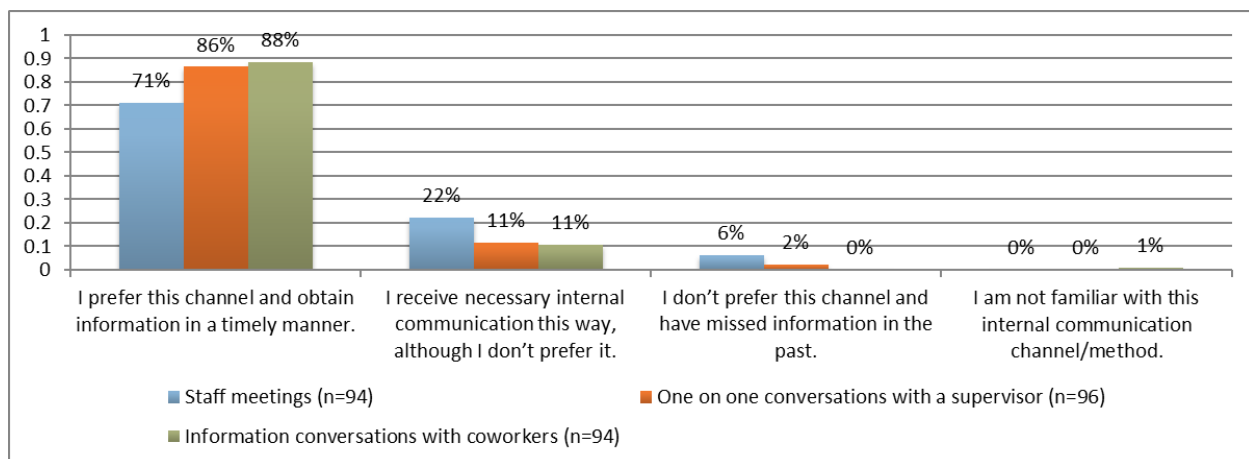
Figure 10: Employee preferences for personal face-to-face communication channels/methods.

iii. Video Calls

For video calls, staff found Zoom and Google Meets to be the easiest to navigate in contrast to Microsoft Teams video and the school division's Polycom video conferencing (VC) equipment. Table 9 illustrates the results. It should be noted that the number of responses for these two methods was lower than for Google Meets and Zoom.

Video Calls: I can navigate and use the channel/method with ease.		
Field	*Ease of Use Rating by Average (0=Difficult, 100=Easy)*	*Responses*
Zoom meetings	85.9	89
Google Meets	85.7	93
Microsoft Teams video	66.0	72
Video conferencing (VC)	64.7	60

Table 9: Video call preferences based on an employee's ease of navigating the channel/method.

When asked which video call channels/methods employees most prefer when gaining timely access to information, Google Meets (50.5%) and Zoom (48%) received the highest scores (Figure 11). The options employees identified as the most unfamiliar with included video conferencing (45.2%) and Microsoft Teams (36.8%).
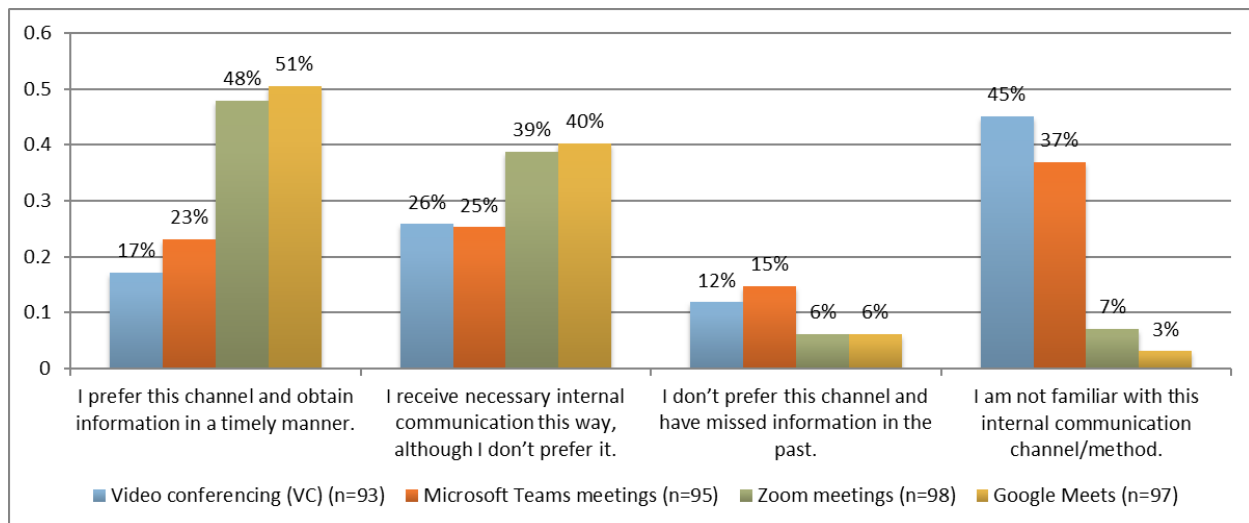
Figure 11: Employee preferences for video call communication channels/methods.

iv. Indirect Information Sharing

Responses were mixed regarding ease of use for indirect information sharing. The most popular was the use of the PRPS website and PRPS Facebook accounts. As Table 10 indicates, both the school division's Twitter and Instagram accounts were less favoured. This is also reflected in the lower number of responses for these two communication types.

Informal Information Sharing: I can navigate and use the channel/method with ease.		
Field	*Ease of Use Rating by Average (0=Difficult, 100=Easy)*	*Responses*
PRPS Website	80.7	95
PRPS Facebook	79.9	76
PRPS Twitter	61.8	56
PRPS Instagram	63.5	48

Table 10: Indirect information sharing preferences based on an employee's ease of navigating the channel/method.

The indirect sharing channel preferences varied to a greater degree, with half of the respondents indicating a preference for the PRPS website (51%), followed by the PRPS Facebook (33.7%) (Figure 12). The indirect messaging tools employees were most unfamiliar with included PRPS Instagram (42.2%) and PRPS Twitter (37%).
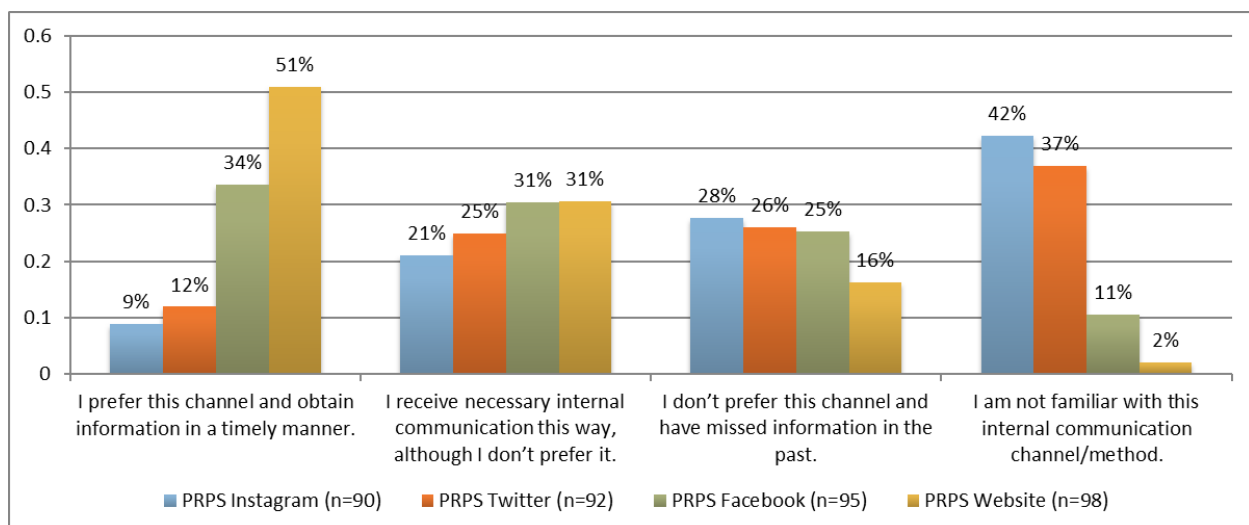
Figure 12: Employee preferences for indirect information communication channels/methods.

v. Channel Preferences by Staff Role

As noted in the channel/method findings, many employees indicated unfamiliarity with using Microsoft Teams as a communication channel for instant/direct messaging or video calls. To determine if this was specific to a particular employee group, two Chi-Squared tests were conducted. The first explored the staff group variable against the preference for using Microsoft Teams for instant/direct messaging (Chi-Squared result 33.7). The second took the same staff group variable and ran it against the preference for using Microsoft Teams for video calls (Chi-Squared result 22.5). Both tests turned up a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$). In both instances, the certified teacher group and the school administrator group were found to be the most unfamiliar with using Teams for either chat or video use, while division office support staff and school-based support staff indicated a strong preference for using Microsoft Teams over other communication methods (Table 11).

Staff Role Group	Teams Chat Messaging	Teams Video Calls
Certified Teachers	4.0%	13.6%
School Administrators	8.0%	13.6%
Division Office Support Staff	32.0%	27.3%
School-Based Support Staff	56.0%	45.5%

Table 11: Microsoft Teams preferences by staff group.

One respondent commented on the use of Microsoft Teams in the school division:

> Central Office employees assume that folks in the district know how to use Teams... most school staff do not know Teams, especially since there has been ZERO training on Teams for general staff.

vi. Additional Training to Increase Satisfaction

As a follow-up, respondents were asked to identify the methods/channels in which they felt additional training could lead to greater satisfaction or preference with its use. The top three choices were Microsoft Teams, the PRPS website, followed by social media (Figure 13).
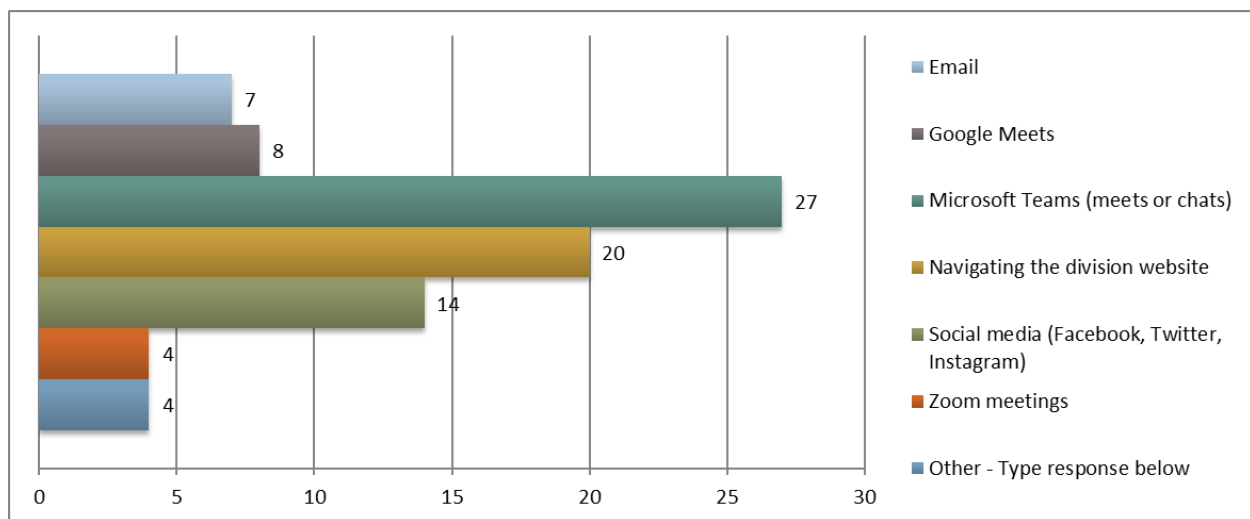
Figure 13: The channels/methods identified by employees where increased training could lead to greater satisfaction with its use (n=49).

The 'Other' response category did not warrant any further suggestions for training. Additional comments related to the use of channels included the following:

- Too many methods of communication. Now I am checking text messages, emails, AND Teams messages.
- Sometimes communication isn't about the "tool". Communication and the quality are greatly impacted by the sender. This includes clarity, timeliness, professionalism, interest... (eg. some staff are great at responding via any tool, others are less reliable).
- For all staff to have access to be able to check messages or emails. Cell phones are not always allowed support staff do not have Chromebooks to access.

f) Preferred Types of Internal Communication

To find out what types of information employees consider the most useful as it pertains to their job, a list of the most common types of communication was provided, and respondents were asked to identify what they deemed 'very useful,' 'somewhat useful,' 'not very useful.'
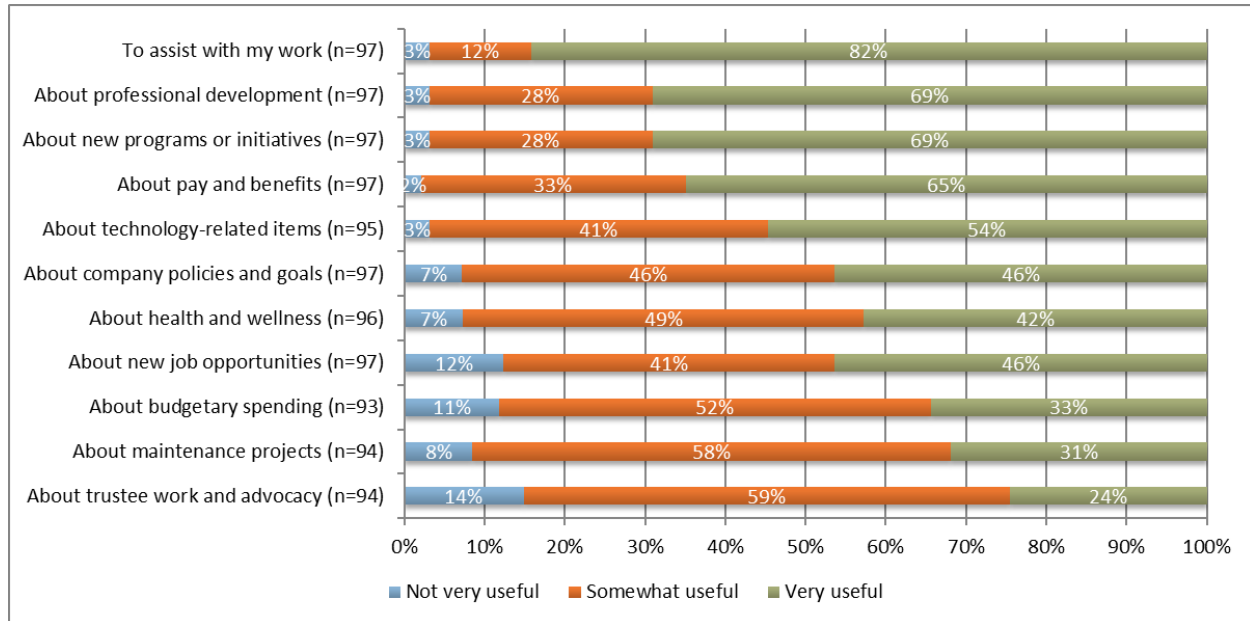
Figure 14: Types of internal communications employees deem most useful as it pertains to their work.

As Figure 14 illustrates, the top four types of internal communication included information "to assist with my work" (82.5%), information "about professional development and upgrading opportunities" (69.1%), information "about new programs or initiatives" (69.1%), and information "about pay and benefits" (64.9%). Even categories where employees indicated a lower 'very useful' result was still overwhelmingly considered beneficial to almost all employees.

i. Preferred Channel Distribution by Information Type

To understand which internal communication channel/method employees most preferred for sharing different types of information, respondents were asked to check off their preferences from the list provided (see Figure 14). Respondents could choose as many channels/methods they deemed best for sharing each type of information. The categories included direct messaging (phone calls, text, chat), indirect information sharing (website, social media), indirect messaging (email), face-to-face interactions (staff meetings, one on one conversations), or video calls (Meets, Teams, Zoom). Overwhelmingly respondents said they prefer indirect messaging (email)

for sharing all types of information in each category, as is illustrated in Figures 15-25. However, it should be noted that some categories identified high response rates (more than 30 recorded responses) when sharing certain types of information. Employees indicated a preference for direct messaging (phone calls, text, chat messaging) and personal face-to-face interactions (staff meetings, one-on-one conversations) when receiving "information to assist with their work" and "about new programs or initiatives." Indirect information sharing (website, social media) was noted to be an acceptable method when communicating "about new job opportunities" and "trustee work and advocacy." Interestingly, the use of video calls (Meets, Teams, Zoom) was chosen as the least preferred method of communication, with only one of the categories (information to assist with my work) indicating a notable level of support for this method of information sharing.
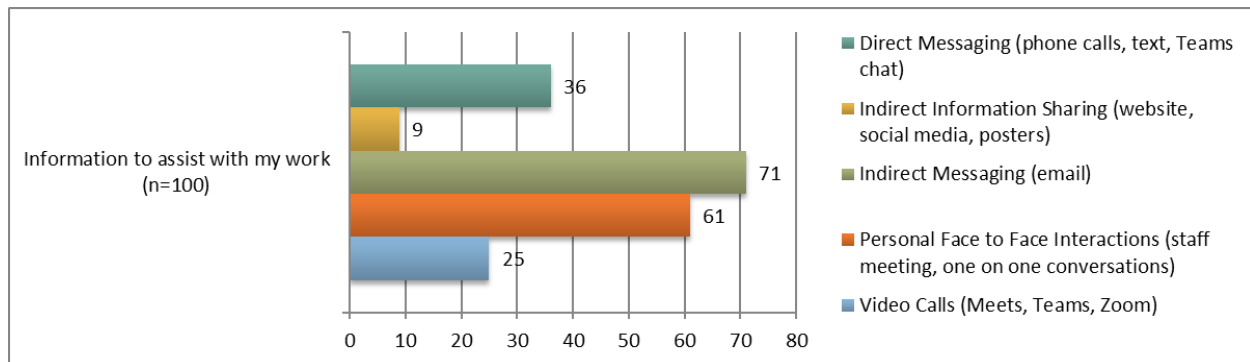
Figure 15: Employee preferences for information to assist with my work.
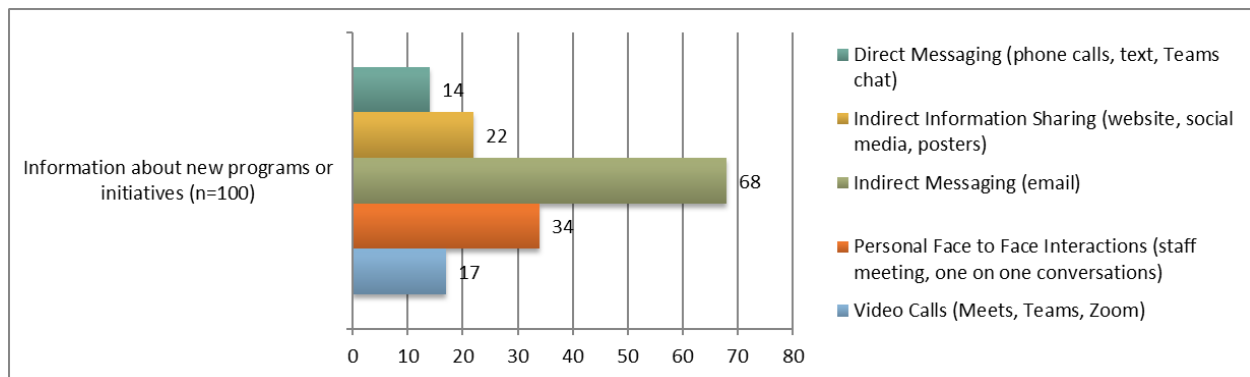
Figure 16: Employee preferences for information about new programs and initiatives.
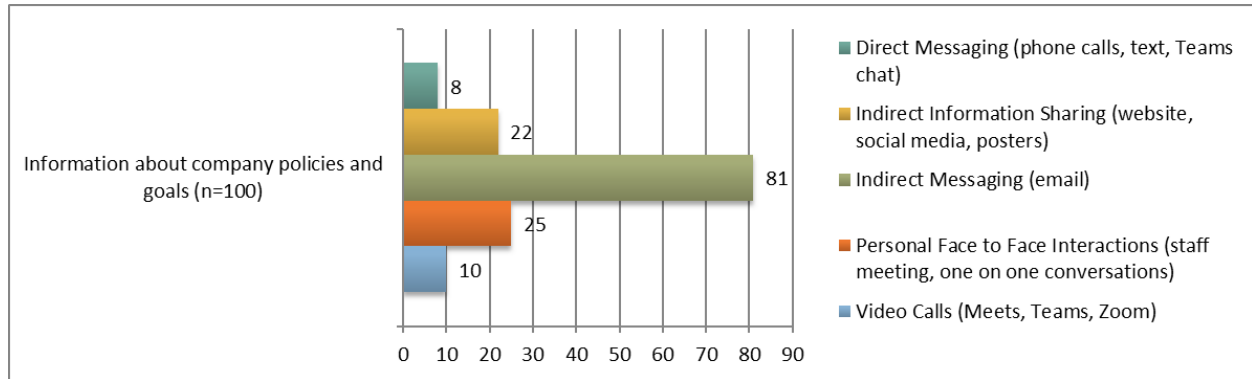
Figure 17: Employee preferences for information about company policies and goals.
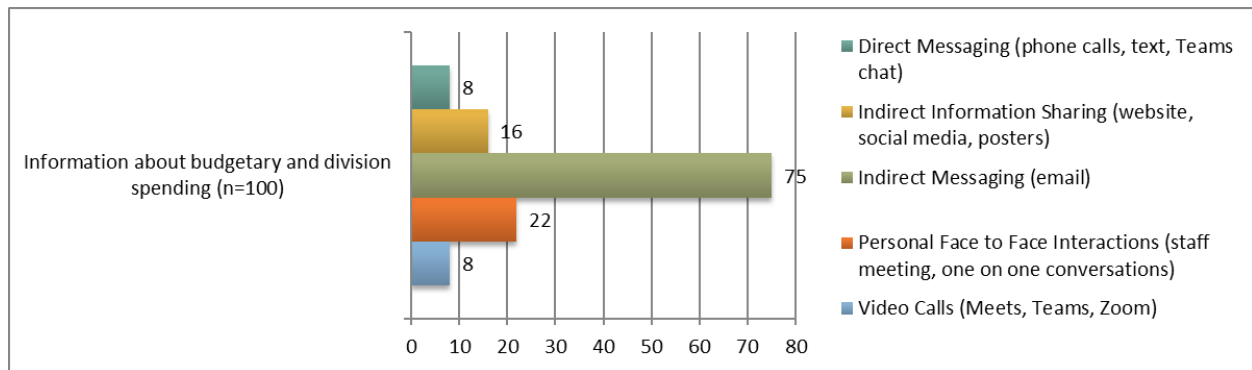
Figure 18: Employee preferences for information about budgetary and division spending.
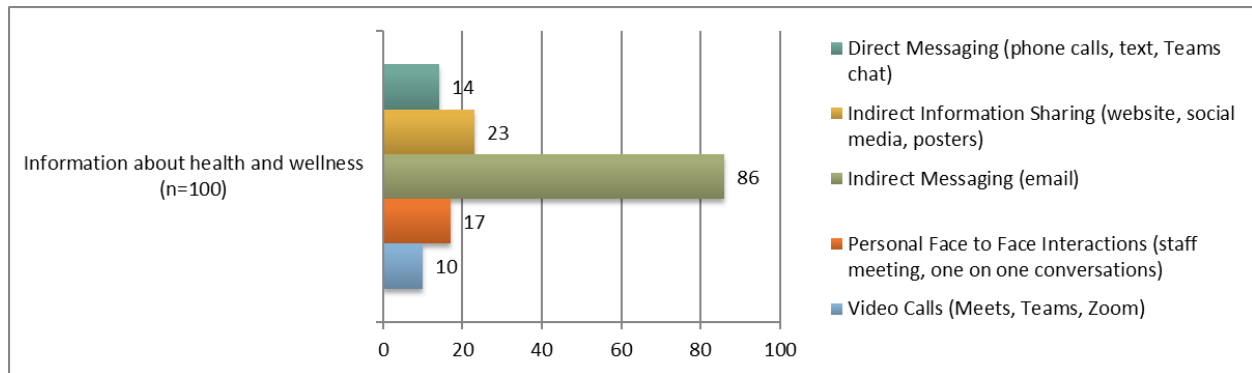
Figure 19: Employee preferences for information about health and wellness.
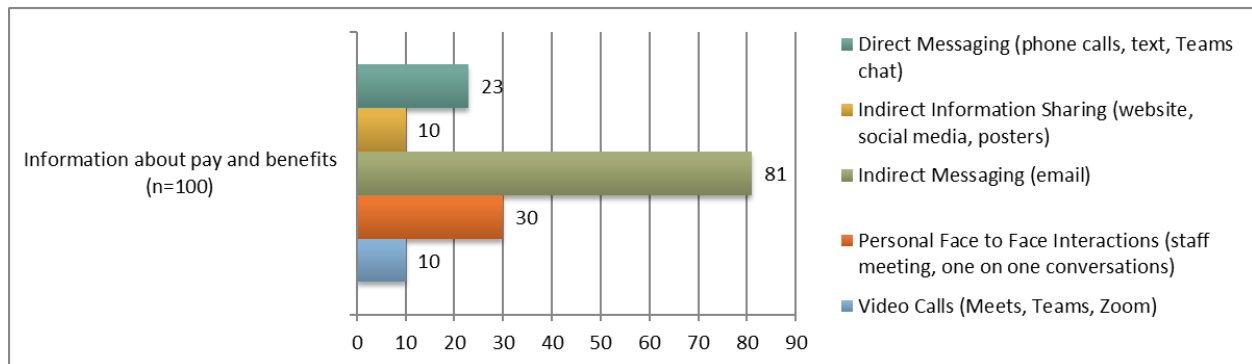
Figure 20: Employee preferences for information about pay and benefits.
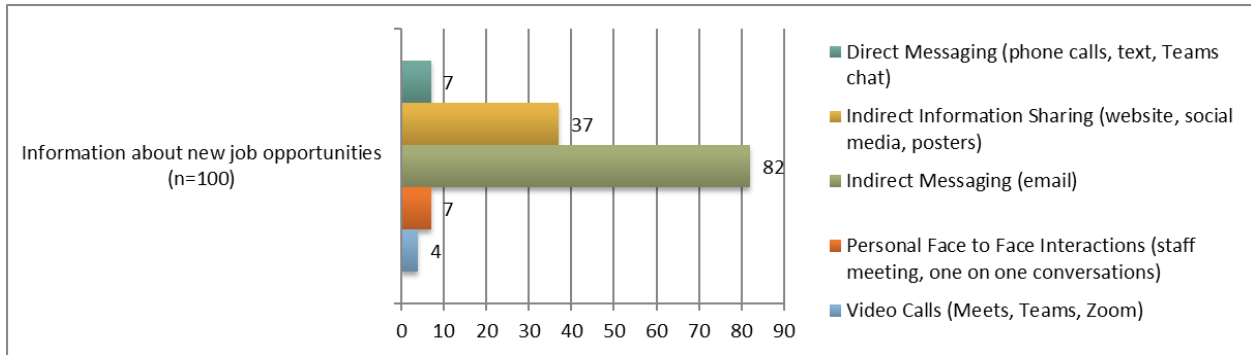
Figure 21: Employee preferences for information about new job opportunities.
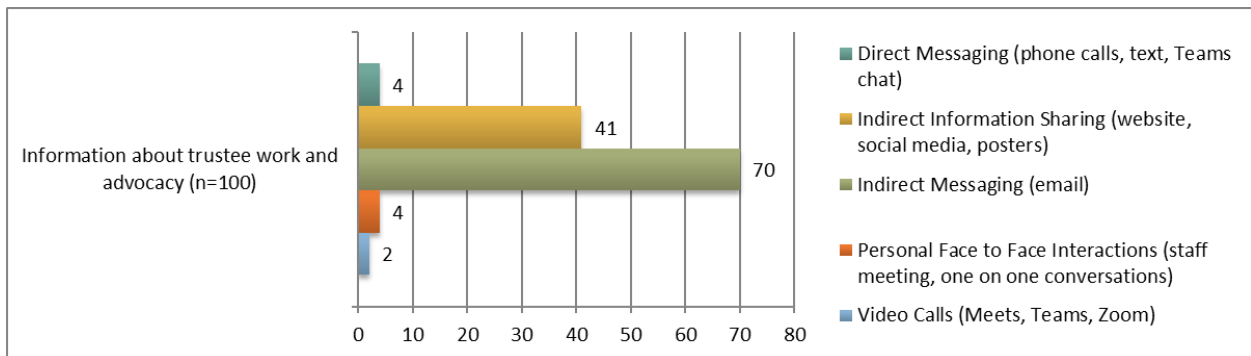
Figure 22: Employee preferences for information about trustee work and advocacy.
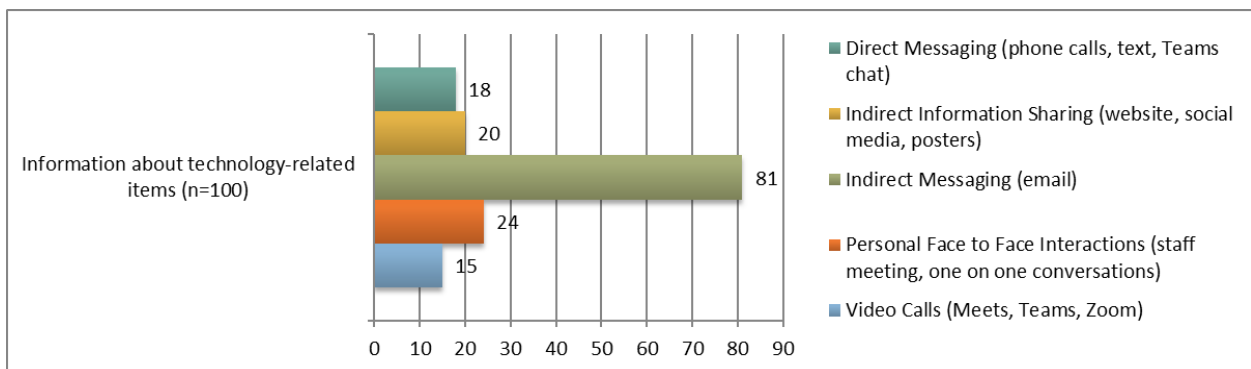
Figure 23: Employee preferences for information about technology-related items.
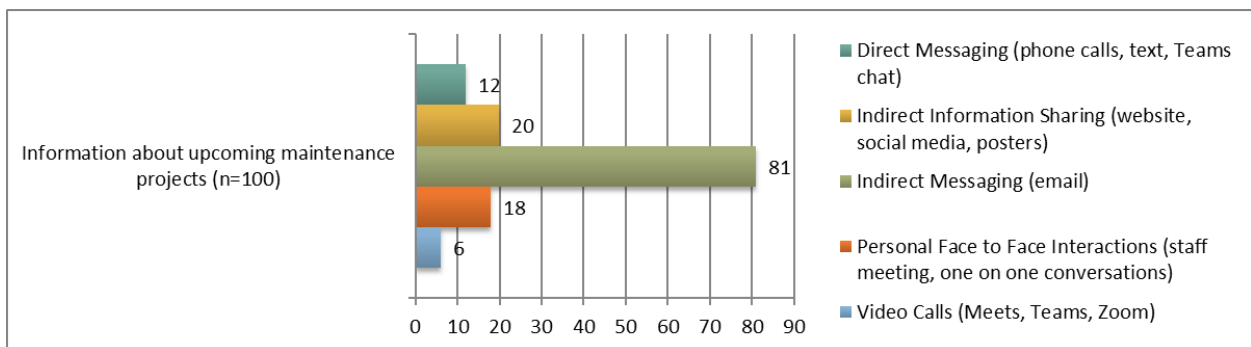
Figure 24: Employee preferences for information about upcoming maintenance projects.
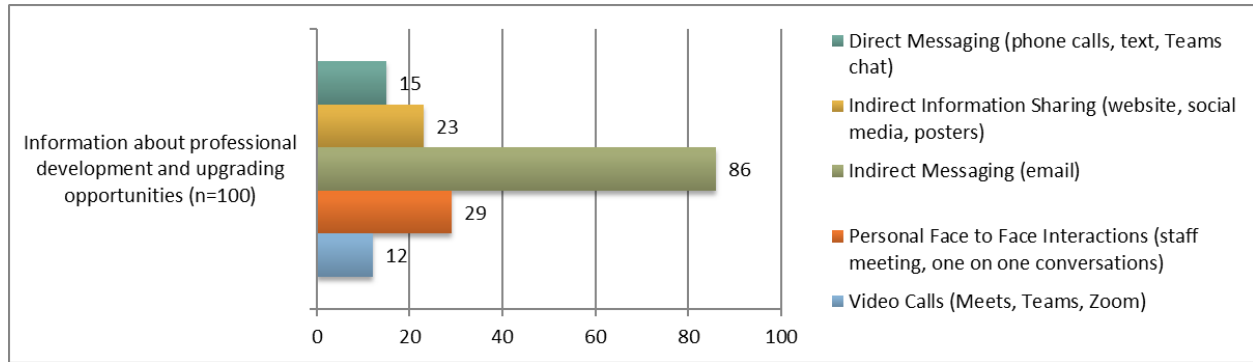
Figure 25: Employee preferences for information about professional development and upgrading opportunities.

g) Use of Email

Questions were developed to learn about staff access to email during the day, how many emails they realistically read, what criteria employees look for when choosing to read an email, and if they have any additional thoughts regarding the use of email as the primary dissemination channel for division-wide news and information.

i. Access to Email During the Workday

Just over half of the respondents (Figure 26) indicated that they have full access to email and online information throughout their workday, while approximately a quarter of employees indicated that they have access three to five times during the day.
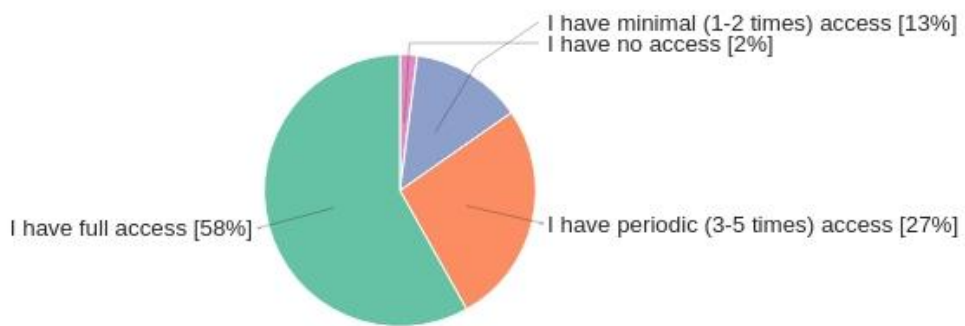
Figure 26: Employee access to email during the workday (n=98).

ii. Amount of Email Read

Respondents were asked to share how many of the emails they received that they actually read. As is displayed in Figure 27, while just under half (45.9%) indicated that they read 100% of their email, 41.8% shared that they read about 75% of what is sent to them.
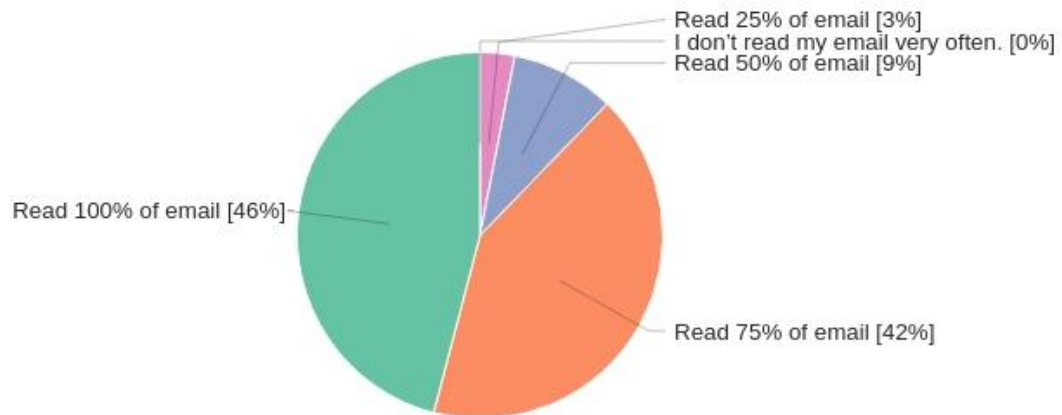
Figure 27: Percentage of email read by PRPS employees (n=98).

iii. Email Criteria and Action

To understand the top criteria for employees when determining whether they choose to read an email, respondents were asked to identify three things they considered most important. Top responses included (Figure 28); who sent the email, a clear and well-defined subject line and the email content.
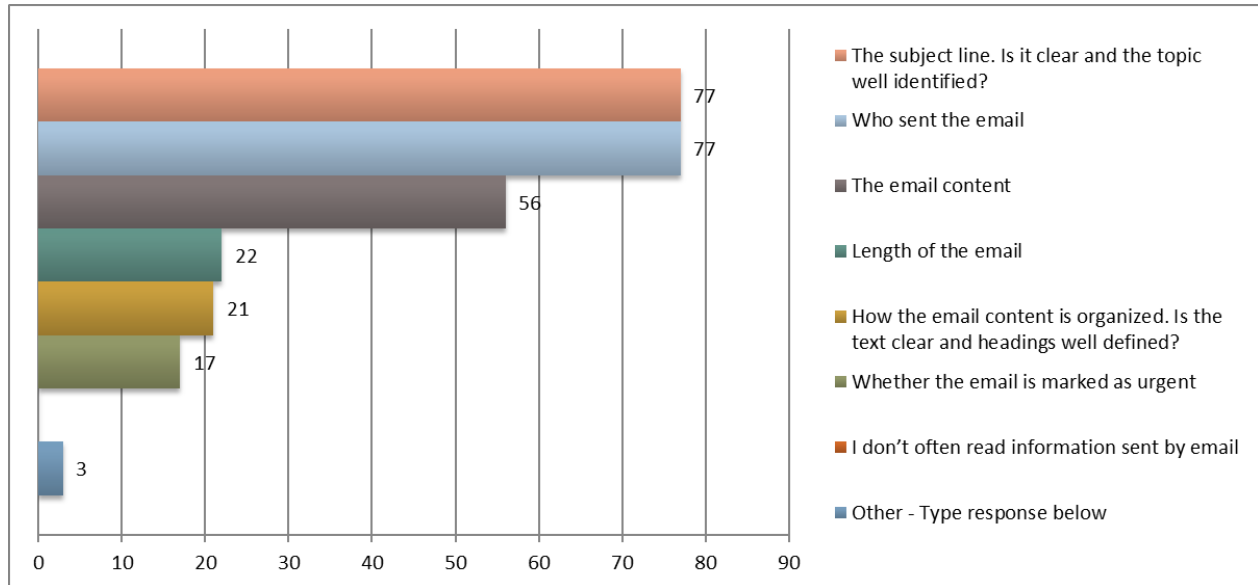
Figure 28: Criteria identified as most important by PRPS employees when choosing to read an email.

While all those surveyed indicated that they read their email to some extent, they were

also asked to share how they would best approach the handling of an email once it arrived in

their inbox. The following example was provided to guide the question:

> *Survey Q41 - You are spending some time catching up on your emails from the day. In*
>
> *your inbox, you see an email from a division office staff member containing links and*
>
> *information about a new employee initiative. Which response would most accurately*
>
> *describe what you do next?*

Approximately 30% of respondents (Figure 29) said they would read the email in its entirety and

follow up with any requests for action immediately. However, most of those who replied tend to

skim over the message and remind themselves to follow up later or read just the first few lines

and close it, reminding themselves to follow up later.
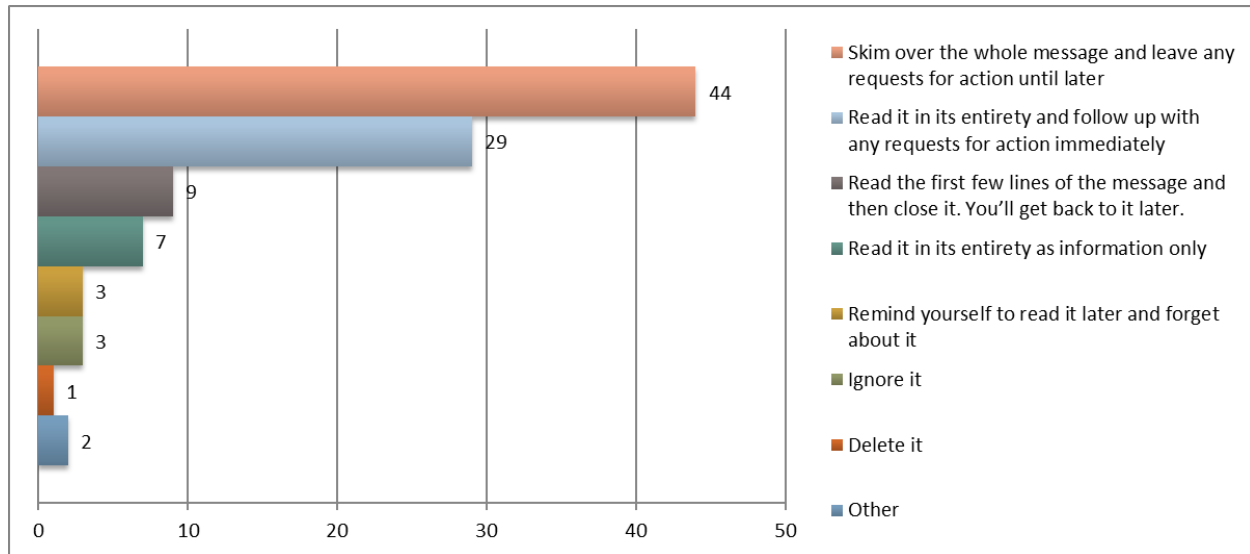
Figure 29: What PRPS employees most often do when receiving an email.

Several employees provided feedback when asked about using email as a two-way method of communication from the division to employees in Prairie Rose Public Schools.

- On a daily basis - we get too much email already. I think a process or clear heading would need to be identified. My preference would be to have general information communications stored somewhere and then a message that indicates there is a new post or something so that the communication does not get lost in the email black hole
- Email can be a great way of communication but it can be too much at times. When we are expected to be attached to it 24 hrs a day is sometimes too much. We do have lives outside of work hours and this pandemic has taught us something it should be to spend time with family and friends and for personal downtime to relax and not worry about work 24 hrs a day.
- If it is not personally for me I don't really read it as I don't have time.
- Sometimes less is more. Sometimes it feels that too much news/too many events/resources are just too much to handle. I often feel that I don't have the time to sift through everything: insiders, multiple newsletters, activities, etc. This then leads to feelings of burnout and inadequacy because I'm not keeping up with these extras because other work demands take immediate priority.
- If it's simply info/request and only one is reply needed, then email is fine. If there is apt to be a lot of back and forth, a phone call or Teams message is a far better way to go.

2. Interview Findings

As was outlined in the Methods section, the goal was to collect one-on-one interviews with three to five employees who volunteered after completing the online survey. A total of seven participants volunteered. Four invitations were accepted on a first-come, first-serve basis. However, one individual had to decline due to scheduling issues. The researcher chose not to approach the additional volunteers because the remaining employees had similar roles as those who had already agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted remotely using Zoom with the remaining three participants who chose the time and location for their interviews. All interviews were recorded using audio and video, based on the interviewee's preference. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes in length.

Of the three participants, one was male, and the other two were female. The interviewees held different roles in the school division and represented; a school administrator/certified teacher, a division office support staff member and a school-based support staff member. At the time of the interviews, all were employed as full-time employees of Prairie Rose Public Schools. Two work primarily from their designated location, while one travels for some or part of their work assignment. The years of service ranged from four to 22 years with the school division.

The interviews commenced with general questions regarding what participants thought internal communications meant and their perceptions of what is considered positive and negative about internal communication practices. At the end of each interview, interviewees were asked if there was anything else they would like to share regarding internal communication practices that the researcher might not have covered. All transcripts were transcribed and provided to the participants within three days of their interviews for review and approval. Some minor edits were made to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees and for clarification. All transcripts were then

uploaded in NVivo for coding. Categories were developed using descriptive coding, with

second-order tags added in the second cycle to further break down each category. The themes

that emerged from the data are represented in the following sections.

      a) What do employees consider internal communications to be?

      The first question asked of each participant was whether they could define internal

communications. Two of the three responded with email as their first consideration before

elaborating to include email news folders, the exchange of information between the district and

the schools, making sure everyone is on the same page, and ensuring people get what they need

to know without receiving communication "every day about every little thing."

      They were then asked to provide examples of positive and poor internal communication

practices. Again, for positive communication, email was mentioned, along with having someone

come and talk to them directly when information pertained specifically to their work. Two

participants also emphasized the timing of the communication and how it was presented.

> I would say, like, it's explained thoroughly. You know, it's. You understand what's being
> said and asked or the information given to you. You understand it fully. That would be to
> make good communication.

> Frequent, open, transparent communication. When there are large things that are
> happening and this is to everybody. So that everybody understands and all the boats are
> aligned in the right direction.

Examples of poor communication practices included hearing about information second-hand or

after it had already been shared with the public and receiving information that didn't directly

pertain to their work. One of the interviewees mentioned they didn't like receiving too much

information about every single thing as it can sometimes lead to the message getting "lost in the

clutter."

b) Availability of Information

All three participants equally expressed satisfaction with their ability to easily find and access information related to communications taking place across Prairie Rose Public Schools. This included getting news from various sources, including district newsletters, the division and school websites, through email correspondence, phone calls, direct conversations with other staff members, staff meetings, and via the many social media accounts managed by the school division. Overall, each individual expressed that they felt information related to things happening in the schools and at the district level was well done, making them feel connected and proud of working for the school division.

> I think is really important, and I do feel connected with the school division because of the information sent out. I mean, sometimes people go, oh my gosh, we had like five emails from the Division. And I'm like, yeah, but they're telling you about a job somebody's going to or something that's happening or, you know, what the school division's outlook is or what they want to do.

> I like to hear about things that are happening in the division at other schools. Whether through the newsletters, all the websites and stuff like that and I go out and check those two every now and then. But it's really important to hear the awesome things that are happening.

Another participant shared that while they have sometimes heard others say they aren't aware of what's happening, not everyone needs to know everything.

> I think the school division does a good job of making sure we know what's going on, right? To what we need to. I would assume that some people might say they don't always know, but some stuff we don't need to know, too.

All but one of the participants shared that they frequently use social media to access information related to things taking place at the different school locations, often scrolling through the different feeds in the evenings. However, even the individual who didn't say they particularly liked using social media themselves acknowledged the need to ensure communication reaches individuals in various ways.

Because at the district level, you need to branch across multiple generations, right? And so you've got the older generation that probably wanted a paper copy you got, you know, like my generation that is like email or pictures on Facebook or, you know, web page. And then you've got the younger generation, which seems to be very connected to their phones and just want constant information. So I think the division does a phenomenal job connecting to every single division piece.

c) Information Sharing is Dependent on the Supervisor

A common theme found amongst all participants was how internal communication

sharing, specifically at the local level, was often dependent on the supervisor at the location. One

of the interviewees provided a perspective from the school administrator position. The other two

shared examples of when they experienced communication challenges based on the

inconsistencies of expectations and processes from one school administrator to the next. As one

of the support staff members explained, sometimes, even sharing an email with the rest of the

staff can lead to frustration.

> Sometimes when someone from Division Office sends an email that says please share this with staff sometimes I share it because it's come to me through my staff group DL [distribution] email list. But I have had my supervisor get upset with me for sharing it before. I'm like, why would you not share that with staff if it says quite clearly on it? [...] With principals, they move schools. It's always different depending on the person. My previous principal would just say thanks for doing that to you. Some do appreciate that. And I feel like if it's sent to me to share in the first place it is because they know I'm going to share it. Sometimes when it is sent to a principal they don't always share it.

The other support staff member, who works in multiple locations, said their school principals are

generally pretty good about keeping them in the loop about localized information; however, that

isn't always the case and is often dependent on the individual.

> When you're not only in one building it's really hard to know what's going on when you're not in that building all the time… unless they really, really do a good job of remembering you. When decisions have been made sometimes, maybe our team, because we're really small, hasn't always known what those decisions are. So we find out later on about something that was decided and we weren't really made aware of. And that could be different supervisors over time. Different people in administration.

Both support staff members did say they are included and frequently invited to be part of staff meetings, even when some of the items discussed aren't always relevant to their work. It was also shared that some school principals have online folders where notes and news from the monthly school leaders' meetings with senior administration are shared.

> I like when there are admin meetings when the notes are presented and they send them out to the folders, and some principals do that, some don't. I think that's really good because we don't always know what's discussed at admin meetings, so when they can send the minutes out I think that's really helpful.

The school administrator/certified teacher also spoke about the need for supervisors to be well prepared when holding meetings with staff or sharing information, which continues to be a work in progress.

> So we normally have a staff meeting on [a specific day each week]. They get access to the notes, so all the notes are held in Google Drive and I try and get them there before the staff meeting, just in case people need to review them. Still areas for improvement. Mainly from my side, not from the staff side. And it's just I have to make the notes more succinct and streamlined so that they can just take a look at it.

d) Perceived Hierarchy of Information Sharing

As was noted in the survey findings, staff identified as school-based support staff tended to have lower levels of satisfaction related to involvement in the decision-making process than those who were in the division office support, teacher instruction and school administrator groups. This finding was further supported by those interviewed. One of the support staff members expressed that at times it feels as though there is a "tier system" for information sharing with staff based on their role in the school.

> So sometimes it's said to the teachers and then support staff. We hear third or fourth hand in the school setting and I kind of don't really think that's always fair, you know what I mean? So yeah, if it's not coming from the division, it's usually mentioned at staff meetings that this is what's going on, and this is what we're going to do going forward. And I do find sometimes that the principal doesn't sometimes say too much about what happened. I find they say it more when the teachers have their own meetings.

The participant spoke of a specific incident when a reassignment occurred at the school. The email notification informing all staff of the change went out before anyone had come to discuss it with those impacted.

> It's put out that you're going to be doing this job and this person is going to be doing that job. But they haven't actually come and spoken to you about that before. They've put that communication out. So then you can be like, Whoa, I don't know what's going on here. Nobody came and spoke to me or asked me first.

While the other support staff member did not reference having a similar experience and was overall satisfied with the level of access to information they received from their schools, "feeling forgotten" was something they had heard from other coworkers.

> I would definitely say that some people feel that we're kind of forgotten sometimes because we're just a whole different identity and we're small, right? So I think, yeah, because if you're not in a building that they sort of forget to add you and you would feel that way. I myself don't feel that personally because I feel included, but I would say that as a whole our team would. Probably some of us would say that.

The certified teacher/school administrator acknowledged the challenge of ensuring everyone was equally included but admitted it can be difficult to find a time when everyone is available due to the need for supervision of the students throughout the work day.

> We try and run all of our meetings, because our day is so long, during a specific time block when the majority of our staff are freed up and have classroom coverage. And so sometimes we bring in all of the staff with the exception of a few because they are working at that time, so that would be our teachers and our EAs. Sometimes our meetings mainly are just with our teachers. So what I'd like to change in the future is to be able to bring in the EAs for all of those meetings as well, and that would bring everybody together and make sure that communication is effective.

e) Use of Email in the School Division

As was represented in the survey findings, overwhelmingly, email was mentioned by all three interviewees when asked about how they most often received information related to both division and localized school news. While email benefits included; knowing that everyone had

equal access to the information and the ability to go back and read it later, several key themes

emerged regarding the challenges with email use for information sharing.

   Use of email during the work day. The primary theme represented by all three

participants was the amount of email being sent each day internally. As one participant put it,

"Email. I receive a lot of email." Two of the three participants said they don't have time during

the work day to stay on top of the emails they receive, as their work assignment doesn't allow it.

As a result, time is often spent during the evenings getting caught up on the news from the day.

> My day is extremely busy during the day, so I actually check my email at night from
> about 8 to 12. That's when I'm responding to stuff, getting everything ready for the next
> day. If it's anything that's urgent, don't email it. If you need it done that day, don't email it.
> You need to call me. Otherwise, it's going to get done that night and then you'll have it
> the next day by the time that you arrive.

While one of the interviewees shared that sometimes it is necessary to reply to emails during the

evening, it can also make it hard to disconnect from the work environment.

> I think sometimes we have to practice doing it within school hours. You are always
> looking when emails come out at night. You try not to look, but I think sometimes it
> could be more succinct to school hours.

The one participant who said they have regular access to email during the work day explained

that they often hear from other staff who don't know about something that was sent out. This

often leads to them repeating the message to that staff member or encouraging them to check

their email.

> I'll say, did you see the email about whatever? And then say one of those staff members
> say, no, I didn't see it. So you can read your email, right? Read it to them or, you know,
> say, oh, this is what happened and you need to read that email or whatever.

   Targeted use of email. When asked whether participants felt that the email they received

was appropriately suited to their role in the organization, two interviewees felt it was, while one

shared that they often receive emails that seemed irrelevant or in abundance. Of particular note

was the sharing of job postings to all staff.

> Sometimes you see four or five job postings come out in a day and I'm like, could this not be put into one email. You know, I mean, like instead of five different emails. Which rarely happens, to be honest with you. But, you know, lately, there are a lot of new job opportunities in June. Many of those posts are not for me. It's not anything that I can do. So sometimes you're like, okay, you get one. And then a couple of hours later there's another one and another one. And I'm like, could this not go into one email.

All three employees did appreciate the use of DL (distribution) lists and email folders

which helped target emails to the appropriate group of individuals. As two of the participants

shared, when used correctly, this practice helps ensure the appropriate information reaches the

right people and that employees only get what would be important to them.

> When I'm at one school or another, then I know what's going on because it's in the folder and I can always keep up on my off days when I'm not there.

> I really like the group setting that everybody's invited to, and then you're going to get emails or content based on that group setting, and it doesn't have to go to everybody else. And I appreciate that everybody else's time is valued.

Email as a way to avoid face-to-face conversation. While not a unanimous finding

amongst all participants, one of the support staff members expressed that sometimes they feel

email is used to avoid confrontation during face-to-face discussions.

> I do feel sometimes it's because they don't want a face-to-face. Confrontation could be the wrong word. But if it's something kind of thrown upon people, that's something they want you to do or something within the classroom. Or I feel like they don't want to have a big discussion about it with people. So I find if they send an email, it's because they don't want to have a conversation about it.

The participant provided an example of how emails are sometimes sent out following a staff

meeting about something they felt would have been better suited to a group discussion.

> So when we have a staff meeting, the principal sends out an agenda about what's happening. So we'll talk about stuff on the agenda and then they will ask people if they have any questions and stuff like that. And then, say a day or two later. You'll get another email saying, oh, by the way, we're doing this. And then people go, Oh, why didn't they say that in the staff meeting? And why is that kind of just being thrown upon us now? Why is it just being sent out in an email? Because then if you have questions in regards to it, not everybody has time to talk about it, you know, within the school day to run up and down, to ask questions.

f) Use of Other Communication Channels/Methods

When asked about the use of communication channels other than email, participants

spoke about the benefits of face-to-face communication, how advancements in video technology

had increased access and mobility for staff and how the use of visuals can be helpful for

comprehension.

For face-to-face communication, it was agreed that when the information pertains to the

work you are directly involved in, it is important to have someone talk to you before an

announcement goes out to all staff. The school administrator/certified teacher also shared that

they continue to try and be consistent with regular in-person staff meetings, as it allows everyone

to be on the same page as a team.

> And I don't know. I think that if anybody could get out of a meeting, we would. Myself
> included. But I think that if we removed the face-to-face meetings people would not have
> a clear understanding of expectations or the direction we are moving in. I think
> everybody would develop their own understanding and interpretation of that, and so we
> would branch out instead of being united. So I think it could cause problems.

For video communication, participants found it much more personal than email, and they

enjoyed being able to see who they were talking to or getting information from. The use of video

meetings for sharing information in small groups was also appreciated, as it allows for two-way

conversation between participants. It was noted, however, that often people keep their cameras

off during video meetings which can come across negatively to the other participants.

> I do find I don't like it when people have their cameras off to the other people. If you're in
> a group, I find that rude because I feel that they're not paying attention. I think if you're
> going to be in a meeting, you should visually be there because you don't know if people
> are listening properly.

Another positive expressed regarding video communication is the ability to connect with

others across the school division, even when scheduling conflicts arise or due to inclement

weather.

We work in a world where we no longer have to always be in person? If the weather is yucky, it's still be like, you and I can do this and we don't have to travel to do it, right? I mean, I'd rather meet with you face to face. It's nicer, but in reality, it's another form.

All three employees spoke about the pre-canned video messages that are occasionally

sent out in place of scripted emails for sharing division-level information about upcoming

programs, training, or updates from the various departments. As two interviewees shared, the

video messages add a personal touch.

I do like the videos. They, they do appeal to me. I like seeing the person and having them talk. I do like that.

You feel like it's more personable than an email and you're trying to follow an email. So yeah, I do think they are more personable and easier to follow. And during COVID and stuff like that, we would do video chats in the school or at home.

Another participant said they especially like watching videos when trying to learn how to do

something, as they can go back and watch the video multiple times and pick up on tricks from

those who are more knowledgeable.

Anything that I need to learn, anything with professional development, anything that is either a new concept, a new idea, or a process that I need because I need to watch that video three times. First time to understand kind of where everybody is, especially if it's with a computer. Some people are really good at computers. It's something that I love too. But when people are teaching it, they know the shortcuts and how to do it fast.

Negative comments regarding the use of video primarily centred around length and tone

of voice.

I don't mean this to sound rude in any way but sometimes if their voices are monotone, I'm like, zone out. Like, it just. It doesn't keep my attention. You know what I mean? And I think once you get to about 15 minutes of something. Something 10 to 15 minutes. On a video recording, that's me time.

If a video is too long, I will just kind of fast forward and stop every about an eighth of the way just to make sure that I'm hitting the main points. And if it's something that I understand, then speed it up.

A final insight provided by participants regarding the use of channels and methods was

how they prefer information with visuals when lengthy emails are shared. As one interviewee

explained, "I can understand it better than a big, long spiel of words that leaves you thinking, I

have no clue what this is about. I am lost here."

g) Considerations for Internal Communication Improvements

When asked about suggestions for improving internal communication practices, all three

participants provided ideas for what could be done to make sharing more effective. One of the

recommendations was related to making communication more efficient to prevent important

messages from being dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant.

> I think less is more. I think, yeah, the key points but not too much. Because that's part of
> sometimes even when some of the district newsletters go out, I think it's fun all the
> contests and stuff, but there's a lot of information and so sometimes I just don't even look
> at it or I just, you know, I look at it quickly.

> Even with an email, if an email is like, six, seven paragraphs long. You know, you kind of
> feel that you have to keep going back and rereading it to understand what was being said.

Another suggestion related to information sharing improvements was around using clear

and concise language when communicating with employees. As one participant shared, not

everyone is equally qualified at crafting a well-drafted message.

> Sometimes if you get an email and it just says, click this and then do this and do that. I
> don't really like that. But it depends on who it is from. Some people don't explain it very
> well. They've used to many technical terms for me. And now you've lost me.

A second participant echoed this sentiment, explaining that sometimes when the language is

outside of their area of expertise, they don't realize that it is something that affects them or that

they need to pay attention to.

> Sometimes the tech stuff is a little confusing. So I know at one point when they wanted
> us to change something, put that thing on our phone with the little number. I didn't even
> know what that meant and I just completely ignored it. And I think they were a bit
> frustrated. But techie stuff is confusing if you're not in that techie world. So yeah,
> sometimes I think when you get a big long thing like that, you miss. Well, I don't think
> that's for me, that's something else. Yeah. Delete.

A third recommendation was related to ensuring communications are consistent across sharing

channels. As was noted by one of the participants, sometimes people aren't sure where to go for

different types of information, which results in uncertainty and frustration.

> It would be awesome to streamline just like, you know, the web page and then the
> Facebook that connects with it. Just that. And for the most part, it is streamlined, which is
> awesome. But like Twitter and Instagram, and this is just my own thing, if everybody
> knows where to find something, it makes it really easy to direct people there.

V. Discussion

This study set out to answer to what extent employees working for a rural K-12 school division are satisfied with the communication they receive within their work environment. To further supplement the findings, two supplemental research questions sought to understand how an employee's job assignment impacts internal communication satisfaction (ICS), and all things being equal, what criteria do employees identify as most important when interacting with and acting upon the internal information they receive. To answer these questions, a case study research design applying a mixed-methods methodology was used to collect data through an online survey supplemented with in-depth interviews. Based on the recommendations of previous ICS researchers, using a mixed-methods approach resulted in the collection of the appropriate data to adequately meet the researcher's expectations for this study.

Based on the case study results, this researcher concludes that most employees generally seem satisfied with internal communication practices while working for Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS); however, there are several suggestions for improvement based on the findings. This conclusion will be supported by comparing the research findings to five of the eight dimensions that make up the multidimensional ICS construct (Downs & Hazen, 1977; Pološki Vokić et al., 2020). The five ICS dimensions chosen to evaluate this study include; organizational integration, communication climate, communication with supervisors, horizontal information communication, and media quality. These were picked based on their relevance to the study purpose and will be used, in no particular order, as evaluation guidelines in the sections that follow. In addition, the lenses of media richness theory (MRT) (Daft & Lengel, 1986), channel expansion theory (CET) (Carlson & Zmud, 1999) and reception theory (RT) (Schrøder, 2019) provide frameworks for comparisons of the results to previous internal communication literature.

1. ICS Dimension: Organizational Integration

When employees feel connected to an organization, they are more likely to feel confident in their work and become advocates for the organization, especially in times of uncertainty (Cornelissen, 2017, Downs & Adrian, 2004). As was noted in the survey findings, employees overwhelmingly reported feeling at least 'somewhat satisfied' with key aspects of internal communication processes that contribute to organizational connection. This included receiving timely, interesting, accurate information, adaptable to emergencies and healthy overall. When employees were asked how the communication in PRPS makes me identify or feel part of the organization, more than 80% of respondents indicated a neutral or higher level of satisfaction. As one of the interviewees shared, "I think the school division does a good job of making sure we all know what's going on."

The majority of employees were also satisfied with handling internal communication throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which is an important finding related to organizational integration. Of those surveyed, more than half indicated that the pandemic improved internal communication practices. This included sharing information that was prompt, effective and timely. While at the time of this research study, the literature regarding the long-term effects of the pandemic on internal communication was limited, a 2021 study by Li et al. suggests that providing employees with quick, timely and accurate information was key to reducing uncertainty and stress in times of crisis. Ecklebe and Löffler (2021) also emphasized that frequency of communication and information quality were two key factors that significantly impacted the overall employee-organizational relationship. It should be noted that, unlike other organizations, most school division employees continued to work at their designated locations except for division office employees who were under the 'work from home' provincial health order. In context, this would mean that most communication sent to employees regarding the

pandemic focused on processes and changes to COVID guidelines and did not require significant

changes to the methods for distributing information.

2. ICS Dimension: Communication Climate

For internal communication to be successful, it requires all levels of the employee

network to be connected through the exchange of views and opinions to promote knowledge

sharing (Sharbaji, 2021). This includes ensuring that employees at all levels of the organization

feel listened to and appreciated. PRPS employees were asked several questions about their ability

to provide input and feel heard in their localized work environment and at the division level to

measure the communication climate. Questions focused on the team environment, the extent to

which employees felt their opinions and ideas were listened to, being able to contribute at staff

meetings and being included in the decision-making process. At the school level, average

employee perceptions of the communication climate fell into the 'somewhat satisfied' and 'very

satisfied' categories. These scores were slightly higher than at the division level. In both

instances, the lowest satisfaction levels were recorded for how included employees felt in the

decision-making process. When further analyzed against the staff role variable, those working in

school support staff positions were more likely to be dissatisfied than certified teaching staff,

division office support staff and school administrators. Another notable finding connected to a

higher level of dissatisfaction from the school support staff group was provided through the

comments of interview participants, who indicated that information sharing is not always

consistent from one employee group to the next. Comments to support this included; support

staff feeling like they hear information second-hand, a tendency to sometimes "forget about"

employees who work in multiple locations and that all staff cannot attend staff meetings due to

scheduling challenges. Previous literature supports this finding as communication preferences

and needs are not uniform across all employee groups or individuals (Welch, 2012) and that a one-size-fits-all communication approach can lead to unsuccessful and inconsistent organizational communication results (White et al., 2010).

3. ICS Dimension: Communication with Supervisors

Employees of this study placed a high value on being involved when decisions and changes occurred and ensuring their opinions were valued by those in managerial positions. While this was found to be the case at both the local and division levels of the school division, staff role seemed to impact the degree to which employees felt this occurred across the organization. As was also noted in the survey and interview findings, there appear to be inconsistencies between internal communication sharing practices between school leaders (principals), resulting in employee uncertainty regarding expectations and participation. As is noted in the study by White et al. (2010), "employees who did not have sufficient access to supervisors and who felt the information was incomplete and /or filtered when it reached them did not feel a strong sense of community" (p. 76). The same study also found that in large decentralized organizations, the ability for employees to receive appropriate information was heavily dependent on managers' communication skills, noting that in some cases, "information does not flow, it trickles" (p. 73). The one-on-one interview participant comments were in-line with this finding, while the survey data did not provide conclusive results. When survey participants were asked about how satisfied employees were with the information shared with them by their supervisor, these categories scored high in the 'very satisfied' category at both the local (55%) and district (54%) levels. The survey results also suggest a general sense of employee satisfaction with the ability to access information related to changes across the school division (46%). Yet despite these high satisfaction results, several comments provided through

open-ended survey responses mentioned areas of dissatisfaction. Some of these comments

included:

- Doesn't need to be a top-down process, so the workers are sitting waiting for a filter-down communication process.
- There needs to be better communication from Administration. Tired of things being secretive and only on a need-to-know basis.
- Communication has been a real problem at my school. Even the information I require to do my job effectively is not always provided and causes a lot of extra work and problems.

One of the key themes that emerged from the one-on-one interviews also helps shed some

light on the dissatisfaction of some employees related to communication with supervisors. Two

participants felt uncertain about procedural expectations and processes at the various school

locations and when supervisor (principal) changes occurred. This uncertainty often resulted in

them seeking information from another source or becoming frustrated. Previous studies show

that when employees are forced to go to informal avenues for information, voids can be created

in the information chain (White et al., 2010, p. 73).

4. ICS Dimension: Horizontal Information Communication

Who communicates, with whom, in what way, with what context and for what purpose

can impact how legitimate an employee considers the communication to be (Welch & Jackson,

2007, p. 185). Based on the results of this study, PRPS employees are comfortable approaching

other coworkers to get clarification about work-related matters, which suggests horizontal

information communication between employee groups is healthy. The survey data revealed that

staff approach a coworker for clarification about work-related matters almost equally as often as

they would a direct supervisor. 76% of employees were also 'somewhat satisfied' to 'very

satisfied' that the informal information they receive is active and accurate. Further, when it came

to ease and comfort for personal face-to-face interactions, approaching a co-worker to get

clarification about work-related matters and initiating conversations with a coworker scored very high. These findings align with communication dimensions outlined in the Internal Communication Matrix by Welch and Jackson (2007), which suggests that colleagues need to be supported and comfortable to actively engage in two-way dialogue regarding team tasks and project discussions.

5. ICS Dimension: Media Quality

The use of email. When interviewees were asked what they considered good internal communication to be, they immediately mentioned email. The survey participants also overwhelmingly chose email as their preferred communication method (91%) over other PRPS communication options (phone calls, Teams Chat messaging, text messages), many of which meet the media richness criteria of richer mediums and allow for more synchronous communication to occur. Guided by media richness theory (MRT), Figure 30 was developed to illustrate where PRPS communication channels and methods, including email, fall on the richness continuum.
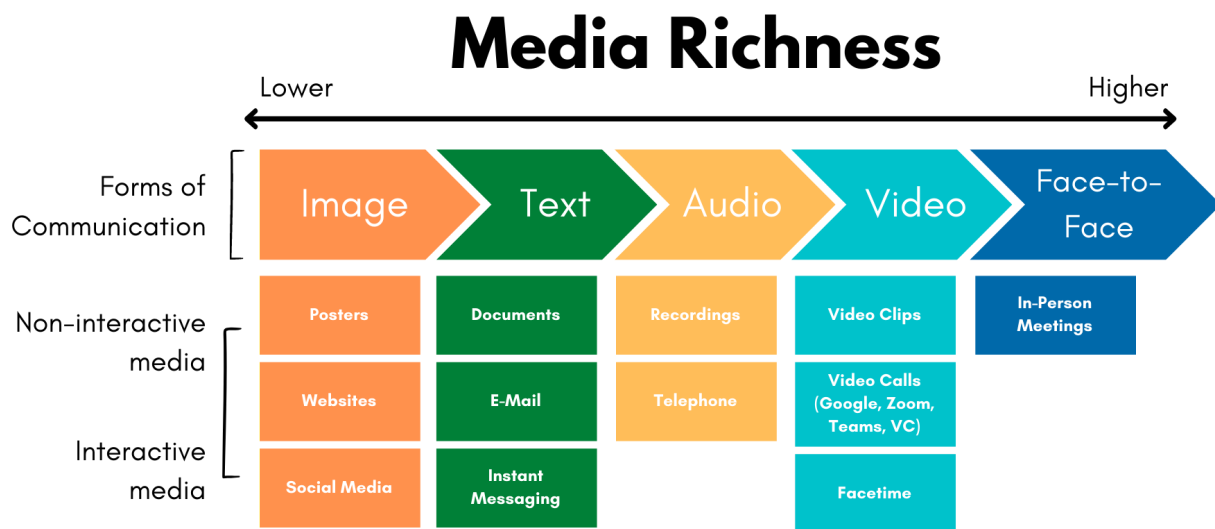
Figure 30: PRPS internal communication channels based on their suggested placement on the richness continuum. Note: Adapted from Ruilin. (2019, July 24). The media richness theory—True or false? Medium. https://uxdesign.cc/media-richness-theory-true-or-false-6f6218a8cf35

As should be noted, based on MRT, email falls at the lower end of the continuum. This has led some academics to challenge the ability of MRT to accurately predict internal communication satisfaction (Men, 2014), as employees routinely seem to prefer email for most organizational communications (White et al., 2010, Mehra & Nickerson, 2019) over more synchronous methods. This was also found to be the case in this study.

Still, despite an overwhelming preference for email by PRPS employees, several participants still expressed many issues about its use. Predominant complaints included; using email to avoid face-to-face conversations, the inability for some information to be coherently explained in a text format, the use of email outside of work hours, that email distribution channels are not always specific or targeted, an overreliance on email to share information about "everything," and that in general, employees receive too much email. White et al. (2010) noted similar findings, citing that "email continues to be the dominantly preferred method of communication, despite being overloaded with messages every day" (p. 70), as did Mehra and Nickerson (2019) in a more recent study, who found that email continues to be a highly effective means of exchanging information with employees.

So why are other channels not preferred when they have the potential to offer a richer, interactive communication experience? This study sheds some light on why there continues to be a preference for email over other forms of communication. Channel expansion theory (CET) provides a lens to understand this in better detail. Based on the four experiences identified by Carlson and Zmud (1999), for an employee to consider a media as relevant requires experience with the channel, knowledge of the message topic, experience with the organizational context and experience with communication co-participants (p. 155). As is noted in the survey results, a substantial number of employees shared that they were not familiar with the use of Microsoft

Teams (35%) for direct messaging or video communication (37%), despite the Teams platform

meeting much of the criteria identified by MRT as a rich medium. Microsoft Teams provides an

instant messaging feature and the ability to converse with someone using audio and video call

features. Furthermore, when asked which method/channel employees felt more training was

needed to increase satisfaction, the majority chose Microsoft Teams (32%), compared to only 8%

that said email. As one survey participant noted, "Central Office employees assume that folks in

the district know how to use Teams... most school staff do not know Teams, especially since

there has been ZERO training on Teams for general staff." This finding suggests that employees

may continue to prefer email communication, not because it provides a more effective

communication experience, but because it is what is familiar and comfortable. Another

consideration for email preference is due to its asynchronous nature. Examples of this can

include the ability of employees to avoid face-to-face interactions, to 'tune out' some messages,

respond to questions based on convenience and not scheduling, communicate with multiple

individuals at one time and obtain information in a time-efficient manner. As noted by the

interview participants, several employees expressed how they liked "disconnecting" outside of

work hours, which could be impacted by using more synchronous forms of communication.

    The use of social media. While not an inclusive finding, the use of social media in the

school division appears somewhat welcome amongst staff when sharing news and information

about what's happening across the district. The survey data revealed that 80% of respondents are

comfortable navigating the school division's Facebook account and that 34% even preferred

some types of information to be shared using this format. This finding was further supported

through the one-on-one interviews, where overwhelmingly, responses were very positive

regarding the ability of employees to find information about the school division through social

media channels. Several staff members said they liked how easy it was to access information on external channels to stay connected outside their localized work environment. As one of the interviewees shared, they often "scroll through all the school division's social media sites in the evening to catch up on the cool things happening in other locations around the division." At the same time, another employee felt that social media is the "best place to promote/advocate and paint a positive picture of the wide variety of learning happening in PRPS." A similar finding was not found in a 2020 study that explored media preferences of digital natives in the workplace. Friedl and Verčič (2020) found that despite an employee's preference for digital media in their personal lives, it did not translate into the work environment (p. 85), and there had not been any shift in employee preferences from traditional media in internal communications to social media (p. 6). In PRPS, while not all employees shared the same keenness regarding social media use, the growing enthusiasm for using social media to communicate organizational information is an interesting finding and supports previous literature that encourages organizations not to create distinctions between internal and external content types but to recognize that all information is content (Ruck, 2019, p. 22). Of note, when placed against the criteria for MRT, social media scores on the lower end of the continuum acting under a one-way transmission model, much like a poster or bulletin board, which has shown in previous studies to have little impact on internal communication satisfaction (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020).

What do employees do with the information once they receive it? Another goal of this study was to understand what criteria employees identify as most important when interacting with and acting upon the information they receive. Reception theory (RT) seeks to understand "not what the media do to people, but what people do with the media" (Schrøder, 2019, p. 156). A couple of key findings were noted to understand this relationship. This included;

understanding what type of content employees find most interesting, what communication methods employees prefer for communicating different kinds of information, and the importance of using a medium to its full richness potential.

    Employee communication preferences. To understand what information employees feel is most important to their work, survey participants were asked to indicate whether they found different types of school division communications to be 'very useful,' 'somewhat useful,' or 'not very useful.' Of the 11 topics provided, those found to be the most useful included; information to assist with my work (83%), information about new programs and initiatives (69%) and information about professional development (69%). However, the responses showed that overall, employees found all types of information to be at least somewhat useful to them. As was expressed by one survey participant, "Stop deciding what staff 'need' to know and just share it all with us." The desire for employees to be 'in the know' to at least some degree for all work-related matters is similar to what White et. al (2010) found noting, "it is important to most employees to receive information about the organization, even if the information is not essential to their job performance. There is a difference between knowing what you need to know and being in the know, which fosters a sense of community and increases willingness to advocate for the organization (p. 80)." Yet, interestingly, some employees recognize that sharing everything with everyone is not always necessary and can be counterproductive. As noted by the interview participants, too much information results in the important stuff getting "lost in the clutter" and that high frequency of information sharing can lead to reduced uptake. White et al. (2010) also found this to be true when large volumes of email communications occurred, as often they are scanned rather than read carefully. This also proved to be the case with Prairie Rose employees, with 45% indicating they skim over the whole message and remind themselves to follow up later.

The findings for this study also aligned with the criteria employees use when choosing to read an email through a 'personal filtering system' (p. 75). This includes who sent the email and a clear, well-defined subject line.

   The medium is the message. As was shared by study participants, certain messages are better suited to one medium over another, and misusing a medium can decrease overall effectiveness. Therefore, choosing the right channel for a message and ensuring the channel is used to its full richness potential can lead to greater ICS.

   Despite school division employees' preference for email communications, there are instances that employees found were better suited to non-email communication methods. Interviewees shared that they enjoyed the asynchronous personal recorded video messages sent out by the district, allowing employees to see the person sharing the message and play it repeatedly if they missed something the first time. They also indicated that online video call sessions for small group training were preferable over email, as they could ask questions and get helpful tips from those who were more knowledgeable on the topic than they were. Direct face-to-face communication was favoured for communication directly impacting their work, while graphics and images helped to increase understanding and engagement with the message. These findings suggest employees value richer mediums over text or email communications, even if they are not fully aware of it. However, some challenges were also identified, leading to a decrease in the effectiveness of rich mediums when not executed correctly.

   As reception theory points out, even if a message is encoded with a specific purpose, the receiver is likely to decode it differently based on countless factors (Dziak, 2021). Length of the message, use of concise language and tone of voice of the sender played a crucial role in whether employees chose to engage with visual mediums. As one interviewee shared, "I don't mean this

to sound rude in any way but sometimes if their voices are monotone, I'm like, zone out. Like, it just. It doesn't keep my attention." Another interesting finding was that even when a richer medium is used to share information, such as Microsoft Teams or Google Meets, the channel is not always used to its full richness potential, leading to a decrease in participant satisfaction. One example provided was when people choose not to turn on their cameras during video meetings. As one interviewee shared, "I do find I don't like it when people have their cameras off to the other people. If you're in a group, I find that rude because I feel that they're not paying attention. I think if you're going to be in a meeting, you should visually be there because you don't know if people are listening properly." Using technical jargon or language that wasn't common to all participants also decreased satisfaction. As one interviewee noted, they completely disregarded a message because they did not think it was for them. "Sometimes the tech stuff is a little confusing. So I know at one point when they wanted us to change something, put that thing on our phone with the little number. I didn't even know what that meant and I just completely ignored it. Well, I don't think that's for me, that's something else. Yeah. Delete."

6. Summary of the Findings and Discussion

As noted at the beginning of this section, based on the findings of this study, this research concludes that overall, employees working for PRPS are mostly satisfied with the communications they receive while working for a rural K-12 school division. This conclusion was based on the evaluation of the research data against five internal communication dimensions and guided by the theoretical frameworks of media richness theory, channel expansion theory and reception theory. Overall, several similarities were discovered between what K-12 rural employees value and expect with internal communication practices; however, some differences were also noted.

When it comes to organizational integration and horizontal communication, no significant issues were identified. However, there appears to be room for improvement regarding the communication climate and communication with supervisors. This includes some employees feeling that not all staff groups are communicated with equally and that inconsistencies between supervisor communication practices have led to decreased internal communication satisfaction. This suggests that an employee's work assignment impacts internal communication satisfaction, which was added as a supplemental research question for this research.

The media quality dimension produced many comparable findings to previous research. Like previous studies, email continues to be the preferred channel for internal communications despite its disadvantages and low to middle placement on the media richness spectrum. Employees' knowledge of the channel and comfort with its use appear to outweigh email's richness limitations and asynchronous nature. Still, there seems to be a growing interest in using richer mediums for communication, but current efforts have failed to produce significant results. This appears to be primarily due to a lack of training and improper use, which has resulted in current efforts not being as effective as they could be. Interestingly, school division employees seem open to seeking some forms of internal communication through social media, which was not recorded in previous studies. One possible consideration for this difference could be due to the nature of the work of K-12 school divisions compared to corporate companies, as publicly shared information is primarily focused on children, activities, and events and not corporate messaging or self-promotion.

Finally, while this study sheds some light on what type of communication employees prefer, the findings provide insight into some of the key criteria that lead to disengagement and reduced media quality satisfaction. While more research is still needed in this area of study, the

data presented is a good starting point for developing new communication practices better suited

to meet the needs of rural K-12 employees.

VI. Study Conclusion

Recognized factors for building successful internal communication include; knowing your demographics, understanding how people spend their day, knowing how people prefer to interact, establishing when face-to-face interaction can occur, and knowing what your employees are interested in (Richmond, 2011, as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2013). This study sought to answer these questions using the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent are employees satisfied, or not, with the communication they receive while working for a rural K-12 school division?

RQ2: To what extent does an employee's job assignment impact internal communication satisfaction (ICS)?

RQ3: All things being equal, what criteria do employees identify as most important when interacting with and acting upon the internal information they receive?

Based on this research's findings, overall, it was found that employees of the case study were mostly satisfied with the internal communication processes working for Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS). Interestingly, very few notable differences emerged compared to previous internal communication satisfaction (ICS) research conducted outside the rural K-12 employee environment. This suggests that, much like other organizations, rural K-12 school division staff have similar expectations regarding the internal information being shared at both the local and division levels.

Researcher takeaways. While this study produced sufficient data to answer the research questions, some lessons can be learned from the process. Firstly, while many previous studies have explored ICS using a single data collection method (c.f., Sharma, 2015; Mehra & Nickerson, 2019; Pološki Vokić et al., 2020), the choice to use a mixed-methods approach for

this study did produce the intended results. Where the survey allowed to gather employees' broad

perceptions on various topics, the interviews provided context and additional insight into specific

internal communication practices that might not have otherwise been learned. Examples of this

included gaining a better understanding of employee preference for email (and when other media

would be preferred), gaining perceptions of the division's use of social media, gathering insight

into employee frustrations related to inconsistent managerial communication practices, and

hearing about specific instances where employees have felt internal communications could have

been improved. These findings support the recommendation of some researchers that call on

using more than one method to measure ICS to move beyond content and channels to a focus on

employee expectations for content (Ruck & Welch, 2011).

Secondly, this study chose to look at five of the eight communication dimensions that

make up the internal communication construct. This required developing questions for both the

survey and the interviews that focused on many aspects of internal communication in the

workplace. In hindsight, focusing the research on one or two of the internal communication

dimensions could have produced richer results in key areas. As Pološki Vokić et al. (2020) noted,

the researcher can choose a few or many dimensions for analysis depending on the study.

Thirdly, when evaluating the survey data, it was noted that some questions were missed

or the incorrect question format was used to collect responses. Purposefully, the demographic

data collected was kept to a minimum to protect employee confidentiality in the small case study

group. However, it would have been helpful to determine if gender, age, or specific work

location impacted the results. In terms of survey design, the question that asked employees which

information they found most useful, very few differences could be noted in the responses.

Asking participants to rank the information in order may have produced more comprehensive

results, as participants would have been required to consider what they deemed most important overall. A final consideration related to the survey structure was how staff roles were collected. Due to the small sample size of the case study population, it was necessary to 'bucket' some of the employee groups together. Specifically, the researcher combined all 'non-school-based school support staff' into the division office support staff group to create even groupings during analysis. Before 'bucketing' groups together, it was noted that responses varied considerably among those within this group due to individualized work environments (i.e. work from home, work in the office, travel daily for work). In the future, it would be beneficial to ask for a second opinion when determining bucketed groupings to remove researcher bias from the process.

Future studies. As noted in the literature review, minimal ICS research examines employee satisfaction in K-12 school environments. This study adds to this apparent gap in the literature, which can serve as a point of comparison for future research. Subsequently, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study using a large urban school division case study or another school division of comparable size and geography. Do location and employee size impact ICS, or would the results be comparable? It would also be useful to re-examine this same case study population after implementing various strategies to increase employee awareness about the organization's numerous aspects of internal communication. This could include additional training on various communication tools, implementing managerial communication processes that create consistency from one location to the next and showcasing the ICS benefits of richer communication mediums. Another consideration for a future study would be examining employee workplace behaviours through an ethnomethodology approach. By observing those in their workplace, additional insight could be gained to understand the dynamics of internal communication further.

Final thoughts. For organizations, timely, accurate, trustworthy, and meaningful communication matters. As primary stakeholders, employees are an essential part of the overall system, yet, internal communication is often considered an afterthought or done following a crisis event. How information is communicated can impact employees' perceptions of each other and the organization. Employees who hold an organization in high esteem and value its reputation are more likely to become genuine advocates and supporters. Rural K-12 school divisions are no different and require special consideration to ensure the correct information reaches the right person, is meaningful to their work, and supports a positive employee environment. This project aimed to provide insight into this area of research, leading to a more streamlined organizational culture of effective and meaningful employee communication in the rural K-12 school environment.

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Appendix A - Survey Consent Form and Online Questionnaire

Welcome to the online survey (Part A) of the research study Exploring Internal Communication Satisfaction: The case study of a rural K-12 school division. This study is being done in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology degree being undertaken by Angela Baron through the University of Alberta and under the supervision of Stanley Varnhagen.

Investigator/Researcher and Supervisor
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Supervisor: Dr. Stanley Varnhagen, sjv1@ualberta.ca

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study is to better understand the extent to which employees are satisfied, or not, with the internal communications they receive while working for a rural K-12 school division. Prairie Rose Public Schools will serve as a case study for the research, whereas internal communication satisfaction will be explored based on the rural context and size of the organization. This will include gathering the perceptions and attitudes regarding internal communication practices while working for the school division. As an employee of Prairie Rose Public Schools, I am interested in your opinions, experiences and overall satisfaction with internal communications practices.

Participation
The survey will take about 20-25 minutes to complete. Employee identifiers such as name and email address will be anonymized and not available to the researcher, however, demographic data including staff type (${e://Field/StaffType}) and staff role (${e://Field/StaffRole}) will be made available as part of the data collected. This demographic information will be rolled together in the findings to protect employee confidentiality. Your participation is voluntary. You are not obliged to answer any specific questions, you may skip questions, and you may end the survey at any time. To end the survey, do not hit submit on the final question. All incomplete response data will be deleted after the closing date. The survey will be open for two weeks with a reminder being sent to those who have not participated after one week. This reminder is generated through the Qualtrics survey system and is not based on the knowledge of who completed the survey by the researcher.

Other Uses
While Prairie Rose Public Schools has granted permission for the research, the project is independent of the school division. Upon completion of the research, the report will be published on the Education and Research Archive (ERA) and provided/presented professionally to Prairie Rose Public Schools administration. No raw or identifying data that may directly identify participants will be included as part of the final report.

Benefits
There is no known risk or direct benefit for participating. The final report will include recommendations for internal communication satisfaction improvements in the organization. As a result, employees may indirectly benefit. There will be no financial compensation for those who volunteer to participate in the study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity
The information that you share will remain strictly confidential and be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only person with access to the research data is the researcher. All data collected will be encrypted and stored in a secure place for a minimum of five years following the completion of the research project, and when appropriate, will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

Part B of the Study
Upon completion of the survey, you will be asked if you are interested in participating in a personal interview to further expand on your internal communication experiences. Interviews are separate from the survey and there is no requirement to participate, even if you choose to complete the survey. Interviews will be 30-45 minutes in length and conducted via Zoom. The researcher requires a limited number of interviews for the study so participation is limited.

Questions?
The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, please contact the Research Ethics Office at reoffice@ualberta.ca. This office is independent of the researchers.

    ☐ I consent to participate in the survey as outlined above. (**continue to Section 1**)
    ☐ I do not wish to participate in the survey. (go to **Skip 1**)

Skip 1: If the respondent answers, I do not wish to participate in the survey:

By choosing to respond to the following question, you will no longer receive reminders to complete the survey. While a response is not required, the researcher is interested in your reasons for not participating.
    ☐ I prefer not to answer.
    ☐ I do not feel comfortable participating due to concerns about confidentiality.
    ☐ I do not have the time to complete the survey.
    ☐ I do not wish to disclose a reason for not participating.

> ☐ I do not wish to participate in the survey, however, I would still be interested in taking part in a one-on-one interview.
> ☐ Other _____

Section 1: Employee Information.

1. How long have you worked for Prairie Rose Public Schools?
   ☐ Under one year
   ☐ 1-3 years
   ☐ 4-7 years
   ☐ 8-15 years
   ☐ 16-24 years
   ☐ 25+

2. Approximately how many people work at your assigned location?
   ☐ 1-5 employees (Colony Schools, New Brigden, Home Plus)
   ☐ 6-15 employees (BIE, Coulee Collegiate, Jenner, OPS, Schuler, WPS)
   ☐ 16-22 employees (Foremost, Parkside, PMAS, Ralston, SCHS)
   ☐ 23-35 employees (Burdett, MWS, SGS, Seven Persons)
   ☐ 36+ employees (EBHS, Irvine, IFC, Division Office)

3. Do you work primarily at this location, or do you travel to multiple locations as part of your work assignment?
   ☐ I work primarily at this location.
   ☐ I work primarily at this location and travel occasionally to other locations.
   ☐ I primarily travel to multiple locations for my work,

4. In terms of a percentage, overall, how often do you typically approach the points of contact listed below to get clarification or information regarding communication that affects your work? (slider format)

Contact	Percentage (0-100)
My direct supervisor	0 → 100
A coworker	0 → 100
Contact at division office	0 → 100

Other - Type response _____	$0 \rightarrow 100$

5. Approximately, how often during your work schedule do you have the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with your supervisor?
- ☐ Multiple times a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ Twice a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Less than once a month

6. Approximately, how often during your daily work schedule are you able to check your email and/or access Prairie Rose news and information shared in an online format?
- ☐ I have full access to email and online information throughout the day.
- ☐ I have periodic (3-5 times) access to email and online information throughout the day.
- ☐ I have minimal (1-2 times) access to email and online information throughout the day.
- ☐ I have no access to email and online information throughout the day.

7. As it relates **to the school division as a whole**, please indicate your level of internal communication satisfaction with the following:

1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat satisfied, 5 = satisfied, 7 = not applicable

	Information related to changes taking place in the school division
	Extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process
	Extent to which I feel I can openly contribute feedback and ideas
	Extent to which I feel my ideas and opinions are listened to and appreciated
	Extent to which I feel part of a team environment
	Extent to which I feel my supervisor appropriately shares necessary division related information with me to do my job well

8. Based on your responses listed above, what suggestion(s) do you have for how satisfaction could be improved? *Open-ended text response.*

9. As it relates **to your specific school/work location**, please indicate your level of internal communication satisfaction with the following:

1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat satisfied, 5 = satisfied, 7 = not applicable

	Information related to changes taking place at my school
	Extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process
	Extent to which I feel I can openly contribute feedback and ideas
	Extent to which I feel my ideas and opinions are listened to and appreciated
	Extent to which I feel part of a team environment
	Extent to which I feel supported and given autonomy to do my job well
	Extent to which I feel my supervisor appropriately shares necessary information with me to do my job well

10. Based on your responses listed above, what suggestion(s) do you have for how satisfaction could be improved? *Open-ended text response.*

Section 2: Communication Tools and Channels

11. Listed below are a number of communication channels/methods frequently used by Prairie Rose Public Schools for sharing internal communication. *Please indicate your personal level of comfort with using each of the following for work-related communications by dragging the slider to the right or left.* If you aren't familiar with or haven't used the communication option before, choose the Not Applicable check box.

➔ Comfort is defined here as your ability to navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

11a. Instant/Direct Messaging (technology)
I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

Sliding Scale = Very uncomfortable (0-25), Neutral (26-74), Very Comfortable (75-100)

Channel Type	Very Uncomfortable		Very Comfortable

Email	$0 \rightarrow 100$
Text Messages	$0 \rightarrow 100$
Teams Chat messaging	$0 \rightarrow 100$
Phone Calls	$0 \rightarrow 100$

11b. Personal Face to Face Interactions
I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

Sliding Scale = Very uncomfortable (0-25), Neutral (26-74), Very Comfortable (75-100)

Channel Type	Very Uncomfortable		Very Comfortable
Openly contribute at staff meetings	$0 \rightarrow 100$		
Initiating one on one conversations with a supervisor	$0 \rightarrow 100$		
Approaching coworkers to get clarification about work-related matters	$0 \rightarrow 100$		

11c. Video Calls
I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

Sliding Scale = Very uncomfortable (0-25), Neutral (26-74), Very Comfortable (75-100)

Channel Type	Very Uncomfortable		Very Comfortable
Google Meets	$0 \rightarrow 100$		
Zoom meetings	$0 \rightarrow 100$		
Microsoft Teams meetings	$0 \rightarrow 100$		
Video conferencing (VC)	$0 \rightarrow 100$		

11d. Informal Information Sharing

I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

Sliding Scale = Very uncomfortable (0-25), Neutral (26-74), Very Comfortable (75-100)

Channel Type	Very Uncomfortable		Very Comfortable
PRPS Website	0 → 100		
PRPS Facebook	0 → 100		
PRPS Twitter	0 → 100		
PRPS Instagram	0 → 100		

12. Using the same list of communication channels, indicate your personal preference for each of the channels/methods listed under each category. **Check one (1) option that best describes your preference for each of the channels listed**.

➔ Preference is defined here by the channel/method you would choose to use based on accessibility and your ability to obtain the information in a timely manner; not specifically on the type of information being shared.

12a. Instant/Direct Messaging (technology)

	I prefer this channel and obtain information in a timely manner.	I receive necessary internal communication this way, although I don't prefer it.	I don't prefer this channel and have missed information in the past.	I am not familiar with this internal communication channel/method.
Email				
Text Messages				
Teams Chat messaging				
Phone Calls				

12b. Personal Face-to-Face Interactions

	I prefer this channel and obtain information in a timely manner.	I receive necessary internal communication this way, although I don't	I don't prefer this channel and have missed information in the past.	I am not familiar with this internal communication channel/method.

		prefer it.		
Staff meetings				
One-on-one conversations with a supervisor				
Informal conversations with coworkers				

12c. Video Calls

	I prefer this channel and obtain information in a timely manner.	I receive necessary internal communication this way, although I don't prefer it.	I don't prefer this channel and have missed information in the past.	I am not familiar with this internal communication channel/method.
Google Meets				
Zoom meetings				
Microsoft Teams meetings				
Video conferencing (VC)				

12d. Indirect Information Sharing

	I prefer this channel and obtain information in a timely manner.	I receive necessary internal communication this way, although I don't prefer it.	I don't prefer this channel and have missed information in the past.	I am not familiar with this internal communication channel/method.
PRPS Website				
PRPS Facebook				
PRPS Twitter				
PRPS Instagram				

13. Of the channels/methods of communication listed below, are there any that additional training could lead to an increase in overall satisfaction or preference with its use? Choose all that apply.

    ☐ Email
    ☐ Microsoft Teams (meets or chats)
    ☐ Google Meets
    ☐ Zoom meetings
    ☐ Navigating the division website
    ☐ Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
    ☐ Other _____

Section 3: Types of Internal Information

14. Listed below are various communications that would typically occur in a work environment. Please indicate how useful information regarding the following topics is to you, as it relates to your job.

1 = not very useful, 2 = somewhat useful, 3 = very useful, N/A = not applicable

	Information about company policies and goals
	Information about new programs or initiatives
	Information to assist with my work
	Information about budgetary and division spending
	Information about health and wellness
	information about pay and benefits
	Information about new job opportunities
	Information about trustee work and advocacy
	Information about technology-related items
	Information about upcoming maintenance projects
	Information about professional development and upgrading opportunities

15. Of the types of information that would typically occur in a work environment, indicate the method/channel you feel is best suited to get information about each topic. You may check as many as you like under each category.

	Indirect Messaging (email)	Direct Messaging (phone calls, text, Teams chat)	Personal Face-to-Face Interactions (staff meetings, one on one conversations)	Video Calls (Meets, Teams, Zoom)	Indirect Information Sharing (website, social media, posters)
Information about company policies and goals					
Information about new programs or initiatives					
Information to assist with my work					
Information about budgetary and division spending					
Information about health and wellness					
Information about pay and benefits					
Information about new job opportunities					
Information about trustee work and advocacy					
Information about technology-related items					
Information about upcoming maintenance projects					
Information about professional development and upgrading opportunities					

16. Do you have suggestions for how internal communications sharing practices regarding any of these topics could be improved? *Open-ended text response.*

17. Currently, Prairie Rose Public Schools distributes a video blog via email for staff called the *Prairie Rose Insider*. Have you watched it before?
- ☐ Yes (go to question 18)
- ☐ No (go to Section 4)
- ☐ I have heard of it, but haven't watched it before (go to question 20)
- ☐ Unsure (go to section 4)

18. Do you think the *Prairie Rose Insider* is an effective means of communicating with employees?
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

19. Do you have suggestions for how the Prairie Rose Insider could be improved? *Open-ended text response.*

20. Explain why you haven't watched the Prairie Rose Insider before?

Open-ended text response.

Section 4: District Level Communication

21. The purpose of internal communication is to ensure that employees across the organization feel connected, informed and engaged in current events and initiatives. Overall, how satisfied are you with Prairie Rose Public Schools' internal communication practices?
- ☐ Very dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Very satisfied

22. What are some communication practices you think Prairie Rose Public Schools does well? *Open-ended text response.*

23. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following:

1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat satisfied, 5 = satisfied

	Extent to which the communication in Prairie Rose Public Schools makes me identify or feel a part of the organization
	Extent to which Prairie Rose Public Schools communications are timely and interesting
	Extent to which <u>informal</u> information is active and accurate
	Extent to which communication practices are adaptable to emergencies
	Extent to which employee attitudes toward communication in Prairie Rose Public Schools are basically healthy (people feel they get what they need)
	Extent to which the amount of communication in Prairie Rose Public Schools is about right

24. How do you think your personal internal communication satisfaction could be improved? *Open-ended text response.*

Section 5: COVID-19 Communications

25. How do you feel Prairie Rose Public Schools has handled communication during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following:

1 = very dissatisfied, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = somewhat satisfied, 5 = satisfied

	Extent to which information related to COVID-19 guideline changes have been prompt and effective
	Extent to which the frequency of information during the pandemic has been appropriate and timely
	Extent to which COVID-19 messages and information have been easy to understand

26. Do you feel overall Prairie Rose Public Schools' internal communications have improved, declined, or stayed the same since the onset of the pandemic?

☐ Improved
☐ Declined
☐ Stayed the same
☐ Don't know/Not sure

27. Do you have any suggestions for how communication could have been improved throughout the pandemic? *Open-ended text response.*

Section 6: Communication Actions - Email Example

Primarily, Prairie Rose Public Schools distributes internal information to all employees via email. The next section focuses on the use of email in the school division to understand employee perspectives on its effectiveness.

28. On average, how much of the communication shared with you via email do you actually read?
☐ 100%
☐ 75%
☐ 50%
☐ 25%
☐ I don't use my email very often.

29. What criteria do you look for when making a decision to read an email for Prairie Rose staff? What criteria do you look for when making a decision to read an email for Prairie Rose staff? **Choose the top three responses** that would most accurately represent your actions.
☐ Who sent the email
☐ The subject line. Is it clear and the topic well identified?
☐ The email content
☐ Length of the email
☐ How the email content is organized. Is the text clear and headings well defined?
☐ Whether the email is marked as urgent
☐ I don't often read information sent by email
☐ Other _____

30. You are spending some time catching up on your emails from the day. In your inbox, you see an email from a division office staff member containing links and information about a new employee initiative. Which response would most accurately describe what you do next?
☐ Read it in its entirety as information only
☐ Read it in its entirety and follow up with any requests for action immediately

☐ Skim over the whole message and leave any requests for action until later
☐ Read the first few lines of the message and then close it. You'll get back to it later.
☐ Remind yourself to read it later and forget about it
☐ Ignore it
☐ Delete it
☐ Other _____

31. Do you have any overall thoughts regarding the use of email as a two-way method of communication from the division to employees in Prairie Rose Public Schools? *Open-ended text response.*

Section 7: Final Considerations

32. Do you have any suggestions for how Prairie Rose Public Schools could improve current communication practices? *Open-ended text response.*

33. Is there anything else you would like to mention about internal communication practices in Prairie Rose Public Schools that were not covered in this survey? *Open-ended text response.*

This is the end of the survey. By hitting the SUBMIT button your responses will be recorded and you will not be able to go back into the survey to make changes or have the ability to have your responses withdrawn. If you do not wish to have your data recorded, do not hit SUBMIT.

End of Survey Message: Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey aimed at exploring internal communication satisfaction in an organizational context with Prairie Rose Public Schools, a rural K-12 school division serving as a case for the study.

Part B of the research will focus on specific incidents of communication. This will include gathering the perceptions and thoughts from employees working for Prairie Rose Public Schools regarding daily internal communication practices consisting of interviews with 3-5 employees. Interviews will be 30-45 minutes in length and will be done one-on-one via Zoom to protect employee confidentiality. To participate in an interview, please sign up below.

Link to sign up for an interview: LINK

Appendix B - Survey Results Report

Survey Participation Consent

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I consent to participate in the survey (Part A) as outlined above.	90.91%	100
2	I do not wish to participate in the survey.	9.09%	10
	Total	100%	110

By choosing to respond to the following question, you will no longer receive reminders to complete the survey. While a response is not required, the researcher is interested in your reasons for not participating.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I prefer not to answer.	40.00%	4
2	I do not feel comfortable participating due to concerns about confidentiality.	10.00%	1
3	I do not have the time to complete the survey.	50.00%	5
4	I do not wish to disclose a reason for not participating.	0.00%	0
5	I do not wish to participate in the survey, however, I would still be interested in taking part in a one-on-one interview.	0.00%	0
6	Other - Type response below	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	10

Section 1: Employee Information.

Q1 - Section 1: General Information   How long have you worked for Prairie Rose Public Schools?

#	Answer	%	Count
5	16-24 years	22.00%	22
4	8-15 years	28.00%	28
3	4-7 years	19.00%	19
6	25+ years	12.00%	12
2	1-3 years	11.00%	11
1	Under one year	8.00%	8
	Total	100%	100

Q2 - Approximately how many people work at your assigned school/office location?

#	Answer	%	Count
5	36+ employees (EBHS, Irvine, IFC, Division Office)	32.00%	32
3	16-22 employees (Foremost, Parkside, PMAS, Ralston, SCHS)	27.00%	27
2	6-15 employees (BIE, Coulee Collegiate, Jenner, OPS, Schuler, WPS)	21.00%	21
4	23-35 employees (Burdett, MWS, SGS, Seven Persons)	16.00%	16
1	1-5 employees (Colony Schools, New Brigden, Home Plus)	4.00%	4
	Total	100%	100

Q3 - Do you work primarily at this location or do you travel to multiple locations as part of your work assignment?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I work primarily at this location.	88.30%	83
2	I work primarily at this location and travel occasionally to other locations.	5.32%	5
6	I primarily travel to multiple locations for my work,	6.38%	6
	Total	100%	94

Q4 - In terms of a percentage, overall, how often do you typically approach the points of contact listed below to get clarification or information regarding communication that affects your work?

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	My direct supervisor	49.32	94
2	A coworker	52.40	90
3	Contact at division office	25.49	76
4	Other - Type response below	25.79	19

Other - Type response below - Text
- no problem knowing what is required of me   - students   - Speech and other services   - Same role at other schools or IT   - someone at another school   - Colleagues at other schools   - Professional Association   - Learning Coach   - School Admin so check in with the department necessary   - Instructional Coach   - school-based staff   - School Administrators

Q5 - Approximately, how often during your work schedule do you have the opportunity to have one-on-one conversations with your supervisor?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Every day	42.86%	42
2	Multiple times each week	32.65%	32
3	Once a week	12.24%	12
4	Twice a month	7.14%	7
6	Less than once a month	3.06%	3
5	Once a month	2.04%	2
	Total	100%	98

Q6 - Approximately, how often during your daily work schedule are you able to check your email and/or access Prairie Rose news and information shared in an online format?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I have full access to email and online information throughout the day	58.16%	57
2	I have periodic (3-5 times) access to email and online information throughout the day	26.53%	26
3	I have minimal (1-2 times) access to email and online information throughout the day	13.27%	13
4	I have no access to email and online information throughout the day	2.04%	2
	Total	100%	98

Q7 - As it relates to the school division as a whole, please indicate your level of internal communication satisfaction with the following:

#	Field	Mean	Count
6	Extent to which I feel my supervisor appropriately shares necessary division related information with me to do my job well	4.12	98
1	Information related to changes taking place in the school division	3.96	99
5	Extent to which I feel part of a team environment	3.69	98
3	Extent to which I feel I can openly contribute feedback and ideas	3.69	98
4	Extent to which I feel my ideas and opinions are listened to and appreciated	3.56	97
2	Extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process	3.33	98

Q8 - Based on your responses listed above, what suggestion(s) do you have for how satisfaction could be improved?

- It has been improving slowly
- communication in general amongst staff
- There needs to be better communication
- Accepting and inputting more ideas from the "front lines"
- Better communication meeting with the EA's that directly work with the kids
- Almost everything comes as a surprise, in both directions. It seems as though leadership has no concept of timelines and responsibilities that rest with us and we have no idea of the timelines for our leaders. A good example is a recent mandatory meeting, whose date was switched. We got an email indicating the switch, without either of us ever having been given any of the original information about the meeting. Without the time change, we might never have known. Also, it was such short notice - it was complicated to work it into already pressed-tight scheduling.
- Sometimes less is more. Sometimes it feels that too much news/too many events/resources are just too much to handle. I often feel that I don't have the time to sift through everything: insiders, multiple newsletters, activities, etc. This then leads to feelings of burnout and inadequacy because I'm not keeping up with these extras because other work demands take immediate priority.
- My administration team often gives the response of "when time is right" to share information. I would like my administration team to share information when asked a direct question.

- As a classroom teacher my communication with Division Office comes through and is returned through my principal. I don't not take my ideas, thoughts and concerns directly to Division Office as it is not my place. I am happy with that arrangement.
- I am happy with how it is
- Doesn't need to be a top-down process, so the workers are sitting waiting for a filter-down communication process.
- Teachers are NOT included in decision-making and are usually the last to know. I feel, especially in the past 2 years that our opinion is highly disregarded.
- I honestly dislike "long" pieces of info - (such as the newsletter from the coaches) - I love all the info...but it overwhelms me as I keep scrolling down and I keep finding more. I'd rather shorter more frequent info. All the "extra" groups to "belong to" - add to 'more things to do' ~ I don't have time to keep up with them all!
- Stronger communication and a team approach.
- Regular meetings or emails with my supervisor and team members so information could be shared with me would be beneficial, especially since I don't have an actual "office "
- In-person consultations or check-ins with administrators and other staff at their schools so division office administrative team can fully understand the environment and things happening at each building.
- utilize employees for the skill set they can bring to the table instead of always relying on past practices - understand what each employee's skill set is and how can be beneficial in discussions and decision-making for the division
- I would love more frequent staff meetings or even emails sharing things that are new - new initiatives, plans, accomplishments... also helps make sure all the potential stakeholders that might need to weigh in get an opportunity to do so
- Head office seems a little disconnected from the rest of us. Feels like they make a decision without talking to others.
- It isn't the communications [...] who makes me feel like I'm not listened to or appreciated. She can only work within the confines of what she is allowed to release. I feel like I am kept in a bubble. The less I know, the more likely I am to just fall into line and do my job, and because I am "just" a teacher, decisions on a larger scale are not something I should have a say in. These are all issues with leadership, not communications.
- Onboarding for new teachers
- More stakeholder collaboration
- New programming, etc., should be consulted with those that will use the programming before it is implemented. Proper training should also be available BEFORE the program is implemented.   There are members of Central Office that are very closed-minded and will not review documentation when asked to do so. Very frustrating when an employee is trying to resolve issues, ie payroll issues.
- It seems that often one or two schools are asked for input or to try new programs, etc. Sometimes meetings, PD, etc. "sprung" on us at last minute.
- A few times decision have been made regarding our specific team but we were unaware. This is over a period of years that this has happened so different teams etc.

Q9 - As it relates to your specific school/work location, please indicate your level of internal communication satisfaction with the following:

#	Field	Mean	Count
7	Extent to which I feel my supervisor appropriately shares necessary division-related information with me to do my job well	4.27	97

6	Extent to which I feel supported and given autonomy to do my job well	4.16	96
3	Extent to which I feel I can openly contribute feedback and ideas	4.02	97
1	Information related to changes taking place at my school	4.00	96
4	Extent to which I feel my ideas and opinions are listened to and appreciated	3.94	96
5	Extent to which I feel part of a team environment	3.89	96
2	Extent to which I feel included in the decision-making process	3.57	96

Q10 - Based on your responses listed above, what suggestion(s) do you have for how satisfaction could be improved?

- no concerns
- need to communicate to work as a team
- There needs to be better communication from Administration. Tired of things being secretive and only on a need-to-know basis. Our opinions are not valued. Administration Opinions and ideas are the only ones that count. Communication is key for any organization and if it fails nothing is going to work.
- The division to me through the teacher may not be needed in my position
- Feeling supported and having autonomy are not the same thing!
- The internal issues of communication at my school between staff and administrators were not addressed through these questions, so not applicable here, I guess.
- My administration team does not look for staff input when it comes time to discuss ideas and/or changes. My administration team tells us what will be happening instead of seeking input from staff members. I would like to have my input/suggestions listened to. I do not feel valued in my school.
- Things are going well and our school is running quite smoothly.
- I feel that because of my supervisor's busy schedule, it is hard to have one on one discussions or real conversations during our work day. It is unfortunately after hours that we can actually have time to visit/discuss.
- I am happy with how it is.
- Communication has been a real problem at my school. Even information I require to do my job effectively is not always provided and causes a lot of extra work and problems.
- There has been little communication shared as of late regarding specific details pertaining to our school. For example, when staff will be away for an extended period of time, new positions or teaching assignments being hired, etc.
- I am the principal of the school and therefore can't comment on these statements
- Just feel secluded sometimes, not like a group/team environment. We are split here, would be nice to be all together in a common area. An office is nice sometimes but gets lonely and quiet.
- Communication, transparency, equity, team approach, support to do my job.
- I hardly receive information updates from my supervisor and feel that I am often a second thought in their mind
- Satisfaction could be improved with communication between staff members remaining professional and not becoming unprofessional and unproductive.
- supervisors need to trust that they hired employees with the right skill set to get the job done - consider new practices versus the same old way of doing things
- I feel very supported in my position by my team, supervisor, and upper management
- At my specific location there are internal issues in departments, and leadership is very focused on "high standards" which results in "high standardization". (Everyone has to teach the same lessons, on the same day, give the same tests and grade in the same manner - which is proven to

> be a horrible way to teach). It would be nice to have some autonomy in my classroom.
> - More Stakeholder collaboration
> - Immediate supervisor is very good with communication, updates is very supportive and appreciates a job well done!

Section 2: Communication Tools and Channels

Q11a - Instant/Direct Messaging (technology) I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

#	Field	Mean	Count
2	Text messages	94.86	91
1	Email	92.67	95
3	Phone calls	91.21	92
4	Teams chat messaging	68.89	83

Q11b - Personal Face-to-Face Interactions I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	Approaching coworkers to get clarification about work-related matters	88.46	95
2	Initiating one on one conversations with a supervisor	86.71	96
3	Openly contribute at staff meetings	80.79	91

Q11c - Video Calls I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

#	Field	Mean	Count
2	Zoom meetings	85.87	89
1	Google Meets	85.73	93
3	Microsoft Teams meetings	66.00	72
4	Video conferencing (VC)	64.70	60

Q11d - Information Sharing I can navigate and use the channel/method for communicating with ease.

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	PRPS Website	80.72	95
2	PRPS Facebook	79.92	76
4	PRPS Instagram	63.50	48
3	PRPS Twitter	61.84	56

Q12a - Instant/Direct Messaging (technology)

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	Email	1.12	98

2	Text Messages	1.51	95
4	Phone Calls	1.73	95
3	Teams Chat Messaging	2.62	95

Q12b - Personal Face to Face Interactions

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	Staff meetings	1.35	94
2	One on one conversations with a supervisor	1.16	96
3	Information conversations with coworkers	1.14	94

Q12c - Video Calls

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	Google Meets	1.62	97
2	Zoom meetings	1.72	98
3	Microsoft Teams meetings	2.65	95
4	Video conferencing (VC)	2.85	93

Q12d - Indirect Information Sharing

#	Field	Mean	Count
1	PRPS Website	1.69	98
2	PRPS Facebook	2.13	95
3	PRPS Twitter	2.88	92
4	PRPS Instagram	3.03	90

Q13 - Of the channels/methods of communication listed below, are there any that additional training could lead to an increase in overall satisfaction or preference with its use? Choose all that apply.

#	Answer	%	Count
2	Microsoft Teams (meets or chats)	32.14%	27
5	Navigating the division website	23.81%	20
6	Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	16.67%	14
3	Google Meets	9.52%	8
1	Email	8.33%	7
4	Zoom meetings	4.76%	4
7	Other - Type response below	4.76%	4
	Total	100%	84

Other - Type response below - Text
- Anything that actually allows for an open and ongoing flow of communication   - Happy with communication

> - I'm good with using media
> - I find the documents on the website as well as the documents within the admin centre very hard to navigate. It is not always obvious where to look for something and I find I waste a lot of time looking. Perhaps more folders or a different directory system. I am not sure but it needs to be addressed. Just looking for the pages with all the phone numbers is difficult and not obvious.

Section 3: Types of Internal Information

Q14 -Listed below are various communications that would typically occur in a work environment. Please indicate how useful information regarding the following topics is to you, as it relates to your job.

#	Field	Mean	Count
3	Information to assist with my work	2.84	97
11	Information about professional development and upgrading opportunities	2.66	97
2	Information about new programs or initiatives	2.66	97
6	information about pay and benefits	2.63	97
9	Information about technology-related items	2.55	97
5	Information about health and wellness	2.37	97
7	Information about new job opportunities	2.34	97
4	Information about budgetary and division spending	2.30	97
10	Information about upcoming maintenance projects	2.29	97
8	Information about trustee work and advocacy	2.15	97

Q15 - Of the types of information that would typically occur in a work environment, indicate the method/channel you feel is best suited to get information about each topic. You may choose as many as you like under each category.

Question	Indirect Messaging		Direct Messaging		Personal Face to Face Interactions		Video Calls		Indirect Information Sharing		Total
Information about company policies and goals	55.48%	81	5.48%	8	17.12%	25	6.85%	10	15.07%	22	146
Information about new programs or initiatives	43.87%	68	9.03%	14	21.94%	34	10.97%	17	14.19%	22	155
Information to assist with my work	35.15%	71	17.82%	36	30.20%	61	12.38%	25	4.46%	9	202
Information about budgetary and division spending	58.14%	75	6.20%	8	17.05%	22	6.20%	8	12.40%	16	129
Information about health and wellness	57.33%	86	9.33%	14	11.33%	17	6.67%	10	15.33%	23	150
Information about pay and benefits	52.60%	81	14.94%	23	19.48%	30	6.49%	10	6.49%	10	154
Information about new job opportunities	59.85%	82	5.11%	7	5.11%	7	2.92%	4	27.01%	37	137
Information about trustee work and advocacy	57.85%	70	3.31%	4	3.31%	4	1.65%	2	33.88%	41	121
Information about technology-related items	51.27%	81	11.39%	18	15.19%	24	9.49%	15	12.66%	20	158
Information about upcoming maintenance projects	59.12%	81	8.76%	12	13.14%	18	4.38%	6	14.60%	20	137
Information about professional development and upgrading opportunities	52.12%	86	9.09%	15	17.58%	29	7.27%	12	13.94%	23	165

Q16 - Do you have suggestions for how internal communications sharing practices regarding any of these topics could be improved?

- Truthfully - unless you are in attendance at a board or executive meeting - very little information actually gets shared around the division.
- Just keeping us up to date in a staff meeting would be sufficient. Seem to be on a need to know basis and only certain ones need to know!
- A Division news channel in Teams?
- Central Office employees assume that folks in the district know how to use Teams... most school staff do not know Teams, especially since there has been ZERO training on Teams for general staff. Information videos -eg short video messages from leaders, etc - are not part of this survey. I feel that they fill an important role in getting an accurate message about plans, goals, policies, initiatives, out to staff in a reliable manner.
- While reading emails can be tedious at least I can choose to read the information. Not providing information or solely relying on supervisors to share information can result in details not being shared as intended.
- Refuse to use Social Media.
- Just more frequent :)
- more transparency. Stop deciding what staff "need" to know and just share it all with us.

Q17 - Currently, Prairie Rose Public Schools distributes a video blog via email for staff called the Prairie Rose Insider. Are aware of this communication initiative?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	73.47%	72
4	Unsure	1.02%	1
2	No	11.22%	11
3	I have heard of it, but haven't watched it before	14.29%	14
	Total	100%	98

Q18 - Do you think the Prairie Rose Insider is an effective means of communicating with employees?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	55.71%	39
2	No	15.71%	11
3	Unsure	28.57%	20
	Total	100%	70

Q19 - Do you have suggestions for how the Prairie Rose Insider could be improved?

- i dont get to it becuase it is not in my radar
- Just put it on the website.
- The staff who care to stay informed watch it. Many don't watch it, but these are typically the same staff who don't read emails, etc... Principals could chose 1 of the episodes/month that is pertinent to their staff and play it at a staff meeting to ensure all have seen it.
- I don't have time to view it
- In order to listen to videos with sound, my smartboard must be turned on meaning I won't do it while anyone else is in the classroom or I have to remember to do it at home. An email form of this would be much better and used more often by myself.

- I don't care about the topics being covered. It's just PR fluff.
- This is an interesting question, as I do think it is, but I don't always actually take it in... I have watched/viewed it less this year than in the past... I am unsure if the link was emailed directly to me before, or my admin directed us to it in the past? Not sure, but it is not a bad way to communicate, but in my day to day, I don't think of going to it...
- Email direct link to all employees
- I would rather see admins sharing things with us rather than bits from tech and bits from payroll and bits from transportation... I think updates/tips/training/etc from departments are better done in a staff meeting or some other way. Maybe I just don't quite get the purpose of the PRI.
- I feel it is very geared to the teachers, which I get it we are a school division and education is first. How ever there are other employ's who work here too that help the schools run smoothly. There is Maintenance, Plumbing, Painting, Custodians, just to name a few who though one may get a shout out, there really isn't anything in there for them ever.
- scrap it. no one has time to watch it.
- I am not really sure people are watching the Prairie Rose Insider. It may be more effective to host information sessions on the topics to allow staff to attend and ask questions.
- Time to watch will be an issue...

Q20 - Can you share why you haven't chosen to watch the Prairie Rose Insider?

- Finding time to watch is the biggest barrier
- No time
- Never thought about it until you asked the question?
- No time
- Do not have the time.
- mostly - no time

Section 4: District Level Communication

Q21 - Section 4: District Level Communication   The purpose of internal communication is to ensure that employees across the organization feel connected, informed and engaged in current events and initiatives. Overall, how satisfied are you with Prairie Rose Public Schools' internal communication practices?

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Somewhat satisfied	35.71%	35
5	Very satisfied	31.63%	31
3	Neutral	16.33%	16
2	Somewhat dissatisfied	10.20%	10
1	Very dissatisfied	6.12%	6
	Total	100%	98

Q22 - What are some communication practices you think Prairie Rose Public Schools does well?

- They are great at what they want the general public to know. Our strategy around this is top

notch.
- Job opportunities
- I feel communication through email on internal items is best and has been adequate. It allows employees to email file appropriately for future reference if need be.   I like the Insider as it often contains photos or videos to connect us to the happenings and give visual to some work being done in other school which is great.
- Gives an abundance of info
- Email is well utilized and ensures everyone is a recipient since email addresses are division-assigned. It's nice to have some of the communication centralized and handled from the division office end as there is a lot of things need disseminating and it can be overwhelming if not handled as such.
- Videos from leadership when there are important announcements. Newsletters from different departments
- I work in a specialized program and never feel left out.I can access any information if I'm motivated to do so.
- Email
- Staff meetings, interschool communication, intra school communication, emails.
- Within the division - somewhat satisfied, within my school - very dissatisfied
- Many things are shared in what almost seems a hidden fashion. Embedded in a website or social media post instead of direct communication with staff.
- The wellness initiatives have been communicated about well.
- If I ever have questions anyone is more then happy to help me, or if they can't they direct me to the person that can.
- Instructional Coach Newsletter has the most valuable information for staff
- Informing us of info from the AB gov't wellness learning coach info
- prairie rose insider social media email
- emails phone messages
- Letting everyone know when changes are happening at division office, it's nice to be in the know of these things.
- New job postings are continually popping up which is nice if you are looking for a new position. Sometimes I am overwhelmed with the number of emails I receive but I also know that they come from outside sources, not just PRPS.   I like finding out what it happening in other schools in our division.
- Email and webpage
- video messages from the Superintendent to share news or new programming - more personal & informative
- I like our staff meetings - whether in person or virtual. I also like when we get email updates about various things.
- great communication on what you do share - but there is so much that we are in the dark about.
- Emails announcing major staffing changes are good. Also school messenger to staff works well.
- Health and Wellness Bulletins
- I think you have many places to go to get information ie) website, social media and email. I think using the DL is good but you can only be signed up under one group so if they use that at your school and you have more than one school you are not included.   I have always like the school groups on emails as it keeps me updated.

Q23 - Please rate your personal level of internal communication satisfaction with the following:

#	Field	Mean	Count
4	Extent to which communication practices are adaptable to emergencies	4.21	97
3	Extent to which informal information is active and accurate	3.97	97
2	Extent to which Prairie Rose Public Schools communications are timely and interesting	3.85	97
6	Extent to which the amount of communication in Prairie Rose Public Schools is about right	3.81	97
5	Extent to which employee attitudes toward communication in Prairie Rose Public Schools are basically healthy (people feel they get what they need)	3.76	97
1	Extent to which the communication in Prairie Rose Public Schools makes me identify or feel a part of the organization	3.64	97

Q24 - How do you think your personal internal communication satisfaction could be improved?

- Internal communication practices need to become the norm and not the exception. It often seems as though information is mainly shared when there is a major change (i.e someone leaving) or there is an emergency of some kind. It is easier to find internal information on social media than it is through any internal capacity
- As a person who seeks to be informed, I am satisfied that communication/information is generally available. I do get frustrated with colleagues who make no/little effort to stay informed and then complain about not knowing things. Insta/Facebook is where lots of staff see things, That is the best place to promote/advocate and paint a positive picture of the wide variety of learning that is happening in PRPS
- I feel like some of the extra, non-essential communication could be reduced.
- distribution lists, while somewhat convenient, are also unwieldy and unrealistic for support staff
- I would appreciate more direct information being shared from leaders in a timely fashion - before it hits social media for example.
- I think more training needs to happened with new employees on all of the methods of communication. I was unaware of alot of things when I first started that I felt I had to figure out on my own or call someone and ask for help as no one ever actually showed me how to use the website, how to use teams or how to navagate google drive or classroom.
- I feel I get too many emails. I know staff doesn't feel they have time to look at all the information sent out.
- big challenge - we try email - people get too many - we update website - no one looks there - staff meetings, PD days, SI days: best way to communicate is face to face
- I think it's been improving since Hone a bit. I like frequent checkins. Would like more opportunties to connect with Admins about projects, requests, or just how we are doing. I don't really like the chain of command style of communication; where if I have something to say it needs to go to my supervisor, who talks to admins. Or if admins have a request it has to go through supervisors and then to the employee. I'm all for keeping everyone in the loop, group/team meetings, etc, but I also appreciate being able to access admins and admins access employees directly :)

Section 5: COVID-19 Communications

Q25 - How do you feel Prairie Rose Public Schools has handled internal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic? Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following:

#	Field	Mean	Count
2	Extent to which the frequency of information during the pandemic has been appropriate and timely	4.32	97
1	Extent to which information related to COVID-19 guideline changes have been prompt and effective	4.32	98
3	Extent to which COVID-19 messages and information have been easy to understand	4.10	98

Q26 - Do you feel overall Prairie Rose Public Schools' internal communications have improved, declined, or stayed the same since the onset of the pandemic?

#	Answer	%	Count
3	Stayed the same	31.63%	31
1	Improved	52.04%	51
4	Don't know/Not sure	14.29%	14
2	Declined	2.04%	2
	Total	100%	98

Q27 - Do you have any suggestions for how communication could have been improved throughout the pandemic?

- Pandemic communication was timely, effective and re-assuring
- Communication should be shared with all staff not just admin to share on a need to know basis.
- At times there was to much information regarding Covid 19. Send out essential information.
- Pandemic Communication does not equal general/non-pandemic communication
- I don't think improvement was necessary. Communication was effective and efficient.
- In my opinion,PRRD could not have done a better job during such difficult times.
- I think that communication was good, I as a parent received texts and emails regarding any pandemic updates, etc... I think it's hard when no one wants to hear the message, and it was difficult because the message was always having to change, but that wasn't in PRSD's control... I think PRSD did the best it could in a crap situation that the Government made you manage.
- We rocked the pandemic communications
- it seemed like you were communicating changes too fast, because the next day, they'd change again. Don't rush it. Collect all the information and then release the information. It could have prevented all of staff feeling the "back and forth" so much.
- Improved in some areas

Section 6: Communication Actions - Email Example

Q28 - On average, how much of the communication shared with you via email do you actually read?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	100%	45.92%	45

2		75%	41.84%	41
3		50%	9.18%	9
4		25%	3.06%	3
5		I don't read my email very often.	0.00%	0
		Total	100%	98

Q29 - What criteria do you look for when making a decision to read an email for Prairie Rose staff? Choose the top three responses that would most accurately represent your actions.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Who sent the email	28.21%	77
2	The subject line. Is it clear and the topic well identified?	28.21%	77
3	The email content	20.51%	56
4	Length of the email	8.06%	22
5	How the email content is organized. Is the text clear and headings well defined?	7.69%	21
6	Whether the email is marked as urgent	6.23%	17
7	I don't often read information sent by email	0.00%	0
8	Other - Type response below	1.10%	3
	Total	100%	273

Other - Type response below - Text
● I read it all   ● It doesn't matter who sent it or what it's about, I read it. Unless it's vendor spam   ● Only about 1% of the e-mail I receive is actually for me so I take a quick glance before I hit delete.

Q30 - You are spending some time catching up on your emails from the day. In your inbox, you see an email from a division office staff member containing links and information about a new employee initiative. Which response would most accurately describe what you do next?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Read it in its entirety as information only	7.14%	7
2	Read it in its entirety and follow up with any requests for action immediately	29.59%	29
3	Skim over the whole message and leave any requests for action until later	44.90%	44
4	Read the first few lines of the message and then close it. You'll get back to it later.	9.18%	9
5	Remind yourself to read it later and forget about it	3.06%	3
6	Ignore it	3.06%	3
7	Delete it	1.02%	1
8	Other - Type response below	2.04%	2
	Total	100%	98

Other - Type response below - Text
● It depends on who it is from and what it is about. Sometimes it will be handled urgently and other times it is disregarded ● Read it, decide if it pertained to me. If not delete. If yes proceed

Q31 - Do you have any overall thoughts regarding the use of email as a two-way method of communication from the division to employees in Prairie Rose Public Schools?

- On a daily basis - we get too much email already. I think a process or clear heading would need to be identified. My preference would be to have general information communications stored somewhere and then a message that indicates there is a new post or something so that the communication does not get lost in the email black hole
- Make emails as clear and concise as possible.
- Email can be a great way of communication but it can be too much at times. When we are expected to be attached to it 24 hrs a day is sometimes too much. We do have lives outside of work hours and it this pandemic has taught us something it should be to spend time with family and friends and for personal down time to relax and not worry about work 24 hrs a day.
- I think it still is the best method to be able to relay relevant information in a timely manner and to the extent and detail it should be. I also like that I can see who else received the information so I know the opportunity for other staff members to know the information the same as I was given to them. It is also helpful as a reference should I need to revisit the specifics at a later time.
- Some information can be utilized on the website that may not pertain to everyone. People may use the website more to look for information regarding the division.
- If it is not personally for me I don't really read it as I don't have time
- This is the most reliable method. It leaves a "trail" of communication. It is easy to attach links, videos, and other important information. I use this for non-emergency communication and information that needs to be acted on or responded to, or contains lots of info /steps, etc. If time is tight and i know the respondent well, I text, especially if I just need a quick confirmation, piece of info, etc
- no
- It has been my preferred method of communication, and I have, for the most part, received timely responses.
- works for me
- I do not have nor desire Twitter, Facebook or Instagram so therefore the questions involving those are not applicable.
- It works well. Of course, the only problem is confirmation of your message having been received and read. Simply impossible
- Not all teaching/school staff are able to access emails until the end of the day (I don't check email when I'm teaching) so for urgent/time-sensitive matters, or contests where "the first two people that email the answers win", are not a good use of email.
- I think that the subject line and the organization of the email is critical. Length also matters but first impressions are most important.
- In some cases, it is hard to know who to send the email to as I get confused with the roles of some of the division staff. It would be good to have defined roles on the website so you can direct your email appropriately.
- no

- I don't think Prairie Rose really values their employee's time. In the past yes, but not anymore. Just do whatever is most time effective and VALUES my time.
- I enjoy email as a two way method of communication as I can respond when the time is available to me versus being required to take a phone call from example.
- I prefer email for the reason that you can read at your own time without being rushed and maybe misunderstand the message
- It is one of the best ways for me to receive communication from division because I have access to it every day. There are so many ways to communicate ie twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email that it is necessary to limit the number of items that I look at. Because I look at email daily, I choose to commit to this form of communication rather than the other ones.
- Very happy with it and can re read it again if I need to
- my concern is those school-based employees who do not work at a computer during the day - we should not expect they receive email to their phone but each school leader should be scheduling time each day/week for those employees to sit down at a computer and review their PRPS email account
- If it's simply info/request and only one reply needed, then email is fine. If there is apt to be a lot of back and forth, a phone call or Teams message is a far better way to go.
- I prefer getting e-mails from division office as if it applies to me I can save it and it will be easy to find, or print out and have at my desk. Also if its not for me I can make it vanish quick not cluttering up my phone.
- it is preferred.
- Email is still the most effective and efficient way of communication however we could use teams chat more as a division.
- Excellent communication tool for most but some support staff may not be able to access it as often as they would like.
- I like it! You can always go back, sometimes when texts are used too much it can get overwhelming.

Section 7: Final Considerations

Q32 - Do you have any suggestions for how Prairie Rose Public Schools could improve current communication practices?

- Developing some strategies to use communication to bring us closer together as a school division.
- Too many methods of communication. Now I am checking text messages, emails, AND teams messages.
- Unless it is an emergency communication should be kept as close to work hours as much as possible.
- None.
- Sometimes communication isn't about the "tool". Communication and the quality of it is greatly impacted by the sender. This includes clarity, timeliness, professionalism, interest... (eg. some staff are great at responding via any tool, others are less reliable)
- I have nothing to suggest.
- Nothing
- Sometimes as a parent in the district, there is too much information sent out through school messenger, that it gets tuned out.
- Admin meeting notes shared with school staff (our old principal did this but not our current)

- for all staff to have access to be able to check messages or emails. Cell phones are not always allowed support staff do not have chrome books to access
- Be transparent it seems only some people get all the info
- Information put in a table format is easier to read than a paragraph. If information lends itself to a table format, I would find it easier and quicker to read because you organized the information for me.
- happy with everything
- weekly updates where all groups i.e. technology, maintenance, communications, admin team, etc have a chance to tell people about upcoming or current projects
- we need to work on changing the culture of employees & departments operating in silo - understand that all of our work has an impact on the organization and before proceeding, broadening our perspectives and asking who will be impacted by this and has this been communicated to them - abolish the idea that information is power and instead look for ways to better share information for the overall good of PRPS
- Lean into Teams more :)
- be more transparent.
- Find out what people want/need to know and follow their initiative

Q33 - Is there anything else you would like to mention about internal communication practices in Prairie Rose Public Schools that were not covered in this survey?

- Not at this time.
- None.
- I feel some information is suited more for the website then sent via teacher email. Information coming to teacher email could be just teacher specific. If they want to know about other information such as what the board is doing, division inform that does not pertain directly to teachers.
- Teams - no training, AND general staff have limited abilities within Teams
- Nothing
- moving forward in communication should include all staff it is important to be on the same page all the time receiving news for an event or change of any kind a day late does not make one feel included
- A few times we did not get information that our administration received at their monthly meeting. But we heard it from other teachers in the area. I am not sure how to improve that. This is not to do with division office but more with administration in our school. I find that, at times, the administration does not communicate clearly with our staff. I do not think that it is intentional but more that the mind of our head administration is not wired to see all the necessary details that are required for everyone to feel that they are in the loop as to what is going on in our school.
- If emails are regarding meeting dates and times to send out reminders the day before.
- I think everything has been covered
- be more transparent in the communications, please.
- I find the Health and Wellness emails as well as the Hone surveys useless and too time-consuming. I feel they are of no benefit to me and that the Hone survey is not done accurately by many of us and any information collected is therefore inaccurate as well. I feel the money spent on this could be better allocated.
- We get a lot of wellness information via email and sometimes I do not read any due to the amount of information being sent.

Appendix C - Interview Consent Form and Interview Script

Interview Participation Consent Form
Exploring Internal Communication Satisfaction: The case study of a rural K-12 school division

Investigator/Researcher
Angela Baron, 403-952-8193, abaron1@ualberta.ca

The researcher will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants:
https://calendar.ualberta.ca/content.php?catoid=6&navoid=803#University_Standards_for_the_Protection_of_Human_Research_Participants

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study is to better understand the extent to which employees working for a rural K-12 school division are satisfied, or not, with the communications they receive. This will include gathering the perceptions of employees based on personal experiences where they felt communication practices have been positive and/or negative while working for Prairie Rose Public Schools. This study is being done in consultation and with oversight from the University of Alberta in fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Communication and Technology degree being undertaken by Angela Baron.

Benefits to the Participant
By participating in this study, participants will be asked to provide personal perceptions and experiences related to internal communication practices. The final report will be shared with Prairie Rose Public Schools once the research project has been submitted for grading. The findings and discussion section will provide insight for Prairie Rose Public Schools' management regarding employee communication attitudes and include recommendations for internal communication satisfaction improvements in the organization. As a result, employees may indirectly benefit, however, there is no known direct benefit from participating. There will be no financial compensation for those who volunteer to participate in the study.

Methodology
For Part B of the study, interviews with three to five participants will be conducted. The interviews will be recorded remotely using Zoom and will be 30-45 minutes in length. Zoom is a cloud-based video conferencing service used to virtually meet with others, either by video or audio-only or both and permits the recording of these sessions to view later. The interview recordings will be transcribed using the audio of the interview and converted into text format for analysis – the video may be used to note non-verbal communication (body language and facial expressions) that may enhance the analysis of the text. Therefore, in consenting to participate, the interviewee agrees to have the interview recorded using both audio and video. Participants

have the option of receiving a copy of the transcribed interviews to confirm accuracy. Transcriptions will be provided to the participant within three days of the interview. Upon receipt of the transcript, the interviewee will have two weeks to review their responses and ask for corrections and redactions to the script or withdraw from the study entirely.

Confidentiality

All information collected will be coded to protect the participant's privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. The researcher will keep track of participant responses by recording them as Participant1 (P1), Participant2 (P2), Participant3 (P3), Participant4 (P4) or Participant5 (P5), however, these titles will not be used in the final report. Before releasing aggregated data to the University of Alberta, any identifying indicators will be removed. No names or identifying data collected through the interview process will be shared with Prairie Rose Public Schools. Further, while all efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality and knowledge of the participant, direct quotes will be used in the final paper which could lead to assumptions of who provided the data by others.

Storage of the Data

All data collected will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years following the completion of the research project, and when appropriate, will be destroyed in a way that ensures privacy and confidentiality.

Other Uses

The final report will be provided to the Prairie Rose Public Schools executive team and the board of trustees. The findings may be used to identify where internal communication satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction occurs within the school division, which may also support subsequent research efforts or changes to Prairie Rose Public Schools' internal communication practices.

Questions?

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:
Researcher: Angela Baron, abaron1@ualberta.ca or 403-952-8193
Supervisor: Dr. Stanley Varnhagen, sjv1@ualberta.ca

If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at reo@ualberta.ca. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

Withdrawal from Study

You have the right to not participate. You are free to withdraw from the research study without any adverse consequences. You also have the right to opt-out without penalty and to have any collected data withdrawn and not included in the study (request for withdrawal of data must be received by the author in writing by email within two weeks from receiving a copy of the

interview transcript). There are no known risks or direct personal benefits from participation in this study.

Participant Informed Consent

I acknowledge that the research procedures have been explained to me and that any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that audio and video of the interview will be recorded. In addition, I know that I may contact the person designated on his form if I have further questions, either now, or in the future. I have been assured that the personal records relating to this study will be kept anonymous. I understand that I am free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time prior to the interview date, or within the two-week window once I receive a copy of the transcript. I will not be asked to provide a reason for my decision to withdraw.

Signature Field:
Date:

Interview Script

1. Join online meeting - *start recording*

   a. Hello X. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and participate in my research study.

   b. Our interview will be recorded and last between 30-45 minutes. You are not required to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable responding to.

   c. I have already received your digital consent to participate. Do you have any questions about the consent form you signed before we begin?

   d. If you are ready, may I start?

2. As was outlined in the consent form, this research is being done in partial fulfillment of my Masters in Communications and Technology through the University of Alberta. Still, I would like to acknowledge that you and I have a current working relationship at the school division based on my role as the Director of Communications. Due to being employed in this position, I would like to emphasize that this study is being conducted independently from my role with Prairie Rose and any data collected is not being used for a work-related purpose. Any identifying factors that I recognize may lead to your identification due to my knowledge of school division operations will be removed from the final report. However, you will also have the opportunity to review the transcript of this interview and provide clarification and requests for the removal of any content you feel would identify you amongst your peers. Do you have any questions about this?

3. As you are aware, the purpose of the research is to explore internal communication satisfaction in an organizational context with a rural school division serving as a case for the study. This will include gathering the perceptions and attitudes of employees working for Prairie Rose Public Schools. To start, I'd like to get your general thoughts about 'internal communication' to ensure we are using common definitions.

   a. Are you familiar with the term 'internal communication' as it would relate to your work? If so, can you tell me what you might think it means? <u>If not, the researcher will provide a definition to the participant.</u> *The researcher will establish a definition with the participant prior to moving forward. Ensure the participant understands that 'internal communications' can mean all the communication functions, processes and interactions with others that are part of the day-to-day activities of an organization.*

   b. If I were to ask what good internal communication means to you, what comes to mind?

   c. Likewise, if I were to ask what poor internal communication means to you, what are your thoughts?

Questions related to communications in daily work

4. I'd like to get your perspective regarding communication practices in your workplace.

   a. I would like you to think back to a previous situation where you've considered internal communication to be 'not so great' or in need of improvement in your workplace. Can you describe the scenario for me? What happened?

      i. What would you have done differently?

   b. I would like you to think back to a previous situation where you've considered internal communication to be either really good or excellent in your workplace. Can you describe the scenario for me? What happened?

      i. Why did you consider this to be positive?

   c. I would like you to think about some common complaints about internal communication you may have heard directly from other co-workers. Of these complaints, what do you think the number one concern or frustration would be?

      i. Why do you think this is the case?

      ii. Do you agree?

Questions related to district-level communications

5. I would now like to find out your thoughts about district-level communications.

   a. How do you generally get information related to district-related news items? For example, would it be through email, a co-worker, in a staff meeting, or is there another way you generally hear about things happening across the division?

   b. How important is it to you that you are well-informed about district-related happenings in terms of feeling connected to the school division as a whole?

   c. Do you think district administration provides information in a way that allows you to be well-informed?

        i. Do you think you could be better informed about district-related news?

        ii. Have coworkers expressed similar opinions?

   d. Do you sometimes receive information from the district that doesn't make sense to you?

        i. If so, what is typically wrong with these communications?

6. I would like you to think back to a previous situation where you've considered internal communication to be poor or in need of improvement from the division. Can you describe the scenario for me? What happened?

   a. How do you think the communication could have been improved?

7. I would like you to think back to a previous situation where you've considered internal communication to be either really good or excellent from the division. Can you describe the scenario for me? What happened?

   a. Why did you consider this to be positive communication?

What makes you act?

8. We've discussed various types of communication in both your workplace and at the district level. I would now like to know what you would consider optimal organizational internal communication to be, in that, you would want to read, view, listen or pay attention to the information shared.

   a. Is there a specific amount of information you would like to get? For example, how many times a day do you think is enough or too much to be getting new information?

   b. Is there a specific type of message or format for sharing information that appeals to you? Could you provide me with some examples of information you may get

and what you think the best way to share that information would be? For example, what information do you like shared in a video, image or graphic, or written format?

    c. Based on the time you have during the day to take in new information, is there a specific length of a message that appeals to you? What is considered too long or too short?

9. If you were asked for ways to improve internal communications in your workplace what ideas would you suggest?

10. If you were asked for ways to improve internal communications at the district level what ideas would you suggest?

Closing

11. Is there anything else about internal communication practices that I have not asked you and you would like to share?

Thank you. I will be transcribing our video interview into a text script for my report. To ensure I accurately capture our conversation, I would like to send you a copy of the transcript to review and approve. I would ask that you have any suggestions or revisions for me within two weeks of receiving it, so I can include any corrections or clarifications you may have. You also have two weeks to withdraw from the study entirely if you change your mind about participating.

I appreciate your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me.

Appendix D - Combined Interview Transcripts

Interviewer: As you are aware, the purpose of the research is to explore internal communication satisfaction in an organizational context with a rural school division serving as a case for the study. This will include gathering the perceptions and attitudes of employees working for Prairie Rose Public Schools. To start, I'd like to get your general thoughts about 'internal communication' to ensure we are using common definitions.

Interviewer: Are you familiar with the term 'internal communication' as it would relate to your work? If so, can you tell me what you might think it means?

- Well, to me, internal communication would be anything that comes from division, office and within our school. And that's given by email or by. Conversation. Is that?

- Okay. What I think it means? I think it means emails. Like it's a way of communicating within our organization. So it could be emails, like texting or like the news folders and those kinds of things anyway that you kind of give it within our division.

- Internal communication is communication between the district, between the schools. It is the way that we can make sure that our message, either going up to division or coming down from division is sent to all the people that need to participate.

Interviewer: For the purpose of this interview, internal communication will refer to all the communication functions, processes and interactions with others that are part of the day-to-day activities of an organization. With that in mind, if I were to ask what good internal communication means to you, what comes to mind?

- I would say. Email. Receiving an email and somebody coming to talk to me about a specific thing, like something that we're doing within our school or school division and I mean. Exactly. Well, in terms of good internal communication. So I would say, like it's explained thoroughly. You know, it's. You understand what's being said and asked or the information given to you. You understand it fully. That would be to make good communication.

- That everyone's included, or everyone within the division what's going on. Yeah. I think that people know what's going on within the division that needs to know. Right? Like some people don't know to know everything that's going on. But I think that if there's things that you need to know, you're aware of and you get to know what they are.

- Good. Is. Frequent, open, transparent communication. When there are large things that are happening and this is to everybody. So that everybody understands and all the boats are aligned in the right direction. It also means that I'm not getting communication every single day about every little thing. Right. Otherwise, there's going to be too much clutter. So, yeah, good communication is effective, succinct communication, open communication.

Interviewer: Likewise, if I were to ask what poor internal communication means to you, what are your thoughts?

- And to me, if it was poor, it would be you receiving it second-hand from outside our school district or out of our school. So like a parent or it's one a news organization before we've heard it. To me that would be poor communication. I know in some instances, like certain things have to be. Like, you know, if there's been an incident or something has happened, sometimes it might go out to the public before we receive like we would go out at the same time. But that isn't I don't class that as poor communication because you want to make sure that people know what's going on. So sometimes. But to me, if it's, you know, general. Like things that happening or something is happening within our school division. I feel if we're not told first and then it goes out to the media or somewhere or a parent, and that would be poor communication to me, because then you're getting it secondhand. Does that make sense?

- I think our DL [email distribution list] system's poor. Is that something I can use is the DL? I know, as our team, we can't actually be on the DL for every school. So if, you're out of school and they don't use a folder, we don't know, and if the principal or vice-principal don't remember to put you on, you don't have an idea what's going on. And I'm lucky, because I am on mine or we have folders, but some of our team doesn't. They don't know what's going on within their school because they can't be on more than one DL. And when you're not in one building all the time, then the people that are more the traveling ones or do different things, it's really hard to know what's going on if you're not in that building all the time unless they really, really do a good job of remembering you.

- Poor internal communication is too much communication that is not relevant to either a specific job or something that you have influence in or need to know. So it gets lost in the clutter.

Interviewer: So these questions that I want to ask next are related to communications and daily work is stuff you do every day. So I'd like to get your perspective regarding communication practices in the workplace where you work. I'd like you to think back to a previous situation where you've considered internal communication to not be so great or in need of improvement in your workplace. So can you describe perhaps a scenario for me or what happened?

- Well, I have found like. Not maybe this year, but in previous years. But within our school, not within the division, where I am, it's put out that you're going to be doing this job and this person is going to be doing that job. But they haven't actually come and spoken to you about that before. They've put that communication out. So then you can be like, Whoa, I don't know what's going on here. Nobody came and spoke to me or asked me first. You know, firstly, if that was okay or if I was happy doing that specific job or working with a specific student. It's just like you're going to do this job. Like with especially with kids, you don't always bond with that kid or maybe that age group. So I know. Personally, that has happened to me. I've received an email and it said, Oh, you're going to be doing this and I knew nothing about it. Or there was an event happening and I didn't know anything about it. And I normally go and get all the stuff for all these things. And then, you know, then that makes me have to rush and do stuff that I knew nothing about. I like to be prepared, so I find that does irritate me that way.

- I feel pretty fortunate that I do feel like I do usually know and I'm included. I think technology has helped. So, you know, if I wanted to, can I go back years before? I think before we had as much technology being in different buildings, I didn't always know what was going on. But now there's so much, so many ways to kind of keep in touch. So if I'm not at a school on a Monday, I could still know what there was happening. So yeah, I would say before technology maybe? Like that's such a long time ago. I feel like I do know what's going on and I'm aware. The DL list would probably be the one that... I don't understand why we can't be on our schools DL. Even though the tech people say we can't. But it makes no sense that we can't at this point. Yeah.

- Good question. Actually, I find the communication that we have here at the schools or at the local with the district and up and down, I find it very open. If I ever have any trouble, I call someone at division office and they are always open to it and provide any clarification that needs to happen. That kind of stuff. I think that we've got a really good system and yeah, I wouldn't really change a thing.

Interviewer: Based on the example you provided, what do you think could have been done differently?

- Well, I feel that if somebody wants you, if I'm involved myself to do something or I'm going to be moving to a different room, or I'm going to have to do a different part. You know, have something added to my day, I feel that you should be coming face to face. Somebody should come talk to you about that first before it's sent out in an email to all staff members that you don't anything nothing about. And then, you know, then sometimes maybe you haven't checked your email for an hour or something, or you've been busy and then you come back and then you're walking down the corridor in the school and other staff are asking you about it. And you're like, nobody said anything to me about that. So I think that you should always you should speak to the person either if you can't speak to and face to face, on the phone first and before it goes out generally on an email.

- Well, I think either go back, either be doing like those school folders because then, you know. So, you know, when I'm at one school or another, then I know what's going on because it's in the folder and I can always keep up on my off days when I'm not there. That there needs to be somehow. I know with some school leaders, because I'm not on the DL they just add me. So some do a good job of that. But I would say that if I was at a different school, that that's something that they need to do. They have to make sure to include all staff. Right. Not just the main ones in the building.

Interviewer: How about internally? So within your own system, like do you have any types of processes or things that you've found that you've changed over the last year or so, or that perhaps you want to change? So your internal process within your own location for you and your staff in terms of the processes that you use?

- For me and my staff? So we normally have a staff meeting on Monday. Um, they get access to the notes, so all the notes are held in Google Drive and I try and get them there before the staff meeting, just in case people need to review them. Yeah. Work in progress. Well, we'll call that. But when we have received them beforehand, there hasn't been any, we have to change this or anything like that. So whether they get it the day on the Friday before or that Monday, they're okay. It's all saved in Google Drive. Um, other communication is if there's any change, I will go and I will talk with the person individually and then I will follow that up with an email. So. People are in two camps with this one. They keep getting hit multiple times with the same communication. But they also understand that at least they know exactly what they need to do, and what's expected of them. And we've got a very smooth running ship.

Interviewer: Do you feel like that's going well, the system that you have put in place, or do you still see where there's areas for improvement?

- Still areas for improvement? Mainly from my side, not from the staff side. And it's just I have to make the notes more succinct and streamlined so that they can just take a look at it. I'm looking at dividing it up. So this is like an information section. This is the actionable section. This, you know, that kind of stuff. And yeah, I think that that would be better. We try and run all of our meetings, because our day is so long, during a specific time block when the majority of our staff are freed up and have classroom coverage. And so sometimes we bring in all of the staff with the exception of a few because they are working at that time. Um, so that would be our teachers and our EAs. Sometimes our meetings mainly are just with our teachers. So what I'd like to change in the future is to be able to bring in the EAs for all of those meetings as well, and that would bring everybody together and make sure that communication is effective. Yeah.

Interviewer: Do you find that your staff appreciates having that face-to-face conversation time?

- I don't know. I think that if anybody could get out of a meeting, we would. Myself included. But I think that if we had removed these face-to-face meetings, it would. The understanding of what people know needs to happen or how we are moving forward. I think everybody would develop their own understanding and interpretation of that, and so we would branch out and instead of being united. So I think it could cause problems.

Interviewer: Can you think back to a previous situation where you considered internal communication to be either really good or excellent in your workplace? And can you describe the scenario for me or what happened?

- My principal might get an email from somebody in regards to an event taking place. So they will always cc me into that so I know what's going on there. And they'll come and speak to me and say, I'm going to cc you into it so that you can communicate with that person for a specific event that's happening. Because they cc me into it and now I communicate with the contact in regards to who's going, book the bus and stuff like that. So I know what's going on there and my principal came to speak to me about it beforehand. So yeah that would be, you know, is the main one.

- Excellent? I think the school division did a really good job with our recent situation in December at one of our schools. I think the division did a really good job in terms of letting people know where things were at. So we're kind of one step ahead of what media might be doing out there in the world. So that's good. I think. Like our supervisor is good at giving us information from division office. I think we do a good job. I feel like there's lots of things we do well. I think staff meetings give you information. I think emails give you information. Our team specifically, we do like a texting, so we have an important information thread so that if there's something that our supervisor needs us to know right away, it will be sent it to that and we know what's important. Whereas we have kind of a fun one our team. If we want to meet for dinner or something, right? So that's good. I have good principals. They know they make sure they let me know. So I never feel kind of left out of the loop to know what's going on within the division.

Interviewer: Why did you consider this to be positive? Like, what part of that communication did you consider to be positive?

- Well, I feel coming to speak to me first about it and to arrange the day because the principal just got a brief outline. Together we can discuss it and then decide what grades would go and what grades it didn't really pertain to. You know, the older kids aren't really going to want to watch that specific demonstration, so we didn't include them in it. And obviously, I find that my principal coming to speak to me, we discussed it before sending out an email. Then together sent an email to all the staff and then discussed it a staff meeting. So to me that's good communication.

Interviewer: I would like you to think about some common complaints about internal communication that you may have heard directly from other co-workers Of these complaints what do you think the number one concern or frustration would be?

- So when we have a staff meeting the principal sends out an agenda about what's happening. So we'll talk about stuff on the agenda and then they will ask people they have any questions and stuff like that. And then, say a day or two later. You'll get another email saying, oh, by the way, we're doing this. And then people go, Oh, why didn't they say that in the staff meeting? And why is that kind of just being thrown upon us now? You know, we had the staff meeting and you obviously knew about it before the meeting and why didn't you mention it in the staff meeting? And then you get an email about it and then other staff members have said, you know, why wasn't this discussed beforehand? Why is it just being sent out in an email? Because then if you have questions in regards to it, not everybody has no time to talk about it, you know, within the school day to run up and down, to ask questions. And then you've got maybe five or six people asking similar questions when it could have been answered in a group setting.

- Well, one would be maybe not knowing what's going on in their own school or not or not being remembered to kind of inform you what's going on. Maybe if decisions have made sometimes, maybe our team, because we're really small, hasn't always known what those decisions are. So we find out later on, well, that was decided that that's no longer

something or but we weren't really made aware of. And that could be different supervisors over time. Different people in admin. I feel pretty positive about the communication at this point. Over the years when I was in more buildings. I think the more buildings you're in, the more dispersed you are, the harder it is to feel connected and feel like you're knowing where it's going on. So that is definitely. I think that would be a complaint maybe or when you're part-time, right. So that yeah, that would be a complaint. I've maybe heard before that when you're part-time, you can't be when you're not working, you don't want to be on your email and checking everything and always to keep up to date. Right. That's because you're that's extra hours that you're shouldn't be doing. Right? So maybe that would be it. Yeah. I can't think of any other complaints, really. I'm trying to think of even at individual schools, like things that maybe would be. I like when there are admin meetings when the notes are presented and they send them out to the folders, and some principals do that, some don't. I think that's really good because we don't always know what's discussed at admin meetings, so when they can send the minutes out I think that's really helpful. I like that the board minutes or if I want to look at something or know something's going to be talked about, I like that they're available too. So I think some of those things that I look at them every time, but I like the newsletters still. I think I'm old school. I like the insiders. I like the fun stuff to know what's fun around the division, too. Right. And what's been successful. So. Yeah.

- So complaints. We are participating in an online wellness survey that is through an external company. And so and I've told this company that they need to change their questions because the communication looks like it's just the same thing and even though the staff understands that it's impacting the decision making, they don't understand why it's the same thing every single time. So we've had multiple conversations about that. That would be the negative. And this is the first year. So once that gets tweaked, then people are going to find more value in it. So this is just like the standard foundational year. The awesome thing is the two newsletters that come out from division office for wellness and instruction. Me personally. I absolutely love both. But both of those individuals do an amazing job. Yeah. And I've heard that from our staff and they love the bingo.

Interviewer: So why do you think. Do you have any ideas why that would be the case? Like, why?

- I do feel sometimes it's because they don't want a face-to-face. Confrontation would be the wrong word. But if it's something kind of thrown upon people, that's something they want you to do or something within the classroom. Or I feel like they don't want to have a big discussion about it with people. And that's why it's mentioned in an email sometimes, which to me is, you know, I always think if you're a principal or anybody like, high up. You should be able to have a conversation with people. It should be part of your job and maybe to take criticism. And some people don't like criticism. So I don't like criticism sometimes. But you know what I mean? Sometimes like in a group, they don't like it. If you have three and four people agree and one person doesn't agree. Or no, a bigger group disagrees. You know, well it feels like you're ganging up and, you know, you're just putting your point across. So I find if they send an email, it's because they don't want to

have a conversation about it. Which I don't really agree with. I think you should. You know, say it.

Interviewer: So I would like to find out your thoughts about district-level communication. So how do you generally get information related to district-related news items? For example, would it be through email? Is it from a coworker in a staff meeting or is there another way you generally hear about things that are happening across the school division?

- I would say mostly it's via email and then if it's certain things that the school leaders have been to, you know, when they have the principal meetings and they've mentioned stuff. Or something the trustees said, you know, whatever happens at the board meeting, then it is mentioned at our staff meetings. That's if it's not sent out in an email by the division, you know. But I'm happy with it. I feel that we got lots of communication. I don't feel like I don't know what's going on. Otherwise it's. So yeah, if it's not coming from the division, it's usually mentioned at staff meetings that this is what's going on, this is what we're going to do going forward. And I do find sometimes that the principal doesn't sometimes say too much of what happened. I find they say it more when the teachers have their own meetings. So sometimes it's said to the teachers and then support staff, we hear third or fourth hand in in the school setting. And I kind of don't really think that's always fair, you know what I mean? And they do these PLC meetings every Friday where we look after kids with one teacher, you know, and they rotate and they discuss students, some of whom I pull out and work one on one with. So they don't know what I'm doing with that kid all the time. So I think it's important to give feedback. I take notes, I have folders on the kids I work with. I write down stuff. I sometimes feel nobody listens to that.

- Definitely, my supervisor at our monthly meetings. The email, the news folder or when it just comes out district-wide to all staff. Social media. I love the way everything is posted on social media. You know who had their first flight at flight school? I follow my schools and the district. So yeah, I think that's a really good way. Yeah. Uh, yeah, I think we do a good job. I think you do a good job of it. You know, the division as a whole.

- So one of the key pieces, our senior executive team does a good job in bringing all the school leaders together, whether it's on Zoom, which isn't as good or is this fun, but whether it's Zoom or face to face, they really put an effort to connecting people and connecting groups. And, that has been probably the best type of communication because not only do we get to understand what's coming down, but we also get to interact with our colleagues and the division and figure out where we're going to be going with this within our own schools and hear about what other people are doing and adapt or adopt. That is my preferred. The other one is. Email. I receive a lot of email. And as you know, the phone calls. But it's mainly those three.

Interviewer: How important is it to you that you are well-informed about district-related happenings in terms of feeling connected to the school division as a whole? How important is it to you?

- I think is really important, and I do feel connected with the school division because of the information sent out. I mean, sometimes people go, oh my gosh, we had like five emails from the Division. And I'm like, yeah, but they're telling you about a job somebody's going to or something that's happening or, you know, what the school division's outlook is or what they want to do. In regards like, you know, everything. So I do think it is very important and I do feel connected with what's going on on that side of stuff.

- Oh, for me, it's 100%. I like to know what's going on with other things and feel connected. The very first year I started this job I didn't feel connected initially. And I thought I, I thought it's really hard. We didn't have the same kind of social media and stuff obviously then. But I think, especially when you're part of a smaller team and you're not necessarily at one building all the time, all those things are important to keep connected. Yeah.

- Well, I find it is very important. I like to hear about things that are happening in the division at other schools. Whether through the newsletters all the websites and stuff like that and I go out and check those two every now and then. But it's really important to hear the awesome things that are happening. We're in education. And I think that then the term is, steal the good ideas. So yeah, that's what we do. We take the ideas that are successful and are promoting the school and academics and we take those ideas and implement them at our school as well.

Interviewer: Do you think district administration provides information in a way that allows you to be well informed? So, for example, just in general, do you think we provide it in a way? So in a way, I mean, in a format and a method and whatever that allows you to be better informed.

- Yeah, I do. When certain things are happening. I do feel that it's explained clearly in the email and straight to the point rather than. You know, you read three paragraphs, but you don't find out what's actually happened until the fourth one. I do not find that happens, but it's very direct. You know what's going on. You're informed and if you have any questions everybody's able to email back or phone or talk about stuff.

- No, I like them. I like the videos, too. I like when like the superintendent does a video or there's little things like that. Yeah, no, I like it.

- I do. I know exactly where everybody is and what everybody's kind of doing. Yeah, that's really, really positive.

Interviewer: Do you think you could be better informed about district news? Do you think there'd be a better way to be more informed?

- I feel that we get good information from the district office. The only thing I would say is, you know, if it's not really a district level, I find that's more of a principal level. It's like I said before, certain things happen or are discussed and sometimes you don't hear about it. But to me, that's not a district thing. It would be more of a principal thing. Sometimes. I find I mean, we're given plenty of information and, you know. As an example sometimes

when you are with a co-worker you will say. Did you see the email about whatever? And then say one of those staff members say, no, I didn't see it. So you can read your email, right? Read it to them or, you know, say, oh, this is what happened and you need to read that email or whatever. So I do find. I always check my emails. Cause I'm in here and it's on my phone. So I find that if people say they don't have the information, that's because they're not checking their emails or checking notifications for certain things.

- No, no, no. I don't feel anybody complains about the emails. I feel the people that don't know what's going on is when those people don't check their emails or say, I don't have time, which you would have time. And some people say, well, you know, I don't want to go and check emails when I go home and I'm like, but its part of your job to be informed. You'll be given an email if you don't read that and you don't know what's going on to me, that's your fault.

- I can't think of an example, so I'm going to say no.

Interviewer: Do you think you could be better informed or where are you at with that? Is there stuff you feel you're missing out on?

- No, I don't think so. I don't feel I am. But would in general, our team sometimes feel like maybe they are. Yeah, maybe it depends on what building you're working at, right. Whether you do. But no, I don't feel like I'm not informed about what's going on.

Interviewer: Do your co-workers within your building feel the same way you think or what have you heard from them? Or are there any complaints you've heard about the district level from those in your building?

- No, I've heard that. They're very well informed. Yeah, what they would like would be. Maybe. Because our schools are spread across a vast region, what they would like is kind of twinning between schools, so being able to connect with other teachers who teach what you teach, that kind of stuff. We've started to kind of make those relationships. So it is happening, but it would be awesome if there was a specific time that they could all come together. I think the division had started this prior to COVID. Right. Or during COVID. But yeah, something like that would be awesome. That's what I hear from his staff.

Interviewer: Do you have you ever or do you sometimes receive information from the district that doesn't make sense to you?

- No I don't know. I mean if I didn't really understand what was going on there, if it included me, I would reach out to someone who could explain it.

- Uh. The communication from those at division office is often really structured, very clear and coherent. Pretty easy to follow. And any time that I have questions, everybody is available. It's awesome.

- I think it's pretty understandable. Sometimes the tech stuff is a little confusing. So I know at one point when they wanted us to change something, put that thing on our phone with the little number. I didn't even know what that meant and I just completely ignored it. And I think they were a bit frustrated. But techie stuff is confusing if you're not in that techie world. So yeah, sometimes I think when you get a big long thing like that, you miss. Well, I don't think that's to me that's something else. Yeah. Delete. And then I knew. Yeah. And it was a big deal. It is important to have it, right. So maybe just the tech stuff sometimes is over my head.

Interviewer: Have you heard that from other people, too? Is that common?

- I don't think so. I don't remember if anyone said that, but I just knew frustrating it was that a lot of us just deleted it. Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there a situation where information came from the district that you've considered to be kind of poor or in need of improvement? Is there anything you've had before? What would that have been regarding?

- I can't actually. I don't think so, to be honest with you. I can't think of anything that I've received when I thought, Oh, that's not right, or I don't agree with that. To be honest. And all the instructions, like if you have to click on something to go to something, it's clearly explained. You click it and it works. Some people say, you know, the link doesn't work, I'm like, that's because you haven't got the app on. You say to them to go do it on their phone, or that you need to have this or that setting on your computer. Some people change their settings on their computers in their classrooms. So I'm like, well, it works fine on mine, you know? I mean, like so no, I always find everything easy to follow. You know the directions. Questions. Explaining what's happening. So good.

- To think that I find. And I know adding us, if schools still do folders. I know getting us added on and doing that like sometimes can be a headache and it shouldn't be because we're. We're part of the team and we should be just that. When we're assigned to a school each year the list should be updated and it shouldn't be that we have to keep asking to be added on. Right. I don't have to change schools that much, so maybe. But I'm talking in general about it hear. Because you just want to feel that connection to the team that you're with. And so when you have to keep asking, can you add me on to this? Or if that makes it hard?

Interviewer: With that being said, do you feel sometimes you, your team as a whole are perhaps left out of some things or missed on some stuff from the district or how do you view that?

- I think if you overall interviewed all of us, you would say some people would feel that. I would definitely say that some people feel that we're kind of forgotten sometimes because we're just a whole different identity and we're small, right? We're a small thing. So I think, yeah, because if you're in a building that they sort of forget to add you to this thing and then you're trying to get on this... And you would feel that way. I myself don't

feel that personally because I feel like I do, but I would say that as a whole our team would, probably some of us, would say that.

Interviewer: Okay. So I guess in terms of it being improved, you wouldn't have any recommendations or anything?

- No. It would be awesome to streamline just like, you know, the web page and then the Facebook that connects with it. Just that. And for the most part, it is streamlined, which is awesome. But like Twitter and Instagram, and this is just my own thing, if everybody knows where to find something, it makes it really easy to direct people there. If they're with Twitter and that. It might not be sending the message that we want to send. And that might just be me and it might just be my generation. I'm a webpage kind of person. Also, to not always send stuff frequently, but when something is important. Right, please read this because it is important.

Interviewer: So if I were to kind of think about what you were just getting at there, would it be finding a better organization process for where we put information?

- No, I think that you've got it. I actually think that we need to cut down on. On the... We need to go bigger and better for advertising and get our name out there. But social media, where it's, you know, text and just going out to the same type of people, I don't find that as effective. I'm not marketing. I'm not a communications person. But what I like is... I don't put out a lot of bulletins. It's so that when you receive one, then this is something that you pay attention to. One example of this, it is not going to be a good example but it's an example. We do calls out at our school and I've seen when there are frequent like we have ones, every maybe a week or something like that, the number of people that it reaches goes down, right? Because they're just picking it up and then hanging up or not even picking it up at all. But if there is one that goes out in a month and then it's like and that's it. Like people, people pay attention. So, yeah.

Interviewer: So could you make a comparable then, I mean, based on what you just said in terms of, you know, even the amount of information perhaps we're pushing out from the district level in terms of frequency? Again, could you think it could be better structured so that people would pay better attention, even internally?

- I don't think so. Because at the district level you need to branch across multiple generations, right. And so you've got the older generation that probably wanted a paper copy you got, you know, like my generation that is like email or pictures on Facebook or, you know, web page. And then you've got the younger generation, which seems to be very connected to their phones and just want constant information. So I think the division does a phenomenal job connecting to every single division piece. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Can you think of a situation where you've considered internal communication? So again, from the district to be really great. Like something that we sent out that worked really well for everyone. That made a lot of sense. And perhaps there's a scenario or a specific piece of communication you can think of that would have stood out to you.

- I would say the district level, the sharing, the cool things that are happening around the district, right? I think that's really well done. Because I wouldn't know what's going on or what's happening in some of the other schools that I'm not at if I didn't hear it through the district level. Yeah. I think. I think you guys do a good job of making sure we know what's going on, right? To what we need to. I would assume that some people might say they don't always know, but some stuff we don't need to know, too. Some of it is not what you need to know. Right? So I think there's a can you do a good job getting it out there.

- I've got many examples of this. So, technology just put together this awesome package for us because PATs are back. And I don't know about the other school leaders but I'm a little bit nervous since my first for me to go through the whole thing and they put together this package, and it's kind of like step one, do this. Step two, do that. And it is. So streamlined. I am not nervous about putting this PAT together again. It's perfect. Like, yeah, so. And I know on the tech side they have things figured out, but with the instructions, they've just melded these two pieces together so we know what to do at the school too. And the coach's bulletin that comes out is absolutely phenomenal. When we're dealing with the web page and the new stuff with the School education plan changes. Yeah. All of the support has been there. It's just, click here. You got to change this, adapt it to your school. It's kind of plug-and-play. I think that, I know that it takes a lot of work and so we're very appreciative of that. So awesome.

Interviewer: So the next section is about what makes you act. So in terms of internal communications, that actually makes you feel motivated to do something about it or to act on the information. So we've discussed different types of communication, both in your workplace and the district. And I'd now like to know what you consider optimal organizational internal communication to be in, that you want to read it, you want to do it, you want to listen or pay attention. So is there a specific amount of information you'd like to get? For example, how many times a day do you think is enough or too much to be getting new information?

- You know, when they have the jobs. Because in May and June is always a lot of jobs posted, or transfers or stuff like that. So if I was to get like, I mean, one or two emails a day is fine. But as it doesn't always impact me, I don't always click on it right away. I wouldn't read it right away because it's not so important to me to know that unless you are working in that school. But then you would already know probably anyway. But sometimes you see four or five job postings come out in a day and I'm like, could this not be put into one email. You know, I mean, like instead of five different emails. Which rarely happens, to be honest with you. But, you know, lately, there are a lot of new job opportunities in June. Those posts are not for me. It's not anything that I can do. So sometimes you're like, okay, you get one. And then a couple of hours later there's another one and another one. And I'm like, could this not gone into one email.

- I think to me it sort of depends on my days too, right? When I'm at a larger school for the day, I don't have a lot of time to look at my information. So for me, like all the social media stuff I do that at night time and flip through to see what's on social media. So, I don't know what's optimal. If it's an urgent kind of thing and things we need to do, then I

think it's good because you can tell if it's if it comes through your email or, you know, it's urgent. So, you know, you have to look at it. I don't actually know the answer to that. What would be optimal? And I don't get 100,000 emails like some of the other, you know, admin would or whatever. I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. I don't feel it's too much at this point, put it that way. I don't feel it's too much.

- Well, as weird as this, my day is extremely busy during the day, so I actually check my email at night from about 8 to 12. Kind of there. That's when I'm responding to stuff, getting everything ready for the next day. So. Other than that, everything is kind of face-to-face. And if stuff comes up, I just I give whoever it is to call and sort it out. And I'm not one of those people that puts stuff on the back burner. I'm just like this is my checklist for the day and just go through it. Yeah, that's how I work.

Interviewer: So I guess, you know, if it's anything that's urgent, don't email it?

- If it's anything that's urgent, don't email it. If you need it done that day, don't email it. You need to call me. Otherwise it's going to get done that night and then you'll have it the next day by the time that you arrive, right? So yeah.

Interviewer: Is there ever been a time where you've looked at your email at night and thought, oh boy?

- You know, I go through everything and that's why it's at night. And so, it sometimes can take a couple of hours, but everybody gets responded to. Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there a specific type of message or format for sharing information that appeals to you? So could you provide me with some examples of information you may get and what you think the best way to share that information would be? I'm going to explain. So, for example, what kind of information do you like shared in a video format or an image or with a graphic or what kind of stuff would you rather get in, say, like a written format? Like, is there a preferred one or certain things that work better for you that would appeal to you more?

- If we're doing a small group thing in regards to, maybe something to do with the website site. I prefer a video chat thing because then you can ask questions. You can show things on the screen at the same time. Stuff like that. I find that's good because you can visually see as well what's happening. Or you can show hey, this is what it is. This is where you're going to go to. Sometimes if you get an email and it just says, click this and then do this and do that. I don't really like that. But it depends on who it is from. Some people don't explain it very well. They're used to many technical terms for me. And now you've lost me. So, yeah, I do prefer like a small group. Yes, I would prefer like video chat or where they can show you stuff. This is where you would go, this is what you're going to do next. Because I feel the information is easier to follow.

- Um, well, I do like the videos. They, they do appeal to me. I like seeing the person and having them talk. I do like that. And then I would say I like in an email or email version

because then you can go back and read it afterwards or see and you can know and you can flag it, right? Yeah.

- Yeah, so video, it would be anything that I need to learn, anything with professional development, anything that is either a new concept, a new idea, or a process that I need because I need to watch that video three times. First time to understand kind of where everybody is, especially if it's with a computer. Some people are really good at computers. It's something that I love too. But when people are teaching it, they know the shortcuts and how to do it fast. And so you've got to watch that multiple times. Um, anything that has to do with just. Communication where this is where we're going. Anything like that structure, policy and procedure written just so that I can have it and reread it. Other than that, I believe I keep these two things totally separate.

Interviewer: What about for video messages like the pre-canned video messages? Is there anything that you do like getting those for?

- If it's in related to what I'm doing at work. Yes. Because then you feel like it's more personable than an email and you're trying to follow an email. So yeah, I do think they are more personable and easier to follow. And during COVID and stuff like that, we would do video chats in the school or at home. The only thing that some people don't know how to work their microphones. They don't realize that everybody can see all of what they are doing. So, yeah, sometimes I'm just like, oh, my gosh. Or the person doesn't join because everybody checks to see who has joined and who's not there. And I do find I don't like it when people have their camera off to the other people. If you're in a group, I find that rude because I feel that they're not paying attention. I know sometimes you don't want to and I get that because I had to do that the other day when I joined a meeting, but I was running back and forth with kids and I didn't want random kids coming in. I think if you're going to be in a meeting, you should visually be there because you don't know if people are listening properly.

Interviewer: Based on the time you have during the day to take in new information, is there a specific length of a message that appeals to you? Like in terms of, okay, so we could even think about like a length of an email or a length of one of those video messages that we share out or time set aside for a Google Meet or a Teams meeting.

- I don't mean this to sound rude in any way but sometimes if their voices are monotone, I'm like, zone out. Like, it just. It doesn't keep my attention. You know what I mean? And I think once you get to about 15 minutes of something. Something 10 to 15 minutes. On a video recording, that's me time. It depends what it's about, though, as well. That's the problem. If it's you know, I realized with the COVID ones, they were long. But they had to be because there was so much information coming out to people and trying to reassure people about what was happening. So I totally understand that. But sometimes I feel like. Some of the information could have been put in an email. In regards to that. But even with an email, if an email is like. Six, seven paragraphs long. You know, you kind of feel that you have to keep going back and rereading it to understand what was being said.

- More than a page? Yeah. Is that what you're looking for? Well, I. I don't know. I think less is more. I think, yeah, the key points but not to too much. Because that's part of sometimes even when some of the district newsletters go out, I think it's fun all the contests and stuff, but there's a lot of information and so sometimes I just don't even look at it or I just, you know, look at it quickly. Because I do like the contests. There's lots, right? So if there's too much, that's why even newsletters are good because they're short and sweet. Now, they used to be like pages and pages, and now most of them are just a couple of pages. So I think short and succinct.

- No, people take time to express their ideas. Some can do it in two sentences and some take three pages. And I will read everything. I like stories as well. But yeah, so for me there's no real length. If a video is too long, I will just kind of fast forward and stop every about an eighth of the way just to make sure that I'm hitting the main points. And if it's something that I understand, then speed it up. If it's something that I don't know, then I can go back. And that's why I like video.

Interviewer: So could you provide me with some examples of information you may get and what you think the best way to share it would be? So I'm thinking of the stuff that comes at you during the day. Are there any types of information that you think could be shared in a different way that perhaps would be more appealing? So I know we generally, overall, send a lot of emails and a lot of them are mostly text-based. Does that work for you or do you think that there would be a better way to share some of those items?

- I think it works for me because I don't feel like I get too many. I don't. So. Yeah. I don't feel like I get too many. So for me, it works. Yeah. I don't like getting too many texts, but I don't think there's a lot shared that way. But I find it too much when you're scanning back over and doing that. So I would prefer that if it's something that needs more that it comes in email format than text because it's hard to go back and go through all your texts or for the people that are part-time for them to come back on Monday and then there's 50 texts coming.

Interviewer: Would you find it to be more helpful if the information is shared in a graphic format or something that's visual versus just words when it comes to email?

- Yeah, I feel like sometimes when it is more visual you can understand it better rather than a big, long spiel of words and you're like, I have no clue what this is about. I am lost here. I am a very visual person when it comes to stuff like that, that's me personally. But I do feel if it's really long, I'm just like reread and reread and then go back and then I'm okay. I'm going to have to read this when nobody's near me so I can focus. Because if there's too much noise going on, I'm like, I know what's going on. I'm trying to do this job. I mean, so, yeah, visually, graphically. I find it easier.

Interviewer: If you were asked for ways to improve internal communications in your workplace overall, are there any suggestions you would have?

- Sometimes when someone from division office sends an email that says please share this with staff sometimes I shared it because it's come to me through my staff group DL email list. But I have had my supervisor get upset with me for sharing it before. So then I'm like, it says in the email quite clearly, please share with your staff and they haven't done that yet. Do you know what I mean? I'm just doing what it said in an email.

- Aside from the DLs. Well, it's nice to be invited to the meetings but it doesn't mean I would go to all my school staff meetings necessarily but it's nice to know when they are and be aware of it so I can attend. And if I'm at the school or if it's an SI day and they're meeting, I always say, what can I be part of today that I need to be because I don't need to be part of all of it. So it's nice to be included. So I would say in terms of in a building, they should make sure they include those who aren't always part of the core team, the different people. Yeah. I think with any of it, it's just nice to be included in case there's a part that would make you doing your job better. Right. Was the other part to that question.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

- I'm like, why would you not share that with staff if it says quite clearly on it? If the email says, please share with staff or send this to the appropriate staff member for the grade level it was to do with. I have gotten in trouble for doing that before. I've worked over 20 years in a school. You know what I mean? I was really annoyed with that. So now I just deleted it. In future, I won't share anything because I don't want to get into a confrontation with my supervisor about it. And I feel like if it's sent to me to share in the first place it is because they know I'm going to share it. Sometimes when it is sent to a principal they don't always share it. I feel like sometimes there's a tier thing going on. Um, and like with principals, they move schools. It's always different depending on the person. My previous principal would just say thanks for doing that to you. Some do appreciate that. Where I find this principal on the other side, it's like I'm the principal. Then teachers. Then support staff. I like my job but sometimes I do feel there's a tier system going on. Yeah. Especially in regards to, you know, I mean it was staff appreciation this week and it was admin assistant last week and nothing, nothing was said, not a word. It's just the small thing sometimes. That's how I do feel. There is a very tier system at the moment. So I feel like we're not always told things. It is like second-hand or third-hand. It's not given to you directly which I don't, I do not like that.

Interviewer: So just in your, in your workplace, if there are any ideas you would suggest, for streamlining any type of internal communication?

- The one thing say is that Zoom has been great. So if there's something going on and I'm not in a particular location that day, I can just Zoom in when there's something. And that was really great. It's like those are the things that I never would've been able to do. But now. You know, that could still happen. Even if they're having an in-person meeting, they could Zoom me and or something. So I think some of those things that we've learned over COVID are great ways. Or just zooming anyways. Like, why do we need to travel for an hour per meeting when I could just be Zoomed in and be there?

Interviewer: So I guess to that though, are people still offering it? Do you find they still are? Do you feel that's being backed away from now?

- That still happens a little bit. Like for one thing I had to attend today. They did it Zoom style, and I thought that was great because I was at another location. So I think that's so good, right? Because for me to go to one place for the meeting at 830 and then come right back here. That doesn't make sense, right? Because that takes away from your work other students and things like that. So yeah, I think there's ways we learn to be more efficient and not necessarily, you know, or weather, right. We work in a world. So why do you always have to be in person? If the weather is yucky, it's still be like, you and I can do this and we don't have to travel to do it, right? Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I'd rather meet with you face to face. It's nicer, but in reality, it's another form, right? Yeah.

Interviewer: Is there anything in terms of the district level and ways of improving internal communications? Do you think it could be better structured and organized by the district?

- I feel maybe if it's a certain job, like a teaching job, it should just go to teachers, I think, and not just support staff as well, because it doesn't affect me, that job. It's not important to me. I'm not a teacher, so I don't really need to see if there's a teaching job. I know they want to get it out to, oh, maybe, you know, somebody that's looking for a job. I understand maybe that as well. But then it goes on the Prairie Rose social media that way. So if I'm going through the Facebook page, I know well, I'm not going to click on that because it doesn't pertain to me. So I do feel that sometimes certain like teaching things should just go to the teachers. So, you know, like with support staff, I mean, if there was a support staff one, then, you know, that's fine. But some of the teaching ones don't affect me, so I don't need to get that email.

- I think it is really good. I, I think sometimes we have to practice doing it within school hours, sometimes for things because there's this thing with, with nowadays that it's just stuff can be always. You can always be looking at like when emails come out at night, you try not to look at each other like that. But I think sometimes it could be more succinct to school hours, right? Yeah. Yeah.

- Honestly, I think that the district does a phenomenal job. It's hitting every single parent group, and I know that's external, but you're also hitting. Same data or the same communication in different ways sent out to those that need it. I really like them because it's not compartmentalized. That sounds really bad, but I really like the group setting that everybody's invited to, and then you're going to get emails or content based on that group setting, and it doesn't have to go to everybody else. And I appreciate that everybody else's time is valued and that comes across very strong.

Interviewer: Is there a better way it could be organized or would you? And I'm going to throw this out there. It's not really one of my questions, but I ask it if we could put everything into one succinct area versus having an email here or a text here or a phone call there or what have you, where it would all be in one location that everybody could find things. Do you think that would appeal to you?

- It would appeal to me because I would look at it, but I don't know that it would work because a lot of people wouldn't bother to look at it. You know, that's the reality. So yeah, we had the news folder, I would always look at the news folder and I would skip if it didn't look like it was important to me. But, I do like that. But I think he'd miss so many people. Yeah. It's better when it comes into your own inbox.

Interviewer: Is there anything about internal communication practices that I have not asked you that you would like to share? Anything at all that we haven't talked about?

- No, not that I can think of. I mean, I feel like as a district, there's the website. We get emails. There's the Facebook page. When we're not open I get all my information. Emails like the test alert one the other day are very helpful. I think that's good that we are given that information. You know, I find that all the information you need is given to us. One thing that does annoy me. If people say, well, I haven't heard of that. And I'm like, most people have Facebook, Twitter, etc. I mean, all the information is there. And I always tell like parents that come in, this is our Facebook page. This is how you sign up for the text message alerts. It's all there.

- No, I don't think so. Yeah.

- Mhm. No, I think they were good. I think I covered it. Yeah, it's good. Okay. But before you stop, the one thing that I want to say with communication, VC, because we're spread out, this is extremely important. This is video conferencing. And so it really enables our students to connect with other students in the district, but it also lets us offer courses that they wouldn't be able to get. It's really important. So, yeah. Anyway, let's just put it out there. It's something new.

Appendix E - Survey Promotional Poster
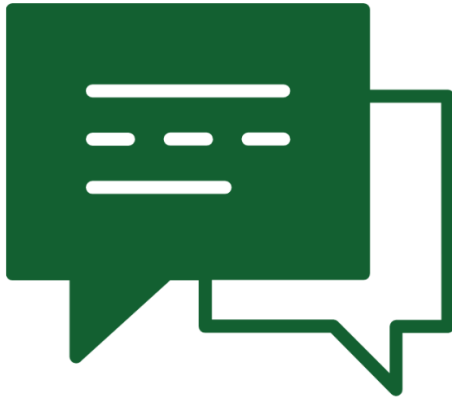
PRO ETHICS NO: PRO00118417

This study is being conducted by Angela Baron in partial completion of a Masters in Communications and Technology degree with oversight by:

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
MA COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

While Prairie Rose Public Schools has granted permission for the research, the study is being conducted independently of the school division.

EXPLORING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

The case study of a rural K-12 school division

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the research is to explore internal communication satisfaction in an organizational context with a rural school division serving as a case for the study. This will include gathering the perceptions and attitudes of employees working for Prairie Rose Public Schools.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The study will be conducted in two parts.

- **Part A**: Every employee of Prairie Rose Public Schools will receive an email invitation with a direct link to an online survey. All responses will be anonymized to protect employee confidentiality.
- The survey will be sent out on April 26th and close on May 10th.

- **Part B:** At the end of the survey, employees will be asked if they are interested in participating in a one-on-one interview with the researcher to share personal thoughts and experiences regarding internal communication practices.
- Interviews will be conducted once the survey has closed.

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