It’s What’s Inside That Matters
How an MNC’s internal corporate communication can be designed
to be effective and engaging
Abstract

With the increasing number of Multinational Corporations (MNCs), new managerial implications have arisen connected to internal communication. Previous literature has identified internal communication as one of the most important factors for organizational success. As a part of internal communication, Internal Corporate Communication (ICC) has been recognized to be of direct importance to employee engagement. Despite the organizational benefits that can come with engaged employees, companies today are struggling with creating employee engagement. For MNCs, the internal corporate communication entails an extra layer of complexity due to its dispersed organizational structure. Although engagement and the effectiveness of ICC are dependent on the employees’ perceptions of it, minimal attention has been given to the studying of what employees would like their organization to communicate. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate how employees of an MNC perceive the flow of ICC, and also contribute to the understanding of what can be considered as effective and engaging ICC. This has been achieved by conducting a single case study where 18 semi-structured interviews were performed with employees from eight different countries. The findings of this study show that the channels have different features making them more or less preferable in order to design effective and engaging ICC. Furthermore, the channels’ dependency of time was identified as a key factor for effective ICC. The study also shows that engagement was dependent on the amount of communication and could be fostered by content including future visions and success stories.

Keywords: Internal Corporate Communication, Communication Channels, Content, Effective Communication, Employee Engagement
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List of Abbreviations

HQ  Headquarters

ICC  Internal Corporate Communication

ICT  Information Communication Technologies

MNC  Multinational Corporation

MRT  Media Richness Theory
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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The ever-growing globalization has led to a rise in integration and interactions between people, nations, and organizations across national borders. As a result of globalization, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, which also has resulted in continual changes in the international business environment. This can be expressed both in terms of the rising number of Multinational Corporations (MNCs), but also in managerial implications that these companies need to constantly update and adapt themselves to. One of these managerial implications that MNCs need to evaluate is communication in general, and internal communication in particular (Hume & Leonard, 2014).

“If the communication activity stops, the organization disappears. If the communication activity becomes confused, the organization begins to malfunction. These outcomes are unsurprising because the communication activity is the organization” (Weick, 1995, p. 75)

Internal communication enables the exchange of information, knowledge, and ideas, and thus its role is crucial in all organizations (Ruck & Welch, 2012). The importance of internal communication was further recognized by Bartlett and Ghoshal (1989) who referred to internal communication as the lifeblood of the organization and effective internal communication has many times been referred to as one of the, if not the very, most important factors for an organization’s success. Furthermore, internal communication has been known as the ”promised land” (Oliver, 2000) and the ”secret weapon” (Yates, 2006) for organizational success. This is echoed in the fact that internal communication multiple times has been recognized as a key area within communication (Hargie & Tourish, 2009; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič, & Moreno, 2010).

One of the dimensions of internal communication is internal corporate communication (ICC), which is communication coming from top management to all employees often incorporating organizational and corporate issues, such as goals, objectives, new developments, activities and achievements (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Internal corporate communication is defined as “a process between an organization’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p.
This part of internal communication is important because it concerns and extends to all employees. Further, as the definition indicates, ICC has been highlighted as having the possibility to contribute to the engagement of employees within an organization (Rajhans, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Many advantages, such as organizational effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness, can come with engaged employees (Quirke, 2008; Tkalac Verčič & Pološki Vokić, 2016; Welch, 2011). Despite the organizational benefits that can be generated from engaged employees, “the world is in the midst of an employee engagement crisis” (Gallup, 2017a, p. 61). A major multi-year, worldwide study showed that as much as 85 percent of the participants considered themselves unengaged. This example illustrates the difficulties for employers to generate engagement (Gallup, 2017b).

Like any other organization, the employees of an MNC are dependent on information from one another. Having a dispersed business model like an MNC calls for even more comprehensive internal communication (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1991; Luo & Shenkar, 2006). The need for internal communication also rises with the size of the company as well as the disparity, not to mention the complexity of it. Furthermore, the importance of internal communication can be seen to be larger in an MNC than a smaller company because of the geographical- and time distance between different units (Keyton, 2010; Luo & Shenkar, 2006).

For MNCs operating in several different international markets simultaneously, it means that the ICC extends beyond the company’s national borders (Cornelissen, 2011). Consequently, this results in that there are several cross-border factors that need to be taken into account, which influence the effectiveness of ICC. Examples of such factors are different languages, cultures, time zones, physical distance and differences in ways of encoding and decoding the messages (Adler, 2008; Cornelissen, 2011; Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen, Ensio Karjaluoto & Nevalainen, 2014). These factors, in combination with the nature of MNCs, enables many different ways for the ICC to be transferred, such as face-to-face meetings, Skype meetings, emails and intranets. Accordingly, this poses another challenge for how the MNCs should communicate internally in order to engage cross-national employees (Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al., 2014).
1.2 Problem Discussion

The benefits of effective ICC have been directly correlated to the overall performance of the company, such as increased innovation, competitiveness and organizational effectiveness (Quirke, 2008; Welch, 2011). However, the effectiveness of the ICC has been argued to be dependent on the employees’ perceptions of it, as they are both the primary recipients of the information as well as those who can act on the information in order to create organizational success (Smith & Mounter, 2008; Welch, 2012). Thus, it is the employees who decide what effective communication is and therefore the employee perspective is crucial to understand (Welch, 2012). The reason for this is because it has been shown that if the ICC is perceived positively by the employees, they are more willing and likely to feel engaged and connected to the company, and therefore they are more likely to contribute to a positive overall performance of the company (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009).

Despite the relevance of effective ICC on employee engagement as well as operational success (Karanges et al., 2015; Martinez Martinez & Fernandez Hurtado, 2018; Nakamura, Umeki & Kato, 2017), little scholarly attention has been given to the topic (Welch, 2013). Ruck & Welch (2012, p. 295) state that “minimal attention has been given to what employees would like their organisation to communicate”. This is mirrored in the statement by Chen, Silverthorne and Hung (2006, p. 242) who claim that “member satisfaction with organisational communication practices has been ignored”.

The lack of effective ICC can lead to employees not feeling connected to the company, they become unmotivated and unengaged, which in turn leads to a poorer overall performance of the company (MacLeod & Clarke, 2009; Welch, 2012). As the employees are the ones who determine the effectiveness of internal communication (Smith & Mounter, 2008; Welch, 2012), this suggests that further research from the employees’ perspective is needed. Pažėraitė and Repovienė (2018) argue that there is no consensus of what effective ICC actually entails, which may be explained by the lack of research on the topic from the employees’ perspective. This lack of focusing on what employees perceive as effective ICC may impose a difficulty in understanding how to design it in order to increase the engagement of the employees, and thus increase the company's performance. MacLeod and Clarke (2009) claim that one of the biggest barriers for employee engagement was poorly executed ICC. These examples embody the challenges for employers to generate engagement, and consequently, that designing the ICC is a challenging task.
In relation to this lies the challenge stemming from the very basic fundamental principles of communication. Often, messages are sent with one intention that is hidden in the actual message from the sender but is received in another way by the receiver, based on the receiver’s ability to analyze and decode the message (Henderson, 2004). How the receiver of the message analyzes and decodes this information depends on the individual’s ability to match the analysis of the information with his or her own experiences and knowledge. This is also true for the sender of the message, whose ability to send and encode the message so that it matches the intended meaning of the message depends on the person's experiences and knowledge (Henderson, 2004). Furthermore, it has been argued that the channel in which the message is transmitted by is decisive in the processes of encoding and decoding, as the channel is the medium that enables the communication to take place (McLuhan, 1964; Men, 2014). Previous studies have shown that different channels have different abilities to absorb the communication, proposing that personal communication such as face-to-face communication is preferable for employee engagement (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013). In contrary, it has been stated that we are in the midst of a meeting society, where the personal face-to-face communication has been argued to be ineffective, as these meetings are considered to be time-consuming and lead to unnecessarily long confirmation reconciliations and social loafing (Lehmann-Willenbrock, Allen & Kauffeld, 2013).

Even though there seem to be ambiguities in what effective ICC actually means, the nature of an MNC with physically dispersed businesses poses an additional challenge for the company in how to communicate, as this type of personal, face-to-face, communication is not always possible. This means that alternative channels need to be used, such as different digital channels and phone calls (Henderson, 2004). Furthermore, as MNCs face different environments in terms of for example nations, time differences, and languages, leads to the fact that additional aspects need to be considered in order for the MNC to reach effective ICC, while at the same time manage to create engagement (Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al., 2014).

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate how employees of an MNC perceive the flow of internal corporate communication, and also contribute to the understanding of what can be considered as effective and engaging internal corporate communication.
1.4 Research Question

*How can an MNC design the internal corporate communication by channels and content to reach effective communication and engage its employees?*

1.5 Delimitations

As the study aims to investigate the employee, i.e. the receiver, perspective, the sender perspective has not been included. In addition, a delimitation regarding the effects of engagement on organizational performance has been made. Hence, the study will not take this into consideration since we believe that the relation is hard to prove with the empirical data from a single case study. Lastly, differences in cultures have not been taken into account in this study.

1.6 Disposition of Thesis

*Literature Review*

This chapter presents a synopsis of previous research within the fields of this thesis, including communication, internal corporate communication, effective communication and engagement. The chapter finalizes with a conceptual framework that is based on a summary of the literature review and acts as a foundation for our analysis when comparing the empirical findings with the conceptual framework.

*Methodology*

The methodology chapter outlines the presented methods and research design used for conducting this study. It presents how the data has been collected and analyzed, as well as discussing the ethical aspects related to executing this research. Lastly, it is discussed how the quality of the study has been addressed.

*Empirical Findings*

In this chapter, the empirical material is presented which is based on the collected data. This includes a presentation of the used communication channels at the chosen case company, as well as the interviewees’ perspective of the internal corporate communication in regard to both engagement and effectiveness.
Analysis
The analysis chapter is analyzing the empirical findings in relation to the conceptual framework that has been illustrated in the literature review, which serves as a frame of reference for our analysis.

Conclusion
The final chapter presents the main findings from our research in order to answer the research question. Moreover, the study’s managerial implications will be discussed followed by limitations and suggestions for future research.
2. Literature Review

2.1 Model of Communication

To be able to understand internal communication, the genesis of communication must first be sorted out. A first step is to look at one of the most well-known communication models, established by Shannon and Weaver (1949) during the Second World War in the US Bell Telephone Laboratories (Fiske, 1990). Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) communication model has been acknowledged by Fiske (1990, p 6.) to be “one of the main seeds out of which communication studies has grown”. The aim with the development of the model was to find out how the different communication channels could be used most efficiently. Even though the model was developed a long time ago, it is still highly relevant for communication studies because it enables studying the different components independently (Chandler & Munday, 2016; Fiske, 1990).

As illustrated in Figure 1, the sender in the communication model is the person who has some type of information that he or she wants to communicate and thereby decide which message to send. After the decision to send a message has been taken a process of encoding begins, in which the source is putting the information into a symbol that can be communicated. It may be in the form of a text of some kind but it could also take form as body language. The message is the core of what one wishes to communicate and can consist of both verbal and

Figure 1. Shannon and Weaver’s model of communication. Own compilation.
non-verbal symbols. The message thereafter goes through a channel which is where, through which media, the encoded message is transmitted, such as email, chat groups or telephone. The receiver is the person that the message is sent to and who later has to decode the message. Decoding is the action the receiver takes in order to allocate meaning to the symbols sent by the source. Response is ultimately the response generated by the receiver after decoding the message. A response is not necessarily given and may also be no action at all. Feedback is what the source knows regarding the response of the receiver. For a two-way communication, feedback is necessary (Chandler & Munday, 2016; Fiske, 1990).

In the model, noise may have the least readily apparent meaning and could be seen as a dysfunctional factor. Between the transmission and reception, the signal can be affected by noise which is anything with an effect that was not intended by the source. When the model first was developed, noise was mainly regarded as distortion of the sound on the different channels, but as time has passed, the concept has been extended. Thus, noise is any signal received that was not transmitted by the source. Nevertheless, the concept of noise could also be anything that makes the sent signal harder to decode by the receiver. Conclusively, noise is anything that interferes the message that leads to the signal being received differently from what was intended (Chandler & Munday, 2016; Fiske, 1990).

Many models of communication have been developed with the foundation in Shannon and Weaver’s (1949) model. Some point to the fact that the model by Shannon and Weaver (1949) does not apply to group or mass communication, but that it rather concerns interpersonal communication (Smith & Mounter, 2008). Around the same time, the Lasswell communication model was developed and looks at who, says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect, providing a mass communication point of view. Many of the earlier communication models provide a rather linear perspective and therefore a number of later models have been developed (McQuail & Windahl, 2013; Smith & Mounter, 2008). More consideration to the feedback process was given in the later models which generated a perspective of communication as circular. Lastly, some models, such as De Fleur and Barnlund, claim that noise is influencing the whole communication process, including the feedback (McQuail & Windahl, 2013). Therefore, noise is today considered as something that can occur in any stage of the communication process (Chandler & Munday, 2016).
2.2 Internal Communication

The wide array of communication can be subdivided into mainly two categories: external and internal communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Kumar (2010, p. 105) defines internal communication as “... the exchange of information and ideas within an organization.” and further by Scholes (1997, p. xviii) as “... the professional management of interactions between all those with an interest or ‘a stake’ in a particular organization.”.

Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 186) elaborate on the definition of internal communication where internal communication in the corporate context has been referred to as “... communication between an organization’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims”. This citation from Welch and Jackson (2007) indicates that the perception of the definition of internal communication has become increasingly focused on its importance to the organization with regards to its effects.

Internal communication can further be divided into formal and informal internal communication. The formal communication concerns the communication that is planned to reach the “insiders” of the organization in line with the organization’s command. This type of internal communication is usually communicated through reports, letters, intranets or emails. Informal internal communication, on the other hand, refers to communication of a more casual character that is not commanded by the organization. Examples of this type of communication are casual conversations between employees, phone calls or emails. It has been argued that both formal, as well as informal internal communication, are needed in order for an organization to create, sustain, and develop healthy flows of internal information (Kumar, 2010).

2.2.1 Downward and Upward Communication

Within an organization, it is common to divide the communication flow into two categories; downward communication and upward communication. The latter, upward communication, can be referred to as the flow of information from subordinate levels up to higher managerial levels. This type of communication often consists of the employee’s personal ideas, thoughts, or expressions. This can take the form in, for example, ideas and thoughts about
organizational improvements or task-related ideas, information about colleagues or more personal information about the employee. It is important to allow for upward communication in order to let the employees' voices be heard, partly on an emotional level, but also because upward communication may contain initiatives that improve the general performance of the organization as well as its profitability (Cornelissen, 2011).

Downward communication, on the other hand, can be referred to as the flow of information from a corporate level to the organization’s subordinate levels. This includes both verbal and digital information methods to communicate with the organization’s employees and inform them about, for instance, organizational changes and strategic goals, as well as the individual’s own contribution to the organization. It is commonly said that downward communication has two main tasks: to inform about things that are considered most important for the organization in order to reach its mission, and secondly to inform about what is most regarded in terms of the organization’s policies (Cornelissen, 2011).

2.2.2 Channels for Internal Communication

Already in the 1960s, McLuhan (1964) stated that the medium is the message in terms of communication. By this, it is meant that the scale and extent of human action and association are dependent on the medium since the medium creates, controls and shapes the message (McLuhan, 1964). Each medium has its own unique characteristics to engage the recipient of the message in different ways, and although McLuhan's (1964) statement above is several decades old, this reasoning is equally applicable to today’s great selection of more advanced mediums (Men, 2014). Today, a broad range of communication channels exist that organizations can use in order to communicate internally. Examples of these channels are everything from face-to-face communication and more traditional publications such as magazines and newsletters, phone calls, to today's wide array of digital and technological advancements such as intranets, social networks, instant messaging, and online video calls (Men, 2014).

Along with the wide variety of communication channels, the concept of media richness has been evolved by Daft and Lengel (1986) in order to rank and categorize the channels. Their research was aimed at investigating the connection between organizational information processing and different communication preferences depending on the media richness. Based on this, they developed a theory called media richness theory, referred to as MRT. According
to Daft and Lengel (1986), media richness can be used as a term to rank, or to categorize, the different communication mediums, or channels, depending on the medium’s ability to reproduce the message that is communicated through it. The idea is that the more informational processing that can be done through a medium, the richer the medium is considered to be (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013). In order to be able to do this categorization, they found that these mediums could be ranked based on four different factors to determine their degree of media richness. These were: the ability to facilitate feedback quickly, the ability to use natural language, the ability to use a personal focus and, lastly, the ability to use informational cues, both verbal and non-verbal (Daft & Lengel, 1986, Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013).

The channels follow a continuum where face-to-face communication is considered to be the richest media as it allows for complex information to be communicated, the ability to receive instant feedback, the ability to use natural language and to direct the communication with a high personal focus (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Information that is considered as less rich is more suitable for impersonal forms of channels, such as reports, posters and simple announcements. Examples of channels that categorize as in between this continuum are phone calls and email. The arguments behind the media richness theory developed by Daft and Lengel (1986) in selecting the appropriate communication channel is that the choice of channel, or medium, is dependent on the ambiguity of the information that is about to be processed and the media richness. However, as resources often are limited, other factors often need to be considered and can affect the choice of channel or medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Thomas, 2013).

2.2.3 Internal Corporate Communication Technologies

Today’s highly digitalized and technologically advanced working space offers several different methods for the MNC to communicate internally (Cornelissen, 2011). Apart from face-to-face communication, there are many alternative technologies that are highly used, such as emails, intranets, and video conferences. Along with these choices of communication technologies, Cornelissen (2011) argues that the ICC can be divided into mainly two categories: management communication and central information and communication systems (CICS).
Cornelissen (2011) describes management communication as the flow of information between a manager and his subordinate colleagues that is often highly focused around a specific task or personally directed towards an employee’s morale. Although the manager often gets support or training for how to communicate this type of information, this type of communication is usually not ordered from the corporate communications department, but it is rather the manager who is responsible for this type of communication (Cornelissen, 2011).

CICS, on the other hand, is described as having a broader perspective on communication than solely looking at the direct employee-manager communication. Instead, CICS communication entails communication about corporate matters to everyone within the organization. This includes all employees in all different ranks and functions and the information is centralized around corporate decisions and developments. The corporate communication department is often responsible for this type of information that is communicated. CICS can be communicated through multiple channels, such as town hall meetings where senior managers can announce important corporate decisions, intranets, and email (Cornelissen, 2011).

2.3 Criteria for Effective Communication

The communication process is mainly focused on trying to outline to what extent the message received reflects the message intended by the source (Kumar, 2010). Therefore, conditions for effective communication are that the message is understood properly by the receiver and that the purpose of the message is fulfilled. If the message is not fully understood by the receiver, the communication can be considered ineffective. Ineffective internal communication is desirable to avoid as it can lead to loss of business. Hence, effective internal communication is a crucial part for the management to try to achieve (Kumar, 2010).

It is vital to understand the criteria determining the effectiveness of communication in order to understand how effective the communication in an organization is. There are, however, various opinions of what the criteria for effective communication are (Kumar, 2010; Pažėraitė & Repovienė, 2018). The seven C’s of communication is one principle for effective communication, which applies to both verbal and written communication. Furthermore, many other principles of communication are similar to the seven C’s and more or less involved in the below conditions. The seven C’s consist of: candidness, clarity, completeness,
Candidness means that a message should always be prepared with the receiver in mind and his or her perception of the world. Effectivity can be reached by taking the audience into consideration, i.e. their problems, needs, and viewpoints (Kumar, 2010). Clarity is the principle of always using a language with familiar and accurate words and finding a balance between them. By clarity the message emphasizes a specific goal rather than trying to achieve too much. The longer a message should travel, the clearer it should be. It is regarded as the most important principle in communication (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001; Kumar, 2010). Zaremba (2006) states that the clarity of communication can be affected by the communication channel, in terms of possibility of direct feedback or opportunity to think through and rewrite the message. Completeness is to give all the information that the receiver needs to understand the message. A complete message leaves no questions in the mind of the receiver and is time saving since no extra message is needed. Conciseness means that the message should be designed in a concise way not to waste time and expense. If a message is concise it does not involve wordy expressions or repetition without leaving any information out. Sometimes repetition can be interpreted as giving emphasis to the message when it, in reality, is the opposite (Kumar, 2010). In a study by Marques (2010, p. 53) the conciseness concept was elaborated on as “too many instances of organizational communication are like ‘hot air’: time-consuming and unsubstantial”. Correctness involves using the right level of language - informal, formal or substandard. It also includes the grammatical correctness which will increase the likelihood of the receiver to take the message seriously. Concreteness is about the communication being specific, particular and clear rather than fuzzy, vague and general. The message should be clear for the receiver to understand. Courtesy is to be respectful to the listener or target group and the communication should be directed to the right audience (Kumar, 2010).

Even though ICC has been recognized as mainly top-down (Smith & Mounter, 2008), many argue that to reach effectiveness there must be a means that allows for correct feedback (Chmielecki, 2015; Cornelissen, 2011; Pažeraitė & Repovienė, 2018). The two-way approach of the communication concept is crucial as the receiver of the communication has been recognized to have a central role in the communication process. The reasoning behind this is that it is the recipient who interprets the information in the process of decoding the message.
Since the message is sent with an intention, the sender has to encode the message. Thus, this interpretation, or decoding process, of the message that the recipient makes is crucial for the value and confirmation of the intention of the message (Henderson, 2004; Rajhans, 2012). Thereby, this two-way perspective is important to understand if the message has been perceived as intended (Quirke, 2008).

2.4 Barriers to Effective Internal Communication

Internal communication is an essential part of any organization. The key idea of effective communication involves the transmitted information from sender to receiver to be perceived in the same way. It can, however, be obstructed in numerous ways, making the communication ineffective (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001; Kumar, 2010). It is the obstructions that imply that the message is not received by the receiver as intended by the sender that can be seen as barriers to communication. This has also been referred to as miscommunication (Kumar, 2010). Any type of communication can be subject to miscommunication and it is often particularly difficult to communicate in a business context. The complexity of the business material that needs to be communicated is often the reason for the difficulties. Furthermore, the business environment entails distractions for both the sender and the receiver which can divert attention (Kumar, 2010).

In the communication process, noise is one of the most fundamental barriers since it distorts the meaning of the message to the receiver. Noise can affect the communication process at any point, and many times, neither the sender nor the receiver can control the existence of noise. Examples of noise can be different sounds like someone sneezing, passing traffic or sound from people talking. In addition, it could also be emails ending up in the spam folder, a dead phone line or someone getting called away before the communication process is finalized (Kumar, 2010). Another main barrier to effective communication is the encoding and decoding process (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001; Henderson, 2004). This means that the process of encoding and decoding may not be the same, resulting in a difference in how the message was received compared to intended. Brooke (1996) states that this barrier is relevant both between individuals and groups as well as essential to communication between different organizational levels. The choice of communication channel may also constitute a barrier if the wrong one is chosen, as different types of information need different types of channels (Smith & Mounter, 2008).
Lee, Son and Kim (2016) have identified three barriers of communication, all related to some form of overload. These barriers are referred to as three dimensions of overload: communication overload, information overload, and system feature overload. These different types of overload can also be seen as work stressors, as they cause stress to the employee exposed to the communication (Lee et al., 2016). Consequently, this can lead to disruption to the optimal functioning of the employee, which in turn may have a negative impact on the employee’s work in form of decreased engagement, fatigue and distract the employee from his or her original task (Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Lee et al., 2016).

Firstly, communication overload is referred to the stage when the communication that reaches the person through various information communication technologies (ICT) channels such as face-to-face, email, telephone, intranet, etc., is considerably higher than the person’s capacity to handle this flow of communication. This may occur when the number of ICT used exceeds the number of channels that the person can absorb. For example, this can be the case when the person feels that he or she gets distracted to perform the original task by different postings, push notifications, news, or other information through different channels. It may also occur if the person feels that he or she needs to respond to more messages through one or several channels than he or she would want to (Lee et al., 2016).

Secondly, information overload occurs when the amount of information exceeds the person’s ability to process the information (Chmielecki, 2015; Eppler & Mengis, 2004; Lee et al., 2016). Information overload is common when the person exposed to the information gets the feeling that he or she (1) gets too much information, (2) gets distracted by the high amount of information the person receives, and/or (3) gets overwhelmed by the information the person receives. This has become increasingly common in today’s digital sphere where the digital communication has exploded with the increased ICT and possibilities to communicate (Lee et al., 2016). Information overload also contributes to the feeling of communication being too time-consuming for the employee, as well as creating mixed messages. Ultimately, information overload can exacerbate the media onslaught, meaning that difficulties for the employees arise in how to approach the information. The mental capacity to absorb and process information is limited and should therefore be regarded as a strategic resource by the company (Quirke, 2008).
System feature overload is explained to occur when the technology to perform a task is perceived as too complicated, too advanced or too difficult by the user (Lee et al., 2016). This also includes the time it takes to learn and adapt to new changes in the given technology, such as functional changes or changes in the technological systems. This may occur when the person perceives that (1) the features in the given technology are distracting and unnecessary to perform the original task, (2) the person feels less efficient because of the given technology, and/or (3) the system is perceived as too complex (Lee et al., 2016).

2.5 The Link Between Internal Corporate Communication and Employee Engagement

The concept of employee engagement has been explored in previous research within several areas, such as organizational behavior, sociology and psychology (Saks, 2006). Further, there has been a growing interest in exploring the relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance (Ruck & Welch, 2012). In connection with this, engagement has become an increasingly central measurement within the communication field. Here, engagement has been used as a parameter in order to measure the correlation with the organization’s stakeholders’ experiences and the impact on the bottom line of the organization (Karanges, Johnston, Beatson, & Lings, 2014). Karanges et al. (2014, p. 129) state that “Industry research has recognized internal communication as an underlying influence of employee engagement.”. This compiles with the statement that organizations must meet the employee need for communication in order to be able to maintain and further develop employee engagement (Welch, 2011). Particularly the internal communication must be well-designed and streamlined through the organization to facilitate employee engagement (Karanges et al., 2014; Mishra, Boyton & Mishra 2014; Welch, 2011).

Although there seems to be a lack of an established definition of employee engagement (Tkalač Verčič & Pološki Vokić, 2016), it has been referred to as the employees’ efforts (Frank, Finnegan & Taylor, 2004), involvements (Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002), and emotional commitments (Baumruk, 2004; Shaw, 2005) to the organization. The connection between internal communication and employee engagement has further been highlighted by Freidl and Verčič (2011) and Ruck and Welch (2011), who state that the main role of internal communication, apart from spreading information within the organization about strategic goals and organizational changes, is to develop a sense of community within the organization.
By communication of strategy and goals, engagement is created through the employee feeling well informed of what is going on and is planned. The belongingness and identification mean that the employee identifies with the values of the organization and is an advocate of what it does (Ruck & Welch, 2011). In order to develop a sense of community within the organization, it is argued that the employees need to form relationships both with supervisors, colleagues, as well as with the organization. Consequently, these relationships are discussed to have a direct correlation with employee engagement. Meaning, if the relationships are perceived as positive by the employee, the employee engagement increases (Karanges et al., 2014; Welch, 2012).

Additionally, Ruck and Welch (2011) highlight the importance of support and performance related communication for creating engagement, meaning that the employee feels valued by the organization and knows how his or her performance is. It is also important for the communication to incorporate the employee voice, meaning that the employee has regular opportunities to have a say. Lastly, the role of the employee is emphasized to be communicated, based on that the employee knows his or her responsibilities and how they contribute to the organization. Communication regarding these topics is highlighted as the greatest influences of employee engagement (Ruch & Welch, 2011).

The relationship between ICC and employee engagement has further been highlighted by Welch (2011), who argues that employee engagement is constructed by both emotional engagement as well as cognitive engagement. The ICC has an effect on both these types of engagement. However, there is also an aspect that influences the engagement that is not affected by the ICC, in which Welch (2011) calls “antecedents”. What is meant with antecedents is the individual’s own personality traits, which also have an impact on the employee’s engagement. This includes the human behavior, which is never fixed and highly individual, since each person’s personality is different, which naturally has an influence on his or her engagement (Welch, 2011).

On the one hand, Welch (2011) conceptualizes the functions of the ICC on an emotional level, i.e. emotional engagement, where the goals of the communication are to (1) promote commitment to the organization, and (2) to contribute to a sense of belonging to the organization. The sense of belonging to an organization can be described as a “we” feeling, meaning that the employee identifies him- or herself with the company (Welch, 2011). The
personal need of belonging has also been recognized by Baumeister, Leary and Steinberg (1995), who suggest that the feeling of belongingness is a strong motivation for people in all social situations, including the workplace. On the other hand, Welch (2011) argues that ICC also can lead to cognitive engagement. The type of communication that creates cognitive engagement is communication promoting awareness of environmental changes within the organization, as well as understanding of organizational goals. The cognitive engagement is described as a state of mind where the employee is fully dedicated to a specific task. This ultimately results in an increased absorption from the employee to the work, which directly has a positive effect on the work performance. The increased engagement, both emotional as well as cognitive, fosters increased organizational effectiveness, innovation, and competitiveness (Welch, 2011).

2.6 Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework for this thesis has been created which is presented in Figure 2. The model has been developed based on the key areas identified from the literature review. In order to examine how an MNC can communicate effectively internally to engage its employees, the ICC is our starting point for our theoretical framework. Accordingly, this type of communication can be defined as downward communication since it is communicated from a corporate level down to the organization’s employees (Cornelissen, 2011).

There are two main areas that can be distinguished regarding ICC and its connection with engagement (Karanges et al., 2014; Welch, 2011; Welch, 2012). The first one is linked to emotional engagement (Welch, 2011), i.e. communication that promotes organizational commitment and a sense of belonging to the organization (Freidl & Verčič, 2011; Welch, 2011). The other one that can be distinguished is more linked to the so-called cognitive engagement (Welch, 2011), i.e. ICC that promotes information about organizational changes and information about, for example, strategic goals (Freidl & Verčič, 2011; Welch, 2011). Furthermore, the channel in which both of these types of communication is communicated through is central for the effects on engagement (Cornelissen, 2011; Daft & Lengel, 1986; McLuhan, 1964; Men, 2014), where the concept of noise has been recognized as one of the most dominant barriers for communication (Kumar, 2010).
As this thesis strives to examine what can be regarded as effective ICC, the criteria defined by Kumar (2010) of candidness, clarity, completeness, conciseness, correctness, concreteness and courtesy are therefore found in the model as factors that affect the effectiveness of the communication. Finally, the result of achieved engagement through effective ICC is believed to lead to increased organizational effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness (Welch, 2011). The effect, however, is not investigated in this thesis as outlined under the heading “1.5 Delimitations”.

![Conceptual framework](Image)

*Figure 2. Conceptual framework. Own compilation.*
3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

There are two types of research methods that can be used when conducting research studies; quantitative research and qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). The choice of which method to use in order for us to conduct our study on an MNC’s ICC fell on utilizing a qualitative research method rather than a quantitative research method. The qualitative research approach is in line with the purpose of this thesis, which is based on generating an in-depth understanding of the research question through interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). Through these interviews, the empirical material will be generated based on how the interviewees interpret and perceive their social reality, which also is in line with Bryman and Bell’s (2015) and Yin’s (2017) reasoning for using a qualitative research method.

A qualitative research method is often the suitable method to use in order to understand beliefs and meanings of questions focusing on “why” and “how”, as opposed to quantitative research that instead is focusing on answering questions in line with “how many” (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). The qualitative knowledge approach is generated by how the interviewees interpret and perceive their social reality, and how the authors interpret these answers. Therefore, qualitative research methods are often referred to as more suitable in order to answer questions of a more complex nature, and especially in combination with international research or cross-national research (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017).

3.2 Research Approach

The aim of this study is to look at how the employees of an MNC perceive the flow of ICC in terms of effectiveness and engagement. This study is developed utilizing an abductive, or iterative, research approach, meaning that a combination of both a deductive and an inductive research approach have been used throughout the formation of this thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). An abductive method has been used because we, as the authors, continuously worked through the various sections of the thesis during the process. Accordingly, this means that the formation of this thesis was a continuous mix of working with both theory and empirical
findings in order to allow for the inflow of new ideas and thoughts to be taken into account (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Dubois and Gadde (2002) call this method of matching theory and empirical findings “systematic combining”, as they argue that empirical observation is a necessity to be able to gain an understanding of the theoretical framework, and vice versa.

The starting point for this thesis, however, was primarily using a deductive approach since a literature review was made prior to the data collection as a foundation for the empirical material. As illustrated in Figure 3, our starting point was therefore that we wanted to study communication within an MNC, and based on that, a broad initial literature was done in order to gain a deeper understanding of the subject before the data was collected. Thereafter, we chose the company that we wanted to study this subject on, which was Volvo Penta. This was followed by deciding the research design, namely a qualitative single case study. After a dialogue with the company, it was decided that the topic should be narrowed down to ICC. Additional theory about ICC was collected and then, in consultation with the company, our research question was finally chosen: to study how to design effective ICC and its impact on employee engagement. As the data was collected, a more inductive approach was thereby used, since we looked at the empirical material to critically question the theoretical framework to see if it matched our collected data, in accordance with the matching process discussed by Dubois and Gadde (2002). Along with our analysis of the collected data, the theory was revisited in order to make more insightful linkages between the empirical findings and the theoretical framework (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Dubois & Gadde, 2002).
3.2.1 Case Study

This thesis is built on a single case study approach. A single case study opens up for the opportunity to research the case thoroughly to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question (Yin, 2017), which is in line with the aim of this thesis. The case study approach also allows for the opportunity to do an extensive and intensive analysis of the subject of interest. Further, when choosing the specific “case”, the focus should be on choosing the case that is anticipated to generate the highest degree of learning (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). Using a single case study approach rather than a multiple case study approach is a particularly suitable method when it is difficult or impossible to distinguish the phenomenon that is desired to be examined from its context (Merriam, 2009). In addition, Dubois and Gadde (2002) argue that the best way to understand the relationship between a specific phenomenon and its context is through in-depth case studies.

Figure 3. Used methodology. Own compilation.
Although there are many clear strengths with case studies, it is also important to consider the downsides that may exist for conducting such a study (Collis & Hussey, 2013). Some of the disadvantages mentioned are that it is an incredibly time-consuming method, and that there may be challenges to find a case suitable for the study. In single case studies, there is also a challenge to make a delimitation to the study's context, which is, for example, focused on an individual company or organization. Since the organization and its members are often part of many other contexts, they interact with other organizations in the society as well, which in turn can have an influence over the company being studied. Furthermore, a challenge lies in the fact that the organization has a future but also a history. Case studies of this nature investigate a phenomenon in the company for a limited time and it can thus be problematic to account for events from both the company's history as well as the future that might influence the results of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2013).

3.2.2 Choosing the Case Study

The basis for choosing the case for the case study should be done with regard to the fact that the case should (1) contribute to the purpose being met for the thesis and (2) that the case enables the research question to be answered (Merriam, 2009). Further, the case should be chosen based on its ability to generate high degree of learnings (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017).

For this thesis, our research interest was about internal communication. Our focus was to find a large international organization, where there was a possibility to examine the international context from a local perspective, i.e. an international organization that was also based in Sweden. Further, we wanted to gather data that would generate a broad perspective in regard to the interviewees, whom we wanted to represent different positions within the chosen organization as well as physically dispersed positions in order to capture the international perspective and generate as great learnings as possible. Another criterion was that we wanted our research interest, internal communication, to be suitable for the chosen case. Finally, we wanted to choose a case that we believed would enable us, as the authors, to answer our research question.

As a result, Volvo Penta was chosen as the company of study due to having business in many different countries and hence being an MNC. Volvo Penta is part of the Volvo conglomerate and is one of the world leading suppliers of power solutions in marine and industrial contexts.
The company has a total of 1,600 employees around the world, out of which about 800 work in Sweden. The HQ is located in Gothenburg, Sweden, where brand and communication as well as legal and compliance matters are controlled from. In addition to this, there are regional offices in the US, England, Turkey, China, Japan, South Africa, Russia, India, and Australia. Volvo Penta has two main factories, one is located in Vara, Sweden, and the other one in Lexington, Tennessee, USA (Volvo Penta, 2018). As the Volvo conglomerate is also one of the most well-renowned companies, we believe that it would be possible to get valuable insights and generate the great learnings (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). When initial meetings took place, the company agreed on our wish to study internal communication and confirmed that it would be possible for us to get access to the desired number of interviewees from several different company positions and physical locations. Therefore, Volvo Penta was chosen as it was believed that it would enable us to answer our research question as well as fulfill the purpose of this study (Merriam, 2009).

3.3 Data Collection

By performing qualitative research it is examined how people make sense of themselves and others as well as how they give meaning to their daily lives. Methods of data collection that is flexible and sensitive to the social context should therefore be used. In research there are two types of data that can be collected; primary and secondary. Primary data is data that has been collected for a specific research goal while secondary data was originally collected for a different purpose and thereafter reused for another purpose (Hox & Boeije, 2005). This study has been performed using primary data by performing semi-structured interviews, which is a common data collection method for qualitative research (Yin, 2017). However, in order to understand our research context, secondary data has been used as well in form of annual reports and internal documents. The secondary data is presented in this thesis in the case description as well as for the description of the company's communication in the form of the respective communication channel.

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Choosing interviews rather than surveys as a data collection method is considered particularly preferable for qualitative case studies. The reason for this is because interviews are particularly suitable for answering questions of the character “how” and “why” in order to gain a deeper understanding of the chosen topic of investigation (Yin, 2017). Since the
research aim was to investigate how the ICC can be communicated to enhance employee engagement, interviews were considered to be the most suitable method for collecting data. The interviews were conducted with employees at different levels in the organization in order to try to generate an as representative picture as possible by interviewing employees with varying backgrounds and experiences.

In order to collect our data, 18 interviews were performed and they followed the design of so-called semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews simply mean that the interview guide followed a certain design, where some questions were set for all interviewees that were considered especially important for our research, while some questions had room for modifications, follow-up questions, or additions depending on the answers and reflections that arose during the interviews. Hence, this type of interview allows for a certain degree of openness and flexibility as well as the possibility to participate in the response of the interviewee. It also gives the interviewee a great leeway in how to reply while still keeping within the frame (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews were therefore chosen in order to be able to slightly modify as well as add questions during the interview, which allowed us to follow up on valuable information during the interview (Styhre, 2013). The interview guide that has been used for the collection of data can be found in Appendix 1.

The interviews were constructed between the 19th of March to the 5th of April and lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. Further, most of the questions were formulated as open-ended to give room for the interviewees to elaborate on their answers. The interviews were conducted in both English and Swedish and were held through Skype. For the interviewees who had Swedish as their native language, the interviews were held in Swedish, and the rest of the interviews were held in English for those who were non-native Swedish speakers. This resulted in 6 interviews held in Swedish and 12 interviews held in English. Since we wanted to encourage the interviewees to talk as freely as possible and feel comfortable in the interview situation, the choice was made to conduct some of the interviews in Swedish as interviews in mother tongue enables this (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Tsang, 1998).

3.3.2 Choice of Interviewees
A first step in finding the persons to interview was to put up some requirements for what was regarded as relevant for the study. As the purpose of this study is to examine how the ICC for
an MNC can be designed in order to be effective and increase the employee engagement, there were mainly two requirements that needed to be fulfilled for the persons to be an interesting interview candidate. The person needed to be (1) a Volvo Penta employee and thereby have access to the ICC channels, and (2) contribute to a width of the total representation of interviewees, both in regard to location but also position within the company.

Based on the requirements, our supervisors at Volvo Penta contacted a large number of people asking if they wanted to participate in an interview about ICC. A dozen people replied that they would like to volunteer for the interview, and thereafter, our supervisors at Volvo Penta booked Skype meetings depending on when it suited the interviewees and us as authors. Further, one of the contacted persons could in turn recommend four additional people who fulfilled our requirements and who wanted to volunteer for an interview. Thus, there was a so-called “snowball sampling” of the interviewees (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Collis & Hussey, 2013). The complete list of interviewees can be found in Table 1.

The fact that it was our supervisors who contacted the people who would be part of this study may entail a risk. One the one hand, it can mean that you carefully choose people in a non-random manner who you think will generate valuable answers for the study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). On the other hand, it could also lead to the risk of choosing the people you think will give an as desirable response as possible in order to convey your own company in an exemplary manner. This risk was counteracted by the fact that we as the author of this thesis formulated the email that went out to all the respondents and that this email was sent to a large number of people where they volunteered to participate in the interview. In addition, we as the authors were included in the mailing list, which increased our confidence that the mail went out to an as wide audience as possible.
Table 1. List of interviewees. Compiled by authors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Area of Work</th>
<th>Interview Method</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Dealer Business Area</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Dealer Sales Support</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 21</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 21</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 22</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Head of Market</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 25</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Aftermarket</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 25</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 25</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Dealer Business Area</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Work Administrator</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Aftermarket</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Head of Market</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>March 28</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Business Development</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Treasury &amp; Investment</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Business Support</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 5</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Data Analysis

In accordance with an abductive research approach, the collected data were analyzed along with the formation of the theoretical framework (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The primary data, i.e. the interviews, were transcribed and analyzed shortly after the interviews had taken place. All of the interviews were transcribed in the language they were performed, i.e. the interviews were transcribed in English or Swedish. The interviews that were held and transcribed in Swedish were later translated to English if used as a quote in this thesis. By doing this, Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that there is a risk for translation bias. However, this problem was recognized already before the choice of which language to use during the interviews was made. Consequently, the translation work was therefore something that was devoted extra attention to where both of the authors of this thesis discussed and revisited the translations in order to minimize this risk. The quotes used have also been re-written in cases where the grammar has not been correct from the respondent's side and unnecessary words have been removed such as “well”, “eh”, “you know”, in order to improve the overall impression of the material. However, much attention has been given to double-checking so that the answers
have not been incorrectly translated to ensure that the meaning of the quote has remained the same even if we have refined the quote.

The transcription of the interviews enabled us to collect and examine the generated data and discover common themes brought up in the different interviews (Collis & Hussey, 2013). This made it possible for us to distinguish and cluster the findings, which in turn facilitates both the understanding of the data as well as how to relate the gathered findings with the purpose of the research (Collis & Hussey, 2013; Yin, 2017). At first, we clustered the findings into two main headings based on the empirical material in symbiosis with the research question: the channels and the content. Thereafter, for the analysis, we continuously went through the theoretical material in combination with the empirical findings and paired the empirical findings into subcategories that were connected to either engagement or effectiveness. An illustration of the clustering can be found in Figure 4 in chapter 5 “Analysis”. This clustering of the different empirical patterns enabled us to make a thorough analysis in the matching process where we continuously analyzed the empirical findings with the gathered data, which is in line with the abductive research approach (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

3.5 Ethical Aspects

When conducting qualitative research, or research in general, there are several aspects to consider related to ethics that has been taken into account throughout the entire process of writing this thesis. One of these aspects is related to research including interviews. One example of such an aspect includes the relationships between the authors and the interviewees (Berg, 2009; Kvale, 1997). Kvale (1997) elaborates on this where he associates an interview situation with a moral company: the personal interaction in the interview affects the interviewee, and the knowledge produced through the interview affects our understanding of the human situation.

Bryman and Bell (2015) explain that there are mainly four ethical aspects to consider when conducting, collecting, and analyzing data for research. Firstly, the researcher should consider the aspect of harm in relation to the research. Meaning, if the research is likely to contribute to harming the participants in any way, it is considered as unethical. However, the concept of harm can include many things, and it can be problematic to distinguish due to its intangible nature. For example, except physical harm, harm could also take the form in for example causing stress, harm in regard to career development and career future, or harm to the
The interviewee’s self-esteem (Bryman & Bell, 2015). These aspects were counteracted by the fact that participation in the interview was voluntary, all interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study to counteract stress and they were informed that their participation would be anonymized. We also had this in mind during our interviews and already before the interviews when designing the interview guide. We chose to ask as open questions as possible where the interviewees themselves have to decide what they want to answer to avoid that they would feel that we are pushing them to respond in a certain way, which could be the case if we instead would be asking leading questions. This was done to prevent them from feeling that their participation and responses could affect them in a harmful way, in accordance with Bryman and Bell (2015) and Yin (2017).

Secondly, another key area to consider in regard to ethics is the issue of informed consent according to Bryman and Bell (2015), which is also highlighted by Yin (2017). A main rule is that those who are to participate should be provided as much information as possible, which enable them to make a well-considered decision as to whether they want to participate or not. However, the nature of the research makes it extremely difficult to provide the participants with all of this information as their participation is often a part of the data collecting process. It may also be negative for the research itself to present all the information that the researchers know to the participants, as this can lead to skewed answers. As the most important thing is to inform the participants about the purpose of the study so that they feel that they are not being deceived, this was done in order to ensure the informed consent (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The third aspect to consider is concerning the participants’ privacy, and more specifically if the research risks to invade the participants’ privacy (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This aspect is highly linked to the aforementioned aspect concerning informed consent, because the participants’ consent should reflect the degree of privacy that is utilized for the research. However, these two aspects are not exactly the same, i.e., if the participant has agreed to consent, it does not automatically mean that the person is willing to answer all questions or share certain things. Since privacy is very individual, it is up to each participant to draw that line and it is therefore important that the researchers are responsive to this (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). To ensure the participants’ privacy, the recordings of interviews and their transcription are handled confidentially and are only available to us as the authors ourselves in our own material for the processing of the empirical material.
The fourth and final aspect is about deception (Bryman & Bell, 2015), which can occur if the researchers present their research as something other than what it actually is, as some research is more likely not to share the entire purpose of the study to get as honest answers as possible. If this is the case, however, this must be explained after various conclusions have been drawn (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To avoid deception, all interviewees were informed of the purpose of their participation, the purpose of the thesis and the structure of the interview. It was also offered to all interviewees to share the material with them so they would feel that they had access to the information in which they were a central part of.

3.6 Quality of the Study

Obtaining a high degree of validity and reliability are considered as key aspects in order to ensure the quality of the study (Yin, 2017). Although it has sometimes been questioned whether validity and reliability should be used in qualitative research since it primarily is designed for quantitative research, they are still widely known concepts that are still used (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Sometimes modifications of the concepts are used, such as trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, trustworthiness is achieved if the parameters of reliability and validity have been ensured (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The parameters reliability and validity are parameters used to evaluate the precision and applicability of the presented results. The meaning of reliability can be translated as the extent to which a concept is reliable to apply, while validity includes measurement parameters, i.e. how well the study measures the intentional purpose (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017).

3.6.1 Reliability

The study's qualitative reliability is assessed on the basis of external and internal reliability. Internal reliability includes issues related to studies where several researchers are involved and how well the common image of a specific phenomenon is related to the same measure (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). The presentation of the empirical data largely consists of the authors' subjective judgments, which can affect the study's internal reliability depending on whether or not the researchers can agree on the observed findings. This has been taken into account in the study, where the both of us have established a common agreement on how the answers are to be interpreted. The fact that we recorded every interview and transcribed them allowed us to both avoid misunderstandings as well as gain a deeper understanding of the answers, since we listened to the recordings several times. If there were any question marks
about what the interviewees told us, we could easily listen to the interviews again and discuss what he or she actually meant. Thus, we created a common picture of what the interviewees had said. Further, this common interpretation between us as the authors of this thesis has also been the foundation for how the answers, theories and results were understood and later presented in order to increase the internal reliability.

The external reliability can be referred to as the extent to which the study can be replicated (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). In qualitative research approaches, this can be problematic, since each in-depth interview is unique and human behavior is indefinite. However, as consistency and documentation are key aspects in order to ensure external reliability (Leung, 2015), a semi-structured interview guide was developed prior to the interviews and thereafter used throughout every interview. Further, documentation was ensured since we took notes, recorded and later transcribed each interview.

3.6.2 Validity

The qualitative validity is assessed according to how well the study measures the intentional purpose and includes external and internal validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Internal validity includes the authenticity of the conclusions drawn from the causal relationships between two or more variables. Since an interpretive approach is used in this qualitative study, the internal validity has been taken into account by trying to find different patterns of the results, which can be seen in the clustering of the findings in Figure 4 in chapter 5 “Analysis”, which is in accordance with the suggestions by Bryman and Bell (2015) and Yin (2017).

The external validity includes how generalizable and representative the results of the study can be perceived for the specific research context (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2017). In order to increase the validity based on recommendations from Bryman and Bell (2015), we have gathered data from several different sources, been transparent with the methods and data used for presenting the results, and finally revised the presented data to ensure that the interpretations of the data conform with the reality. This is in accordance with the recommendations by Bryman and Bell (2015) who argue that this increases the representative quality of the study. Reaching full generalizability in qualitative single case studies can be challenging as it is not the intention, since each case is unique. However, the hope is that by analyzing a phenomenon that may also be applicable to other organizations, other studies with similar theoretical context and similar research objects can benefit from the conclusions presented in this study as well (Leung, 2015).
4. Empirical Findings

4.1 The Channels

4.1.1 Volvo Penta Communication Channels

During the collection of data and prior to the interviews, the different types of channels Volvo Penta uses to communicate internally were examined. It was found that there were several different channels that the communications department uses for ICC, namely the intranet, email, Skype, and face-to-face (Volvo Penta, 2019).

The *Violin intranet* is an internet portal that all employees have access to through their web homepage and where posts are made frequently. In this channel announcements regarding news, campaigns, events, press releases and new products are made. It is also the main channel for any news in the company as well as new customer agreements. Lastly, financial results reports are announced on the intranet quarterly. The intranet offers a certain degree of personalization meaning that the employee has the possibility to filter what he or she is more interested in (Volvo Penta, 2019).

*Email* is another channel in which a large amount of information is communicated through. Communication regarding upcoming events and conferences are often announced by email, as well as weekly product newsletters and sales reports (Volvo Penta, 2019).

*Skype* is used for large marketing updates where it is up to the employee to choose to attend. The physical CEO meeting in Gothenburg is executed through Skype at two different time slots for the Americas and the Asian region. This enables the employees in other parts of the world to take part of the same information given locally. Additionally, innovation and transformation seminars with different focuses are performed over Skype (Volvo Penta, 2019).

*Face-to-face* communication is used for the CEO meeting in Gothenburg where a presentation is performed regarding strategies and goals for the organization as well as the financial statements being accounted for. In addition to this, face-to-face meetings are also held by inviting different persons to discuss business strategy and how communication can be improved (Volvo Penta, 2019).
4.1.1.1 The Intranet - Violin

Volvo’s intranet Violin is the communication channel that appears as a pre-selected option as soon as a Volvo Penta employee opens up an internet site at work. The intranet is a broad communication channel. Not only is news published here, but also the organization's documents, presentations, policies and process support are available. There is a pre-selected filtering function for the intranet, which is based on the employee's work and location. This is to filter the information and make it more relevant (Volvo Penta, 2019). During the interviews, it was usually Violin that was mentioned first, as it is the website that most interviewees use several times a day.

It was discussed that the intranet was a rich source of information channel that was always available for the interviewees to access information. The interviewees mentioned the intranet’s ability to store a large amount of information, and the benefits to gain access to the intranet regardless of time, as this enables to absorb the information at your own convenience. However, this also meant that an active action was required from the employees to take part of the communication on the intranet because the employees themselves had to actively click on the information on the screen and read the information to access it.

_The Intranet is the main tool that we use during the work so everybody has access to it and if you don't see it the problem is exclusively yours. Like, the situation is there, so if you don't see it, it is your problem, everybody can read it. If you don't read it, it's because you were not interested (Interview 1)._}

However, due to the large amount of information available on Violin, many of the employees mentioned that the communication via Violin can become overwhelming. This was said to incorporate the risk that the employee does not take part of the information because there is too much information communicated. Some of the interviewees discussed that because of the large amount of ICC, it usually led to them only reading the headlines on the posts on Violin, and based on the headline, they decided whether they wanted to read the information or not. This led to many articles not being read. There was a general perception that it could be difficult to reach out to all employees via Violin as many stated not to bother taking part of the information communicated.
Violin I would say is less intrusive. So the advantages of Violin is that it's not intrusive as email, but the disadvantage is that you can overlook most of the information (Interview 11).

It was also argued that the communication regarding Volvo Penta got overshadowed by the Volvo Group communication, consequently leaving the employee feeling like he or she was missing out on information regarding strategies, goals and news from the company they actually work for. The interviewees argued that because of the large amount of information communicated via the intranet, it was difficult to find the information they were looking for. If there was something they had once read and wanted to find the same information, the interviewees mentioned that it was difficult to find this information again.

The intranet was not perceived by the interviewees to be very engaging. It is up to the employee him- or herself to take part and actively read the posts and only reading a text was not considered engaging. If a video or such had been included in the message, many considered the engagement to increase distinctively. This was because the employee could more easily understand the purpose and context of the message.

I think it is really engaging with well-written articles on Violin, and especially articles where you can tap on a link and see a video. For me, videos enhance the “we-feeling” and create engagement towards the company (Interview 18).

In addition, the general experience of the intranet was that it was hard to know who and how to contact if the employee needed clarification or wanted to give feedback. Hence, the employees did not consider the intranet as a channel where feedback was encouraged, some even mentioned it to be similar to a newsfeed.

4.1.1.2 Email

Email was another well-used communication channel at Volvo Penta. There were many benefits that the interviewees mentioned about using email as an ICC channel. The time aspect seemed to be a central part when elaborating on the advantages and disadvantages of email. On the one hand, email was considered to be beneficial from a time efficiency point of view, as the interviewees were able to read and respond to emails based on their own work schedule and convenience. On the other hand, however, email could also be considered ineffective from a time efficiency point of view. If wanting a quick answer, email was
considered less effective, the reasoning behind this was because it is hard to know when to get a response, compared to a direct contact like face-to-face or Skype. The interviewees also discussed that the effectiveness of using email as a communication tool could vary to a great extent, as it could be difficult to understand each other sometimes. Email was described as limiting in regard to the use of language, as some people were described to be better to express themselves in written text than others. Hence, emails that were perceived as unclear could result in confusion and/or delays in understanding and absorbing the intended message.

*Well, [Skype] it's a little bit closer than receiving by email, you have a chance to ask questions directly if needed. The risk is that in giving messages through written channels that people can understand things very differently (Interview 3)*.

Another benefit with email that was mentioned by the interviewees was the ability to trace the email, since the human factor can cause us to forget things if we cannot save and store the information. The interviewees therefore stated that email was beneficial because it allows both saving and easily looking back for the information.

*It's easy to have a phone call, but then people forget. So if you've sent an email, you can follow it up (Interview 5)*.

*I always prefer email personally, because it has traceability if I need to look back for something (Interview 12)*.

Another aspect that was addressed by the interviewees was the size and extent of the company, including for instance different time zones. Since the company is an MNC operating in several different countries and has to provide information to all of the company's employees, the interviewees discussed what was considered reasonable in terms of ICC channels. The time aspect with regard to email was discussed from two perspectives. Since Volvo Penta is such a large MNC with operations across different time zones, it was considered beneficial to be able to deliver messages even though it was not possible to reach the persons directly due to time differences. Email enabled everyone to get the information and take part of the information when they had the opportunity, regardless of physical location as email is not time bound. On the other hand, the time aspect was also considered as a negative thing as response or feedback was not given directly. Instead, it was impossible to know when to get a reply from an email, and some of the interviewees mentioned that it sometimes could take several days.
I mean if it is a message that is going out, you cannot call people, it is unreasonable, so then email is a very good communication method, given that we are in different time zones, from the USA to China and everything in between (Interview 7).

Furthermore, when the interviewees elaborated on the different communication channels, it was mentioned that email worked as a kind of multitasking channel where the interviewees could take part of the information from email while doing something else. One of the interviewees expressed it as follows:

*With email you can read the message when you have the time and opportunity, and everyone has their phone with them always. I can read it when I am on the subway or when I have 5 minutes over at home. I think that the phone is an extremely good tool* (Interview 7).

However, as email was considered a more passive communication channel than Skype or face-to-face as discussed above, where the interviewees discussed that they can open and answer the emails based on your own time and opportunity, the interviewees discussed that there is a risk to miss out on the important information that is communicated through email too. Here are two examples that illustrate this:

*Well the advantages of the email are, of course, that it's effortless, you just go through your email daily, so you don't have to do anything else. And for someone, these advantages could be a bit intrusive, but I mean, it's not a big deal. You just receive an email, you read it, and if you're not interested, you can throw it away* (Interview 11).

*Receiving emails is good, but you get a lot of emails too* (Interview 13).

In addition to this, one employee described that the large number of emails made the one email with important information to get lost because he did not have time to open and read every one of them. According to him, the large number of incoming emails was exceeding his ability to be able to browse through them all and absorb the crucial information.

This view on email as a rather passive channel also seemed to apply for the interviewees’ perspective on email as a channel to generate engagement. It was explained that it was difficult for the interviewees to get engaged through email because the format was considered
as rather boring and limited. As email is a written form of communication, it was considered as more difficult to express emotions, as opposed to talking to someone or seeing someone on a video. One of the employees exemplified this in the following quote:

*If I get corporate communication to my email, it can be rather dry I would say, without any emotions. And what makes me engaged in something is to get emotions. Reading is less emotional than listening to people (Interview 8).*

### 4.1.1.3 Skype

Another channel used frequently for ICC is Skype. Skype was mentioned to have several functions as it was both a popular channel for making calls but also for having meetings when the persons in question are not at the same physical location. Since Skype enables more than two persons to join the meeting or call, this was considered advantageous from a meeting point of view, as colleagues with physically dispersed locations thus had the opportunity to talk to each other regardless of their placement. One of the interviewees expressed it like this:

*I really appreciate when the meetings are held through Skype, even the big town hall meetings for the people that are off site. By doing that, everybody will be available to see the information even though they're not on site and Skype is a powerful way to do that (Interview 2).*

An advantage mentioned by multiple employees is that Skype offers the possibility to use the camera function, enabling the participants to see each other. This was seen by several employees as a much more engaging way to communicate, rather than only hearing a voice or reading a text. It was stated that receiving communication through a video can be engaging in a way that you see the person talking as a leader that the employee wants to follow. Skype is also advantageous as it was mentioned to create organizational identity by seeing the people behind the message compared to only reading a text. It was mentioned that seeing a person speaking made the interviewees get a face behind the message, which enabled to create a relationship to the person speaking, which enabled to create a relationship with the person behind the message as well as the organization as a whole.

Another advantage mentioned with Skype was the possibility for direct feedback. Firstly, Skype makes it possible to clarify the message and the information to make sure that everyone understands. Skype was stated to facilitate the understanding of the message as intended, and
thereby misunderstandings can be avoided as you get it explained directly to you, instead of reading a text. Secondly, it also enables the possibility to ask supplementary questions and get a quick response.

*Skype is easier to avoid misunderstandings, get direct answers and ask follow-up questions directly. For example, when sending an email and having a 7 hour time difference, if it was not clear what I wanted answers on in the mail, once I get the answer I might have already gone home for the day, then it takes another day. Therefore, it is often easier to pick up the phone and get answers directly (Interview 7).*

Even though Skype enables people in physically dispersed locations to be able to have meetings together, a disadvantage that was mentioned of having Skype meetings by the interviewees was because of the time differences that an MNC entails. Thus, if the information is only communicated via Skype could mean that employees with conflicting work tasks or in other time zones miss out on this information.

*Usually the meetings are at the end of the day in Sweden, meaning it is morning here. In the mornings it's usually a little bit busier, so I very rarely get to join and see the faces in the Skype meetings. It's a readily available format for my time, it's just that they usually fall right in front of a meeting here for me, so it's difficult to join. The disadvantage is the time difference, it's tough, it'd be nice to have the ability to join in (Interview 9).*

4.1.1.4 Face-to-Face

In regard to how employees would like to receive ICC, the majority of the interviewees mentioned that meeting face-to-face has a large impact on how the communication was received. It was stated that having met the people who send out the information was of great importance in terms of not only engaging the employees, but also to strengthen the relationship. The interviewees explained that this way of receiving the message creates a relationship or a personal connection with the person talking, which in turn enhanced the absorption of the message. The respondents explained that meeting or seeing people in person generates a feeling of loyalty and willingness to get behind the ideas, thereby creating engagement. It was explained that face-to-face communication made the message more personal, which was explained to generate more engagement as the interviewees could relate more to the person when seeing the person face-to-face rather than from a computer. One of
the interviewees exemplified this by saying that by having met or having seen a person once made the employee create an association with the name or face of the person. If the same person was speaking on later occasions, this association made the employee feel a connection with the person who was talking, which as a result made the employee pay higher attention listening to the message. Moreover, it was also stated by the interviewees that meeting people face-to-face at some point can enhance the message through other channels later on.

Last year I went to Gothenburg, that improved a lot of the communication, because you give peoples’ names a face and I can get in touch with them more easily now than before when I didn't know them. I think these kinds of personal meetings improved our relationship a lot. Before I used to contact people through channels like Skype or email, but it was not the same thing compared to after you know the people behind the email address (Interview 1).

In addition, meeting people also helped with the direct communication and to more easily give feedback. When meeting face-to-face, the interviewees expressed that it was easier to have a discussion and to fully understand each other. This direct form of communication enabled the interviewees to ask questions and get responses directly, which meant that unclarities could be resolved immediately instead of waiting for hours or days to get a response and to understand the message. As a complement to meeting people face-to-face when not possible, Skype seemed to be the preferred alternative due to its possibility to this direct form of communication where the interviewees could hear and see the person talking.

You can't beat being with people face-to-face. We have traveled to Gothenburg and things like that, and had meetings in other countries but there is always that thing, though, that if you're 600 miles away from the head office, communication face-to-face isn't always that easy, but I think Skype's helped a lot, Skype is easy (Interview 10).

For the employees based in Gothenburg, the CEO meetings were mentioned to be highly relevant in terms of creating engagement. It was also expressed that this type of communication was greatly appreciated and rather rare for an MNC of Volvo Penta’s size. By attending these meetings and seeing the CEO, engagement was created by hearing goals and strategies formulated right in front of you. The interviewees explained that these meetings showed that the CEO was available and visible, where it is encouraged to ask questions directly if the employees have any. In turn, this ability to direct communication created a kind of personal connection with both the CEO as well as the company itself and the company’s
goals. It was explained that these CEO meetings created a connection with the company and enhanced the interviewees’ feeling of belonging to the organization.

However, a problem related to face-to-face communication in an MNC discussed by the interviewees is its boundedness to both time and place. This was expressed by the employees as a fear that he or she was missing out on important information because of working in a remote location, thereby not having any possibility to receive this kind of ICC.

_They cannot understand that other people don't get all the information... So in that way, kind of sometimes my concern is that how much I miss and how much I have to spend time to receive the same information that the people who are at the HQ receive (Interview 3)._  

4.1.2 The Number of Channels

It was strongly emphasized that one of the main challenges with absorbing the ICC at Volvo Penta was the many different channels that exist. In addition to the different channels ICC is communicated through, there are additional channels aimed for other types of communication such as communities and team communication platforms. Even though the additional channels are not used for ICC specifically, they inevitably made it hard for the employees to differentiate the communication. The many channels used throughout the company were stated to make it hard for the employees to know through which channel the most important information is communicated and also where to find the wanted information. Hence, too many channels were stated to result in inefficient communication as it was difficult for the employees to know how to prioritize between them. The interviewees also described that it was hard to know what information was communicated through which channel. Some of the interviewees explained that the same communication often reaches them on many different channels, resulting in duplication of the same information on several different communication channels. The duplication of the same message consequently made it more troublesome knowing where to look for the information, as it was not clear which channel to use for what kind of information. This was highlighted by another interviewee who explained that it was a frustration for him, since he needs to handle a high amount of information in his day-to-day work. This was illustrated as follows:
I lose a lot of time trying to find the right information that I need to answer customer questions. I think that maybe 20 percent of my time is wasted on finding the right information because I don’t know where to access it. I think that's a lot of profit to gain there (Interview 4).

The issue of having too many channels was further highlighted in the below quote;

I do not know how to prioritize between the different channels and find the important information, there are email, Skype, the intranet and it takes time to learn new channels (Interview 17).

While many expressed the issue of too many communication channels, there was a rather large consistency in believing that a single channel could not fulfill the purpose on its own. It was described that different channels have different advantages and disadvantages and therefore a combination is needed for the channels to supplement one the other. No channel was described to be able to get a full coverage by itself and the different types of information may require different channels to be communicated through.

The CEO information meeting does not get 100% coverage, for example if you are unable to attend when you are in another meeting. I believe that the meeting concept feels a bit outdated, it is based on the fact that many people are locked at the same time [...]. If you get the information in other ways, you can absorb it when it suits you. That being said, you get lots of commitment and interaction when you have these CEO-meetings that are outweighing this disadvantage, but to put everything only in the CEO-meeting channel would be dangerous, if you want to be sure to get the information out, another channel must be used in addition, for example Violin (Interview 14).

Mentioned generally, and not only in the above quote, was that relying only on a channel that requires the participant to be there for a certain time, i.e. Skype or town hall meetings, should try to be avoided. ICC through channels like those possess a great risk of being missed out due to conflicting work tasks or business travels. It was stated that if the employee misses out on information due to channels tied to a specific time, communication gaps can arise. If the employee feels like an information gap has occurred, it was mentioned that the engagement level quickly decreases due to not knowing where the company is heading. This, in turn, led to the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty of the company’s status, vision and future in general. It was stated that video clips from these types of meetings could be posted on other
communication channels that are not bound to a specific time and place, such as the intranet or email, in order to avoid communication gaps.

4.2 The Content

4.2.1 Clear and Precise Communication

During the interview process it turned out that one of the very first things raised by the majority of the interviewees was a desire for clarity and preciseness in the ICC messages. It was highlighted as one of the most important functions that the ICC had, both for the interviewee, but also for the interviewees’ closest team.

*I think that the message created on corporate level should be created in a way that the message is extremely precise if they want to secure that it goes through the organization in a correct way (Interview 2).*

One of the arguments behind this was that communication needs to be precise in order to avoid losing time trying to understand and interpret the messages. The majority of the interviewees agreed on that it was sometimes difficult to determine whether or not the message was actually relevant for them, since the purpose of the message was not clarified. One of the interviewees explained that he and his team sometimes need to spend much time thinking about how they should consider the message and what kind of actions they need to take as a response to the message, as this had not been clearly formulated in the communication. Another interviewee explained that she and closest colleagues often had to repeat the message, as they sometimes could be understood wrongly at a first glance.

Another argument from other interviewees was that the message must be specifically clear since Volvo Penta is such a large company with many different departments scattered around the world. Since the company is so large, it often leads to the information passing many different stages, and these different stages put another pressure on the preciseness of the information to avoid misinterpretation of the message. Accordingly, this was mirrored by one of the interviewees as follows;

*When the strategic message is transferred into a market, it is easy to result in the so-called telephone game. Meaning, if the message has several steps to go through, the last one who is receiving the message will not necessarily receive the same message*
that it was in the first place. So the more kind of short path and clarity for the message, the better quality of the message (Interview 3).

4.2.2 The Future and Success Stories

The interviewees stated that there was a link between the content of the message and the interviewees’ own engagement. It was explained that knowing exactly what goals and strategies the company has was highly important for employee engagement. Many mentioned the importance of knowing the direction in which the company was working towards in order not to get confused or have doubts, which is inevitable to happen if there is a lack of accessibility to communication. The interviewees further highlighted the importance of knowing what the company is striving towards for their own engagement, as this made it possible for them to understand their own work as an important contribution to the overarching goals of the company. The importance of knowing the direction to work towards was highlighted by two of the interviewees as follows:

*It’s important to get all the information on what the goals and objectives are. If you don’t have the information, you kind of just continue to do your job but you're not really sure what the direction is (Interview 2).*

*I'm keen to receive communication about a clear strategy and to know about new directions, like where we're going. Those are the things that keep us engaged (Interview 9).*

Furthermore, it was considered important that the message contained things that are directly applicable to the employees’ daily work, making the interviewed persons more engaged to read the information and engaged in the company. Innovation was another topic that was highlighted, both in the form of a futuristic perspective, i.e. where the company is moving, but also from a historical perspective, i.e. success stories, making the employees proud to work at the company. This was illustrated by the interviewees as follows:

*From my point of view, I'm more willing to receive communication that is really relevant to my day-to-day job, but also more related to, let's say the reality I live every day. So when it comes to electromobility and the future, I like the future and the idea of everything changing. Too much communication on things that are quite abstract, especially for my job, are less likely to be engaging for me (Interview 11).*
I think it’s engaging to read about success stories that you can use for your own work. Because if you remember a success story, then someday, it can be tomorrow, it can be after two years, if you remember the "why" somebody has had a success and you meet the same kind of problem you can associate the story behind and turn your problem into a success. That’s, of course, the best thing you can think about (Interview 3).

Almost all of the interviewees mentioned that communication messages regarding new innovative products and technologies that Volvo Penta had released were strong factors for increased engagement. Electromobility was one example of an innovative area that the interviewees were highly motivated to read or hear more about. The reason for this was partly due to their own interests, seeing as the interviewees had an own personal interest for technological innovations, the future, and how it can shape the society. Another reason why these kinds of updates engaged the interviewees was because it made them feel proud over their own work and the company they are working for. It was expressed that success stories and how Volvo Penta contributes to developments, within for example electromobility, makes many of the interviewees proud to work there. One employee made a parallel to reading about a new Volvo Penta engine for a boat in Gothenburg that runs solely on electricity and how this made her proud of her company since they are a forerunner in their segment. In addition, many of the interviewees expressed their willingness to talk and share information like this with friends and family. Success stories were also stated to create a strong feeling of belongingness to the workplace, being able to say and feel “hey, look what I am part of”.

A few of the interviewees instead mentioned that their engagement increased when getting communication that directly calls for an action from them to know how to contribute to the future success of the company. One of the interviewees mentioned that messages that are pushing initiatives on to employees are the most engaging for him, since that increases his understanding of what is happening around the country, but also around the world, and how they as employees can play an active role in that. This was exemplified by giving the employees an opportunity to be a willing participant and letting the employees know how they can participate. The interviewee elaborated on this, meaning that by giving the responsibility to the employees and giving them the opportunity to respond and participate makes them feel more involved in the company, as their action would directly affect the company’s future.
So giving us more of an opportunity to be a willing participant and saying “hey, have you heard about this?” not only “did you get the article or the information” but here's where you can participate and here is how we want you to participate. So kind of make it as an information sharing plus participation, you can't do that with all activities are all subject matters, but it'd be interesting to just do a little bit of response (Interview 9).

4.2.3 Local Adaptation

Many of the interviewees mentioned that the ICC often failed to be locally adapted to the market they work for as an issue with working for an MNC. It was stated that the communicated information often focused around the activities performed in Sweden locally and hence sometimes not of relevance for their work located outside of Sweden. The communication centered around the Swedish market was not always considered of importance for the individual employee due to the distance from his or her day-to-day work. There were, however, some interviewees that argued that knowing more about the different markets provided a holistic perspective of the organization, which in return facilitated the understanding of where the organization was heading. It was argued that by this type of ICC, employees could identify themselves more with the organization by knowing what it contributed with in terms of for example developments and innovation.

Further issues regarding local adaptation of ICC was mentioned to concern the two different segments of Volvo Penta, industrial and marine. Some markets, such as China, Russia and Turkey, are heavily focused on industrial engine sales while others are more dependent upon the marine segment. Based on this, it was stated that it could be hard to align the communication to be of relevance for both segments. The challenge that was mentioned was to find and create messages that overarch the organization as a whole. One employee stated that goals and strategies look very different depending on if your target is engines for yachts in the Meditteranean or if it is for an industrial machine in a gas field in China. Consequently, only showing marketing material illustrating boats from the archipelago in Gothenburg did not feel relevant to all segments. There seemed to be a fair consistency in the opinion that the ICC today did not completely manage to take both segments equally into consideration.
4.2.4 The Amount

As Volvo Penta is part of the Volvo group, corporate information about the group is also communicated frequently to the employees. The amount of ICC was said to have an impact on how the employees choose to engage in taking part of the information and also the general engagement towards his or her workplace. Too much information was claimed by the interviewees to lead to an information overload, making the important information drown in the excessive amount. Getting too much information and not having the time to absorb it, was stated by several employees as having a negative impact on their engagement. This was mainly explained by not having enough time to go through all the information and thereby creating a fear of missing out on important information regarding goals and strategies. As a result, this generated a feeling amongst the employees of not knowing the direction of the company and the future vision. It was stated that some employees got information that was not relevant to them, suggesting that messages should be directed more specifically to the employees they regard. When the employees got information that was not relevant to them, a feeling of irritation arose due to the time loss when trying to absorb the information. Some also described it as a matter of confusion, as they were not sure of how the information related to them. Below, the feeling of getting too much information is described by two interviewees.

*It is a problem I think if you look at communication, that you want to inform everyone about everything. When you get 20 emails a day then the one that is relevant to me may disappear in the large amount you ignore to browse through and then you miss the email that might have the information I need. [...] Less is more. Generally, we have a perception that everyone should always have all the information but there is no possibility to acquire all that information (Interview 7).*

*I generally feel that the amount of information is almost too much and when you send too much information, I will not bother and not be able to accept that information (Interview 17).*

Rather the opposite of the statements above, a few respondents were not of the "less is more" opinion, but rather "the more the merrier" opinion. The more communication the employee gets, the more involved the employee gets in the company, claiming that more information results in an increased engagement level as well as belongingness to the company. Some of the interviewees wanted to know everything that was going on in the company in all the different locations, which made them feel engaged. This was mostly based on the
communication that was not time-bound, which made it easier to absorb the ICC at a time that suited the employee.

*Because the more you know about the company you are working in, the more you feel that you are a part of it and, the less you know about your company, the less you think you're a part of it. I think it's very important for me to know everything about what's happening* (Interview 1).

The balance of “not too much, not too little” information was shown to have an impact on some employees’ engagement. When getting too little information, the feeling that the organization cares was stated to decrease, while too much communication led to an overflow and difficulties in processing, sorting and absorbing as well as a lack of engagement. What was also mentioned to be important was that ICC should be flowing in a steady stream. It was mentioned that the internal communication flow at times was very low and that it all of a sudden could change to a large flow. This made it hard for the interviewees to prepare and absorb the information, as well as wondering and worrying why there was a lack of information from time to time. The desire for “not too much, not too little” information flow is illustrated in the quotes below.

*If I get too little information I wonder what Volvo Penta is planning for the future then I am worried that nobody thinks and does something. But if I get too much information, I have difficulties understanding what is prioritized by that information, so then this is where the information must be specific. Thus, there is both an upper and lower limit* (Interview 14).

*I prefer a constant flow of information within reasonable limits, so you do not feel that there all of a sudden is silence and you do not hear anything for several months because then you lose engagement and corporate culture formation* (Interview 15).

**4.2.5 Feedback**

When performing the interviews, feedback was raised as one of the most important things for the employees in order to be able to understand the communication, and thereby for it to be clear and effective. Feedback was mentioned to be highly connected to the different channels and the extent to which it is possible and should therefore be further reflected upon. The different communication channels provide various benefits and issues, in addition to the need for getting information, the possibility of giving feedback was mentioned as having a great
influence. It was clear that if the possibility to communicate back exists through the various communication channels was of great importance for the employees. It was indicated that the employees many times did not know how or to whom communicate back if there was a need for clarification of the message or had questions to ask.

*Because to get to the right person to get the right information is sometimes difficult (Interview 4).*

Another employee also mentioned that he saw a great article regarding product development on the intranet and that he wanted to use the information to give a presentation about and tried to get in contact with someone who could help providing material for the presentation. It, however, took a few days and emails back and forth in order to find out who could help with this particular issue, since the information was not clear enough. The lack of a well-functioning two-way communication channel where feedback is desirable and appreciated seemed to be an overall wish from the employees. Not knowing who to respond to often led the interviewees not bothering getting back at all, leading to the employee not fully understanding the message. In addition, it was mentioned by many that they would like it to be easier to find marketing material related to news like this, without having to go to several different channels to find it. Lastly, it also became apparent that the feeling of not knowing who to contact was more common amongst the employees that worked further away from the HQ.
4.3 Summary of Empirical Findings

A summary of the empirical findings related to the communication channels used at Volvo Penta are presented in Table 2 below, whereas a more general summary of the overall empirical findings is presented in Table 3 below. Together, Table 2 and Table 3 present the main findings mentioned by the interviewees, providing an overview of the empirical findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intranet</th>
<th><strong>Advantages</strong></th>
<th><strong>Disadvantages</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not time-bound</td>
<td>Too much information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information rich</td>
<td>Difficult to find information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to store information</td>
<td>Risk to overlook information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Volvo Penta employees have access</td>
<td>Not an engaging channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of feedback possibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email</th>
<th><strong>Advantages</strong></th>
<th><strong>Disadvantages</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not time-bound</td>
<td>Impossible to know when to receive an answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to trace the message</td>
<td>The understanding of the message depends on the sender’s ability to express him- or herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to store information</td>
<td>Risk to overlook information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A multitasking channel the employees always have access to</td>
<td>Not an engaging channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility to give feedback by replying to the email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skype</th>
<th><strong>Advantages</strong></th>
<th><strong>Disadvantages</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhances understanding of the message</td>
<td>Time-bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility to have meetings regardless of physical location for all employees in an MNC</td>
<td>Conflicting tasks hindering participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility to see and hear the person regardless of physical location</td>
<td>Time zone differences make participation difficult for all employees in an MNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility for direct feedback</td>
<td>Missing out on information if not being able to participate in the meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging channel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Face-to-Face</th>
<th><strong>Advantages</strong></th>
<th><strong>Disadvantages</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhances understanding of the message</td>
<td>Time-bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increases relationship creation with both employees and the organization</td>
<td>No ability to store the information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging channel</td>
<td>Employees who are not there miss out on the information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possibility for direct feedback</td>
<td>Impossible to conduct for the entire MNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Receiving face-to-face communication once enhances communication through other channels later on</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Channels</th>
<th><strong>Advantages</strong></th>
<th><strong>Disadvantages</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One channel is not enough, multiple channels supplement each other</td>
<td>Too many channels make it difficult to prioritize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple channels enable receiving information despite not being able to participate in for example meetings</td>
<td>Unclear which channel to use for what communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duplication of information on several channels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2. Summary of empirical findings 1. Compiled by authors.*
Table 3. Summary of empirical findings 2. “X” means that it was mentioned by the interviewee. Compiled by authors.
5. Analysis

As explained in the methodology chapter, the categories for the empirical data were created through our own categorization based on what was said during the interviews, in symbiosis with the research question. As shown in the illustration below, the different communication channels and the amount were mentioned by the interviewees to affect both effectiveness and engagement. The content of the communication in the form of local adaptation and future and success stories affect engagement, while clarity, preciseness, and feedback opportunities affect effectiveness. These categories constitute the main important findings of our study and will be analyzed with the help of the conceptual framework in this chapter.

Figure 4. Categorization of factors impacting effectiveness and engagement. Own compilation.

5.1 Engagement and Effectiveness Through the Different Channels

5.1.1 The Intranet

The intranet at Volvo Penta provides only downward communication as there are no possibilities for the employees to communicate back by using the intranet. Hence, the purpose of the intranet is to communicate information from the corporate level to all employees, and therefore it can be considered downward communication in accordance with Cornelissen
If an employee wants a message clarified or has any questions, a change of channel is necessary and the employee would need to either pick up the phone or send an email, for example. Neither does the intranet allow for personalization as it is directed towards all employees within the company, making it a less rich communication channel, in line with Daft and Lengel (1986). Since all the information published on the intranet is available to all employees in the company, the information is directed to the company as a whole as opposed to solely looking at the manager-employee relation and it can thereby be seen as CICS (Cornelissen, 2011).

As the intranet does not require the employee to actively take part of the information communicated there, neither send out push notifications, it was stated that the intranet was a rather non-engaging channel for communication, as is seen in Table 2. Another contributing factor to the intranet being considered as a non-engaging channel was because most information posted is in a text format, which the employees considered a bit “boring”. It was, however, said that adding videos or pictures to the messages on the intranet could increase the engagement among the employees, which shows how the message can engage rather than the channel itself. In this way, a channel that can be categorized as less rich, such as the intranet, can increase its capacity to be engaging if it adds attributes of a richer character according to MRT (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Examples of this could be to add videos, which is considered as a richer form of medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986), on the intranet. This could be a way of making information that originally is time-bound, such as CEO meetings or Skype meetings, not time-bound and thereby making the information more accessible for the ones who could not participate in the meeting. By doing this, the engaging attributes of video communication could be possible on the intranet as well. This would give the employees the opportunity to take part of the strategic future of the company communicated via a meeting although they were not able to be there physically, which is argued to increase the engagement (Ruch & Welch, 2011), and more specifically the cognitive engagement in knowing where the company is heading (Welch, 2011). Further, this can help to overcome the barrier for an MNC having a dispersed business structure. Inserting a video on the intranet enables to both see and listen to the person speaking. This makes it possible for the employee to create a form of relationship with the person communicating the ICC, which is argued to increase the feeling of inclusion and belongingness to the organization, and thereby also increasing the emotional engagement (Welch, 2011).
An advantage that was mentioned about the intranet as a channel, which can be seen in Table 2, is that it stores a large amount of valuable information and that the employees can take part of the communication at their own convenience as it is not time-bound. However, since the interviewees expressed a feeling of a large amount of information being communicated via Violin, it possesses the risk of being overlooked, which is in line with the barrier of information overload as discussed by Lee et al. (2016). Consequently, this could mean that the intranet channel is not the most effective in terms of communication. Even though most of the interviewees said that they keep track of the posts on the intranet, it was also stated by some that they look only at the headings and then evaluate if they want to read the entire post. Furthermore, the lack of possibility to give feedback shows that the channel has a disadvantage in being able to fulfill the criteria of clarity and completeness as stated in Kumar (2010). This implies that this type of channel requires a higher degree of the clarity and completeness of the communication, as there are no possibilities for feedback if the message has not been fully understood.

5.1.2 Email

The findings from the empirical material show that Volvo Penta’s ICC is often communicated through email, in the form of downward communication according to Cornelissen (2011). It can be regarded as a form of downward communication because the main purpose of this type of communication is to allow for the flow of information from a corporate level to the organization’s subordinate levels (Cornelissen, 2011), which conforms with the empirical findings seeing as Volvo Penta’s ICC through email included sales reports, product newsletters, and upcoming events. It is thereby more of a one-way communication, where the company wants to communicate a message without the need for any response, although email as a medium allows for the technological possibility to reply. This is in line with Cornelissen (2011) who argues that one of the two main tasks that downward communication has is to inform about things that are considered most important for the organization in order to reach its mission. Therefore, in accordance with Cornelissen (2011), this type of ICC can also be seen as CICS, as the information sent out through email is (1) coming from the corporate communications department, and (2) centralized around general corporate matters and decisions, rather than being focused on the direct manager-employee relation.

If looking at the channel as such, Daft and Lengel (1986) argue that email can be considered as being in between the continuum of media richness, meaning that email is neither the richest
nor the least rich medium. As the media richness determines how much informational processing that can be done through the channel depending on the ability to use natural language, to use a personal focus, and to use both verbal and non-verbal informational cues, the theoretical framework argues that email is ranging somewhere in-between (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013). This means that email does not allow for the most complex communication to be communicated, such as verbal informational cues, since email is a written and hence a non-verbal form of channel. The empirical material confirmed these drawbacks with using email as a communication channel, where the interviewees mentioned that email could be limiting in terms of using natural language, in accordance with Daft and Lengel (1986). It was raised by the interviewees that different people had different skills and abilities in expressing themselves in written form, and therefore the ability to use the natural language varied depending on the user, as is seen in Table 2. Thus, the empirical findings showed that email as a communication channel could vary in how much information that was successfully captured and transmitted through it.

If looking at how effective the communication through email can be considered from the interviewees’ perspective, the empirical material indicates that this had varying results depending on the person using the medium. When asking the interviewees about the advantages of using email, the main three benefits that were mentioned were: time efficiency, traceability, and flexibility. All three of these, however, require that certain criteria are met in order to achieve these, which can be associated with Kumar's (2010) criteria for effective communication. Many of the 7 C's interact with each other in achieving effective communication (Kumar, 2010). It was evident in the empirical material that for email to be considered as effective, the message in the email must be clearly worded (clarity), straightforward (conciseness, concreteness), have an appropriate language (correctness), the email should contain all the information necessary to understand the message (completeness), and the sender of the email should have the recipient in mind when designing the message (candidness, courtesy) (Kumar, 2010). Unless these criteria by Kumar (2010) were met, the interviewees instead considered email as ineffective because it required repetition of the message, sending more emails, and waiting for answers to understand the message.

Further, emails that need clarification lead to more emails being sent, which makes the traceability more difficult, as it disappears in a large mass of emails. This is also in line with Lee et al’s (2016) argument about information overload, which acts as a barrier to effective
ICC. In addition, another benefit that was mentioned with email was its flexibility, such as being able to respond to an email regardless of time differences and location due to communicating in an MNC. However, this flexibility instead becomes the opposite if the employees do not understand the message and need to wait several hours, or perhaps even days, to get an answer. Thus, it is necessary that these criteria are met in order for email to be considered as effective. It is thereby evident from the empirical findings that these criteria are particularly important in written communication, since the possibility for feedback by asking questions and getting direct answers is not as extensive in written communication as in verbal, direct, communication.

In terms of engagement, the empirical material showed that email was considered as a rather passive channel that the employee can browse through while doing something else without giving it full attention. This passive behavior indicates that the cognitive engagement is low, as the cognitive engagement is about being fully dedicated and concentrated to a specific task in line with the organization’s goals (Welch, 2011). The interviewees also explained that email did not manage to capture any emotions in the communication. These empirical findings are in line with the arguments by Freidl and Verčič (2011) and Welch (2011), who highlight this emotional aspect in order to create engagement. Freidl and Verčič (2011) stress the importance of this emotional aspect in terms of belongingness and that employees should feel a sense of belonging to the organization in order to create engagement, in which Welch (2011) refers to as emotional engagement. Thus, the empirical findings suggest that there are difficulties with using email for ICC to generate both cognitive as well as emotional engagement.

5.1.3 Skype
Volvo Penta's ICC through Skype is, just like the intranet and email, a form of downward communication in line with Cornelissen (2011), as the purpose of Volvo Penta's ICC through Skype is to inform about corporate matters to subordinate levels. Further, Volvo Penta’s ICC through Skype can be referred to as CICS according to Cornelissen (2011), seeing as the Skype ICC meetings have a broad perspective and entail large market updates about organizational goals and strategies, CEO information meetings including both statistics, performance and future goals, as well as innovation seminars with a high focus on inspiration and future technological advancements.
Skype as a channel can be categorized into the richer part of the media richness continuum by Daft and Lengel (1986), as Skype allows for more informational processing to be done compared to the intranet or email. The reason for why Skype can be considered as a richer medium according to MRT, is because more informational processing can be done through Skype in terms of the ability to use natural language, use a personal focus as well as using verbal and non-verbal informational cues (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013). This means that Skype allows for more complex information to be communicated, since Skype enables the possibility to use natural language as the person can express him or herself in his or her natural language by talking, as opposed to writing. Furthermore, it can be argued that Skype as a medium allows for a more personal focus since it is technologically possible to both see and hear the person who is communicating, who, in turn, can use both verbal and non-verbal informational cues (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013), otherwise difficult in an MNC. However, Skype is still a technological channel that must rely on the technology to work in its optimal form. Thus, there are several of these factors that can be disturbed if the technology does not work, for example if the video or sound does not work to a full extent, which greatly affects the possibilities for informational processing. These technological errors that can occur can be associated with noise, making the message more difficult to decode by the receiver as argued by Chandler & Munday (2016) and Fiske (1990).

The richness seemed to be correlated to how effective the interviewees perceived the channel. When asking the interviewees about the advantages of using Skype for ICC, all of the interviewees highlighted the ability to both see and hear the person talking even though they were not at the same physical location due to being an MNC. This was expressed as being beneficial in order to absorb the information, as it was easier to understand the messages when seeing and hearing the person talking. This facilitated the absorption of the message as it was easier to understand when someone was presenting the message to you instead of just reading a text. Furthermore, since Skype enables the possibility to ask questions directly, the interviewees explained that Skype was effective because they have the possibility to ask follow-up questions directly instead of sitting and waiting for an answer, as opposed to intranet or email. As seen in both Table 2 and Table 3, the possibility for feedback was highly valued among the interviewees in order to clarify the message, which also is supported by Cornelissen (2011), Chmielecki (2015) and Pažėraitė and Repovienė (2018) who argue that feedback is crucial in order to achieve effectiveness.
The need for clarity that feedback facilitates was evident among the interviewees as one of the main advantages of Skype, as seen in Table 2, which further can be connected to Kumar’s (2010) 7 C’s for effective communication, in which clarity is one of the seven criteria. The opportunity to ask questions does not only mean the ability to clarify the message, but also to ask follow-up questions if the interviewees felt that some information was missing, which is in line with Kumar's (2010) criterion about completeness. As Skype was explained by the interviewees to be beneficial in terms of avoiding misunderstandings, it can be fair to assume that Kumar’s (2010) criteria of conciseness, correctness and concreteness are easier to fulfill when using Skype compared to the intranet or email, perhaps also because of the ability for feedback and ask questions directly. When using email, it was mentioned by an interviewee that sometimes the ICC was perceived as irrelevant and there was a desire for the recipient list to be refined. This was not expressed for Skype, which can be interpreted as the interviewees perceiving that Volvo Penta's ICC through Skype creates the message with the recipient in mind, in accordance with Kumar’s (2010) criteria of courtesy and candidness.

If looking at engagement, the empirical findings show that Skype was considered to be an engaging channel. By being able to see and listen to a person, the interviewees described that they got a face behind the message and thus created a kind of relationship with that person. This relationship creation with a company representative also enabled them to create a relationship with the company itself, creating an organizational belongingness (Freidl & Verčič, 2011; Welch, 2011). Thus, it seems that Skype is a medium that manages to capture the emotional aspect, which is a key factor in order to create engagement (Welch, 2011).

5.1.4 Face-to-Face

Volvo Penta's ICC, which is communicated face-to-face in the form of CEO meetings and other meetings coming from the company's communications department and communicated to the company's subunits, is in line with downward communication and CICS according to Cornelissen (2011). Face-to-face communication is a direct form of communication that, by its very nature, provides an opportunity for the audience to answer, ask direct questions, and provide feedback, which can mean that this type of ICC can also be interpreted as upward communication due to its more conversational style of ICC. However, it is probably rather that the possibility for feedback can be considered as more evident in face-to-face communication than other channels, and thus it can still be classified as downward communication due to the purpose of the communication (Cornelissen, 2011).
Face-to-face as a channel is argued to be the richest according to MRT (Daft & Lengel, 1986). It was evident from the interviewees that face-to-face was considered as the richest channel in terms of its ability to facilitate feedback quickly, use natural language, have a personal focus, as well as using both verbal and non-verbal informational cues (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013). This means that face-to-face is the channel that can process the most complex type of information (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Face-to-face communication makes it possible to both view and listen to a person, have a personal focus, ask direct questions and enable feedback, and use both verbal and non-verbal informational cues. There are no technological factors that face-to-face communication must rely on for the communication to flow, as opposed to Skype, which is a channel that is dependent on its technological functioning. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the noise that can be created from technological factors are less evident in face-to-face communication than the other channels (Chandler & Munday, 2016; Fiske, 1990).

The correlation between how rich a channel was categorized according to MRT (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas, 2013) and the channel's effectiveness also seems to be consistent with the empirical findings about face-to-face communication. The empirical findings showed that face-to-face communication was superior to the other channels according to the interviewees. The interviewees argued that there was nothing that surpassed getting the communication face-to-face, partly from the effectiveness point of view for optimal decoding of the message, but above all, this was emphasized from an emotional perspective. The interviewees explained that having met a person makes you create a relationship with the person, which means that you are more willing to both listen to, read about, and absorb the information. If we look at how this can be interpreted from Kumar's (2010) 7 C's of effective communication, then this emotional aspect can be linked to both courtesy as well as candidness. The communication communicated face-to-face is directly addressed to the recipient. Therefore, face-to-face has by its nature a more personal touch and it can thereby be interpreted as that face-to-face communication is designed with the audience in mind to a higher degree than the other channels. Kumar’s (2010) criteria of completeness and clarity were easily met with face-to-face communication through the possibility of asking follow-up questions and getting a direct response. Since the speaker sees the audience in face-to-face communication, it may thus be easier to adapt the language to the audience, hence fulfilling Kumar’s (2010) criterion for correctness. Since face-to-face is the richest channel that allows for most informational processing (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Men, 2014; Thomas,
2013), it is reasonable to assume that concreteness and conciseness can be reached through face-to-face communication as well. The empirical material, however, shows that this is only applicable if the persons are in the right place at the right time, which is impossible in an MNC.

Many interviewees instead meant that they missed out on this communication, because it is difficult, or even impossible, for the entire company to be able to take part in face-to-face communication, due to time differences, locally dispersed locations and other conflicting tasks or meetings. This can be seen in Table 3, where as many as 14 out of 18 of the interviewees mentioned that conflicting tasks made ICC difficult for them. In addition, the time aspect becomes especially important for an MNC in terms of conflicting tasks, as different time zones add an extra layer of complexity. This was also highlighted by the interviewees, seen in Table 3. Furthermore, this led to a reduction in employee engagement, as they argued that (1) they became unaware of the company's strategic direction and (2) they felt less belongingness with the company. This is in line with Welch (2011), who argues that engagement is based on both cognitive engagement, which can be connected to understanding the company’s strategic direction, as well as emotional engagement, which can be connected to organizational belongingness. Hence, missing out on this type of information negatively affects the employee’s engagement. Instead, for those who were in the "right place at the right time", meant that face-to-face communication was the most effective channel for their engagement. They created a relationship with both the sender of the message and a relationship with the company, which increased their organizational belongingness, as is seen in Table 2 (Freidl & Verčič, 2011; Welch, 2011). The empirical findings also showed that it had a positive impact on the employees once having heard the message face-to-face, as this positively affected engagement for messages via the other channels thereafter.

5.1.5 The Question of How Many Communication Channels

As stated in the empirical findings, Volvo Penta communicates through a large number of channels, making it hard for the employees to know which channel to prioritize. This is seen in Table 3 as 8 of the 18 interviewees mentioned that this was an issue with the ICC at Volvo Penta today. When corporate information is communicated through various channels, employees must clearly know which channel is dedicated to what type of information, or it will result in inefficient communication. Today, the communication through many channels
was expressed as a concern that resulted in time-loss and confusion. A known barrier to effective ICC is communication overload by Lee et al. (2016), suggesting that communication through too many channels can cause stress and decrease engagement among the employees. It was evident in the empirical findings that the employees at Volvo Penta experienced communication overload and that the number of ICT was exceeding the employees’ capacity to handle all. Many of the employees mentioned that they had a hard time prioritizing between the communication channels, which is in line with the concept of communication overload by Lee et al. (2016).

The question, however, is whether the actual problem is based on the large number of channels as such, which is related to the barrier of communication overload (Lee et al., 2016) or if the problem rather is based on the duplication on the information through the different channels. Alternatively, the problem may also be based on the difficulty of knowing when to use which channel for finding information. The interviewees expressed that all of these aforementioned problems were connected to the channels, which indicates that all of these can act as barriers that prevent effective communication. The fact that the employees expressed a difficulty in knowing when to use what channel suggests that there is an issue in knowing how to approach the information on the different channels. This can be linked to what Lee et al. (2016) and Quirke (2008) refer to information overload, which can occur when the employees get distracted by the large amount of information they receive and they feel that they are getting mixed messages. Further, the employees having a hard time distinguishing between the large number of channels used not only for ICC but for communication in general confirms with the employees’ difficulty in knowing when to use which channel. This indicates that there is an ambiguity in knowing how the different communication channels are supposed to be used. The implication of this can thus cause these barriers to prevent effective communication for employee engagement. Hence, perhaps it is not the number of channels per se that is the barrier, but rather the lack of communication about how these channels should be used.

It is, however, fair to assume that only one channel would not be sufficient for an effective ICC at Volvo Penta. This was mainly argued to be because of the different reachability and time-boundedness of communication channels. As was stated by the employees, real time meetings were not preferable for crucial information, since they constitute a risk of being missed due to different time zones, traveling, or other conflicting work tasks. These barriers
can be referred to as noise according to Kumar (2010), as it interferes the communication process. The time-boundedness of real time meetings were explained to be the issue with this type of communication in an MNC, as it is impossible for everyone to attend. Communication channels that are dependent on the employees’ attendance should therefore be complemented by another communication channel where the ICC can be absorbed at a time chosen solely by the employee him- or herself. Therefore, by combining different types of communication channels, companies can avoid the risk of employees missing out on important ICC.

5.2 Engagement through Internal Corporate Communication

5.2.1 How to Create an Engaging Message

The content of the message, i.e. what is communicated, was instantly mentioned as one of the major contributors to engagement in terms of corporate communication. What the employee read or hear about can therefore be considered most influential in the quest for engagement. What was considered most engaging was future aspects, often in terms of electromobility and innovation, success stories, day-to-day related communication, and goals and strategies, which can be seen in Table 3.

One of the main topics that seemed to trigger engagement was for the employee to read or hear about the future perspective of the company. Since Volvo Penta is currently working a lot with electro mobility and innovation of different kinds, this was on top of the list of things to be seen as engaging. By knowing what the company is working towards created positive feelings, such as being proud to work for the company and knowing that you contribute to a more innovative society, much in line with role and performance communication to create engagement as stated by Ruck and Welch (2011). The reason for this is because receiving clear communication about future plans means that employees get confident in what the company is working for, and can therefore see their own participation as an important contribution to accomplish the future vision, thereby creating cognitive engagement as argued by Welch (2011). In addition, knowing your role in the company and your own contribution to the entire organization was argued to be important as it helps the employee to feel that they are part of something “bigger”. Therefore, this type of communication also encourages the creation of organizational belongingness, in accordance with Welch (2011).
Closely related to the topic of future aspects, is the great influence of success stories for creating engagement. Many mentioned that reading and hearing success stories about what other employees had accomplished created engagement since it made them believe that they could accomplish the same one day. This made them feel more connected to the company, and thereby creating emotional engagement in accordance with Welch (2011). Hence, it is fair to state that both ICC containing information regarding the future vision of the company as well as the past, and more specifically the success stories of the past, are contributing to both cognitive as well as emotional employee engagement in accordance with Welch (2011).

Another topic that was highlighted was the message to be of relevance for the employees’ day-to-day work. This indicates, which was also mentioned, that messages that do not concern or are connected to the employees’ day-to-day work do not create engagement. For example, messages that show the employee how his or her work contributes to success create emotional engagement through organizational commitment, as discussed by Welch (2011). Communication that was formulated in a way so that the employee could understand how his or her day-to-day work was contributing to the success makes the employee feel like a part of the team and is hence a factor to emotional engagement through commitment and belongingness (Freidl & Verčič, 2011; Welch, 2011).

Another topic that was highlighted by 7 out of the 18 employees, which can be seen in Table 3, was the need for local adaptation in relation to employee engagement. The interviewees argued that it was important that the ICC was locally adapted to their own market, as this type of ICC felt more relevant to them, which increased their engagement. When the employees feel that the ICC is not of relevance to their own work, the organizational belongingness decreases as it becomes more difficult to relate to the ICC. This can be related to Welch (2011), arguing that emotional engagement is created by ICC promoting a feeling of belonging to the organization. This mirrors the dispersed organizational structure for an MNC, where local adaptation may be more difficult than for companies located in one single market. Thus, it can be fair to state that there is an ambiguity in balancing the ICC with regards to local adaptation and overarching communication of relevance for the entire MNC.

Continuing, it seems as if messages which make the employees understand what is needed from him or her, i.e. messages that calls for an action, create not only emotional engagement in terms of the employee feeling commitment to the organization but it also generates
cognitive engagement by the employee understanding how they fit into the organization (Welch & Jackson, 2007). It would be reasonable to state that engagement can come through the employees feeling important in the organization and that his or her role matter. It was easier for the employees to understand how they fit in the organization when the ICC is open about plans and strategies. In connection with this topic, what was also mentioned by the employees was the need for goals and strategies to be clearly communicated. This does not only seem to affect the effectiveness of communication but also the engagement that the employees gain through knowledge about the future vision of the company. It was said that reading or hearing about strategies for the company creates engagement because it helps the employee understand what is needed in terms of change for their role, closely in line with understanding the changing environments and thereby creating cognitive engagement as stated by Welch (2011).

5.3 Effectiveness of Internal Corporate Communication

5.3.1 The Importance of Understanding the Communication

The empirical material revealed that the desire for clear and precise messages was highly evident among the interviewees, which is seen in Table 3. As for how the ICC at Volvo Penta is conducted today, the interviewees stated that it was difficult to understand the messages at times. There were several different explanations for this difficulty discussed by the interviewees. One difficulty expressed by the interviewees was that sometimes the communication was not perceived as clear enough to read only once and understand the purpose of it. To exemplify, one of the interviewees said that she needed to repeat the message in order to understand it. This was further enhanced by the difficulty mentioned by some interviewees to know how they should consider the message, since they could not discern what in the message that was actually relevant to them. As a consequence of this, a number of the interviewees expressed that they did not know what kind of action they should take as a result of the message. Hence, they did not know how to react to some of the communication.

This difficulty mirrors the interviewees’ issues to interpret the intentional message in the decoding process (Chandler & Munday, 2016; Fiske, 1990; Henderson, 2004). When the communication department at Volvo Penta is sending out a message, they are encoding the message and trying to compress and transfer the purpose of the message into a format that is
captured through the various channels (Chandler & Munday, 2016; Henderson, 2004), whether it being the intranet Violin, email, Skype or face-to-face. The message received through these aforementioned channels thus constitutes the conditions for how the message can be understood during the encoding process by the employees, where they try to give meaning to the message. Ultimately, the initial purpose of the message is understood during the encoding process (Henderson, 2004). However, as the interviewees explained that they faced troubles understanding the messages at times, suggests that the interviewees are facing difficulties in their decoding process. This problem may have occurred already in the encoding process, where the sender of the message has not been able to convey the desired intention with the communication (Henderson, 2004). This may be due to the barrier of system feature overload as discussed by Lee et al. (2016), which may occur for the sender of the message, seeing as the interviewees mentioned that people had different skills in expressing themselves through the different channels. Likewise, the barrier of system feature overload may also occur for the receiver, as the interviewees expressed that they sometimes had troubles to understand the message. It may also be that the channel failed to capture the intention of the message, which may be due to a mismatch between the complexity of the message and the capacity of the channel (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Since the interviewees expressed that there was a confusion of where to access some of the information can also suggest that there is a mismatch in the used channel for ICC.

This desire for a clear and precise message is in line with the criterion discussed by Kumar (2010) as the 7 C's for effective communication. Clarity is one of the 7 C’s and makes the communication effective because it facilitates the recipient to understand the message. This includes the appropriate language where words are chosen in order to make the message as concrete as possible and enhance the content of the message (Kumar, 2010). The fact that the participating interviewees expressed the need to repeat messages and the desire for a clearer communication indicates that there is a lack of clarity in how the ICC at Volvo Penta is conducted as of today. The clarity is enhanced by Kumar’s (2010) criterion of concreteness, which is another criterion for effective internal communication. Concreteness means that the message needs to be clear for the recipient to understand the message and nothing should be left for imagination (Kumar, 2010). Having the recipient in mind when designing a message is also highlighted in Kumar's (2010) criteria for completeness and courtesy. The message should be complete, and it should be easy to understand with regards to the recipient (Kumar, 2010). Hence, the lack of these criteria may explain the difficulties experienced in the

5.3.2 The Need for Feedback Possibilities

Even though feedback has been widely mentioned as important in internal communication (Pažėraitė & Repovienė, 2018), it has also been recognized that this type of communication is primarily one-way, top down (Smith & Mounter, 2008). As seen in Table 3, our study shows that being able to give feedback to the internal communication is of great importance for the employees, in line with Quirke (2008). It may not always be that the employee feels that there is a need, but in times of questions or a need for clarification, it has been shown to be of absolute importance. It was stated that not being able to give feedback or get clarification leads to inefficient communication, because of the time the employees have to put into trying to understand the message on their own. These findings indicate that communication that moves only in one direction is ineffective, and that a two-loop feedback is desirable in order to minimize time loss and confusion due to difficulties in interpreting the messages. Thus, it can be reasonable to argue that feedback possibilities must exist in order for Kumar’s (2010) 7 Cs to be fulfilled, and first then the ICC can be effective.

5.4 How the Amount of Communication can Affect Engagement and Effectiveness

The interviewees had somewhat conflicting opinions regarding the amount of communication received. While a few argued that there can never be too much communication, most agreed that too much communication has a direct negative effect on both engagement and effectiveness. Nevertheless, it was also found that too little information should be avoided. The different opinions on the matter might be a factor of the employee’s own interests in the company as well as underlying personal traits and antecedents (Welch, 2011).

It was argued by the interviewees who believed the more communication the better that the more they can read about what is going on in the company, the more engaged they become. Moreover, it was stated that the more you know, the more involved you get, and the identification with the company increases and thereby also your emotional engagement in line with Welch (2011). An important finding related to the opinion “the more communication, the
better” is that this regarded written and not time-bound communication, which means that the employee can absorb the information at a suitable time.

On the other hand, some interviewees raised the issue of getting too much information as a barrier to engagement. When the communication stream is very high, the employees felt that there was not enough time to acquire all the information. Consequently, this increased the risk of missing out on important information on goals and not knowing where the company is heading, thereby failing to create cognitive commitment as stated by Welch (2011). As too little communication on the matter led to a similar feeling, it can be assumed that the amount of information needs to be somewhere in between. The amount of ICC in an MNC can therefore be stated having to be enough to engage the employees, but to a level that makes the employees feel like they have enough time to absorb and process the information.

The role of amount of ICC was found to have a direct impact on the effectiveness of communication. What was found in the study aligns with Lee et al’s (2016) findings that too much communication can act as a barrier to effectiveness, namely information overload. It was found that a majority of the interviewed employees did not bother to read or take part of the ICC when they felt it was too much. This clearly shows that the effectiveness of the communication decreases along with the rise in the employees’ feelings of communication overflow. Additionally, it was found that an excessive amount of information makes it impossible to absorb and that the absorption is not only limited by the employee’s cognitive capacity but also in time, both in line with Quirke (2018).
6. Conclusion

6.1 Findings and Theoretical Contributions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how employees of an MNC perceive the flow of ICC, and further contribute to the understanding of what can be considered as effective and engaging ICC. By conducting a single case study of Volvo Penta we have been able to study and analyze the employees’ perceptions of the ICC and what could be seen as effective and engaging. This has made it possible to answer our research question: *How can an MNC design the internal corporate communication by channels and content to reach effective communication and engage its employees?*

The results of our study show that the design of the ICC had a large impact on the employees’ perceptions of effectiveness and engagement. The channel is vital for understanding the message, where face-to-face communication is undoubtedly superior to the other channels. Face-to-face communication fosters effectiveness because it allows the employees to both see and hear the person communicating, optimizing the message to be perceived in the same way by the recipient. For an MNC, however, it was evident that it is the features of face-to-face communication rather than the channel itself that affects the effectiveness of the ICC. The reason why the channel itself cannot be seen as optimal is because face-to-face communication is time-bound, which is impossible in an MNC due to differences in time zones and conflicting tasks. Therefore, the channel’s dependency of time has been identified as a key factor in effective communication in an MNC. Moreover, the number of channels was found to have an impact on the perceived effectiveness, where the effectiveness decreases when too many channels are used, while at the same time using a single channel is not sufficient. The dilemma with a large number of channels is that it causes difficulties in prioritizing what channel to use, resulting in time loss, confusion and missing out on information.

To some extent, the channel itself can be perceived as more or less engaging, where face-to-face or Skype are preferred in order to increase organizational belongingness and organizational identification. However, for increasing the engagement it is more important with “what” is being said, i.e. the content, rather than “how” it is said, i.e. the channel.
Our study shows that the content of the ICC can be designed to various degrees of effectiveness. The effectiveness is dependent on the clarity and preciseness of the communication and it is therefore important to design the ICC accordingly, in order to avoid losing time interpreting the intended meaning of the message. Another key factor that was identified in this study is the fine balance of the amount of communication, as this was found to affect both the engagement as well as the effectiveness. Additionally, effectiveness can be facilitated by providing the possibility for feedback. This is closely linked to the need for clear and precise communication, since feedback is crucial in order to clarify messages if needed.

In order to engage employees, the content of the ICC should contain success stories and future visions. Success stories generate a feeling of pride and belongingness to the organization, and thereby engagement. Future visions contribute to the feeling of belonging to the organization and wanting to accomplish those visions. Engagement is further created when employees understand their own role as the recipient of the communication. Therefore, locally adapted ICC was found to be of particular importance for the employees in an MNC, as the large size of the company can make it more troublesome for the employees to see their own relevance of the ICC if it is not locally adapted to them.

In addition to the contributions mentioned above, this thesis contributes by adding to the existing research on the flow of ICC in terms of effectiveness and employee engagement in an MNC setting. Thereby, a connection of various studies within ICC, effective communication and employee engagement has been made, contributing to the limited research field focusing on the employee viewpoint of ICC and its potential effects on engagement. Therefore, this study develops the understanding of what can be seen as effective and engaging ICC from the employee viewpoint and how an MNC can design the ICC in order to achieve this.

6.2 Managerial Implications

This study has shown how ICC can be designed to be effective and foster employee engagement and presents factors that both hinder and facilitate the communication. Therefore, this thesis can give some guidelines on what is considered as most important when conducting the ICC in order to create employee engagement. An awareness of factors that encourage engagement in relation to ICC is likely to lead to a greater understanding of tackling the...
widespread problem with unengaged employees. Accordingly, it is important for managers to gain an understanding of what type of communication that engages its employees. Furthermore, it is important not to underestimate the balance of the amount of information communicated internally in order to avoid the barriers of communication- and information overload.

In terms of channels, this study suggests that managers should take into consideration the channels’ dependency of time, seeing as the features of face-to-face and Skype communication are perceived as more engaging and effective although practically impossible to perform in an MNC due to different time zones and conflicting tasks. In practice, this suggests that face-to-face features should be included in other channels as well, making the desirable time-bound features not time-bound and thereby accessible at any time. This could for example mean to record and include videos of the meetings onto not time-bound channels, such as intranets.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

The delimitation was made for this study not to look at the resultantly effects from the ICC because it is a single case study, since it would be more valuable to look at these effects on a larger number of companies. Therefore, for future research, we firstly suggest investigating what effects that could be generated from conducting ICC that is perceived as effective and engaging, and secondly, if these effects confirm with those argued by previous academic literature, such as increased innovation, organizational performance and competitiveness. Furthermore, since the employee perspective is still unexplored in research related to ICC and employee engagement, it is suggested to conduct more studies taking the employees’ viewpoints into account. For future research, it would also be interesting to add on to the existing international business research by studying differences in engagement depending on geographical location.
References


Appendix 1

Interview Guide - English

Background
- What is your role in the company? Can you briefly describe your tasks?
- How long have you worked for the company?

Internal corporate communication
- How do you believe internal corporate information is communicated at Volvo Penta?
- How often do you receive internal corporate communication? Do you think this is enough/too much?
- What is the most common type of internal corporate communication you receive?
- Through which channel/s do you receive this kind information?
  - Advantages of these channels?
  - Disadvantages of these channels?
- What kind of channels would you prefer that the company uses for internal corporate communication?
- If any, how do you think the company could communicate internal corporate communication more effectively?
- What do you think is the most valuable with the internal corporate communication?
- What do you think are the biggest challenges for the internal corporate communication?
- How would you improve the internal corporate communication if you had the opportunity?

Engagement
- In what way do you think internal corporate communication affects your engagement?
- What type of information increases or decreases your engagement?
- How do you believe the amount of internal corporate communication has an impact on engagement?
- How do you believe that the channel of internal corporate communication has an impact on engagement?
- What could the company communicate in terms of internal corporate communication in order to increase your engagement?
Interview Guide - Swedish

Bakgrund
- Vad är din roll i företaget? Kan du kort beskriva dina uppgifter?
- Hur länge har du jobbat på företaget?

Intern företagskommunikation
- Hur tror du att intern företagskommunikation kommuniceras på Volvo Penta?
- Hur ofta tar du emot intern företagskommunikation? Tycker du att det här är tillräckligt/för mycket?
- Vad är den vanligaste typen av intern företagskommunikation som du får?
- Genom vilken/vilka kanal/kanaler får du denna typ av information?
  - Fördelar med dessa kanaler?
  - Nackdelar med dessa kanaler?
- Vilken typ av kanaler skulle du föredra att företaget använder för intern företagskommunikation?
- Om något, hur tror du att företaget kan kommunicera intern företagskommunikation mer effektivt?
- Vad tycker du är det mest värdefulla med den interna företagskommunikationen?
- Vad tror du är de största utmaningarna för den interna företagskommunikationen?
- Hur skulle du förbättra den interna företagskommunikationen om du hade möjlighet?

Engagemang
- På vilket sätt tycker du att intern företagskommunikation påverkar ditt engagemang?
- Vilken typ av intern företagskommunikation ökar eller minskar ditt engagemang?
- Hur tror du att mängden intern företagskommunikation påverkar engagemanget?
- Hur tror du att kommunikationskanalen påverkar engagemanget?
- Vad/Hur skulle företaget kunna kommunicera gällande den interna företagskommunikationen för att öka ditt engagemang?