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Landsberg, Tersia; Wiggill, MN

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PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00



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Tersia Landsberg & Magrita Nicolene Wiggill

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RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT WITH MANAGERS OF COUNTRYWIDE OFFICES OF SEESA: A CASE STUDY

Tersia Landsberg

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1201-0911>

SEESA, Business Intelligence Unit, South Africa

Magrita Nicolene Wiggill

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4024-9965>

North-West University, South Africa

marlene.wiggill@nwu.ac.za

ABSTRACT

Employees are a crucial stakeholder group for organisations since they determine the degree to which they achieve their goals. It is therefore necessary to build strong relationships with the workforce to encourage employee engagement, which implies that employees' individual goals are aligned to those of the organisation. To build strong relationships, internal communication should be managed strategically. However, when an organisation has offices around the country, internal relationship management can be impeded, which adversely affects the entity attaining its goals. In this qualitative study, the case of SEESA, a national labour law organisation specialising in providing legal services to employers, was investigated to determine the way in which it manages relationships with its nationwide managers. A mixed-method approach was followed, using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to gather data. The findings indicated that, despite studies elsewhere indicating a communication and relationship building strategy as a prerequisite for building strong organisation-employee relationships, the outcomes of such relationships can be present without a formal internal communication strategy. This can occur provided the organisation is inclined towards a symmetrical world view, has an open culture and encourages two-way communication with top management. Suggestions for managing relationships with employees in nationwide offices are made.

Keywords: relationship management; internal communication; strategic communication



and relationship management; national organisations; regional offices

INTRODUCTION

Employees are among the most important stakeholder groups of organisations because of their significant contribution to achieving the employer's goals (Men and Stacks 2014; Welch and Jackson 2007). For instance, employees are the production force for the entity. Their attitudes, behaviour and performance contribute to productivity, organisational performance and success. Moreover, the workforce is a representative of the organisation who conveys messages regarding its operations to all the stakeholders upon whom the employer depends. Employees with a favourable attitude toward their work are corporate ambassadors, and especially in the case of a national organisation, they are a public relations force that should be nurtured (Men and Stacks 2014, 306).

In light of the employees' role in organisational success, internal communication should be managed strategically (Scholes 1997, xviii; Welch and Jackson 2007, 179–183). The importance of strategic internal communication lies in its contribution to organisational effectiveness, by conveying the entity's aims, values and strategy to employees to ensure their engagement. Whenever employees are engaged, they identify with and internalise the organisation's vision, mission and aims (Papalexandris and Galanaki 2009, 368). According to Grunig (1992, 532), an organisation's operational structure, environment, power and culture are totally dependent on its internal communication management.

The workforce tends to experience a stronger relationship with the employer when it perceives the managers as “authentic, ethical, balanced, fair, transparent, and consistent in what they say and do” (Men and Stacks 2014, 318). However, it is difficult to encourage such perceptions when an organisation's offices are spread around the country. This implies that internal communication over large geographical distances should be managed strategically to foster the desirable strong relationships between the head office and its regional offices.

The research reported in this article is introduced by providing the theoretical background on the management of relationships and of internal communication over large geographical distances. Thereafter the case study of the national organisation, SEESA¹¹, is discussed.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1 SEESA is an acronym for Small Enterprise Employers of South Africa. However, the organisation has grown to such an extent that it not only assists owners of small and medium sized organisations, but also national bodies. The acronym, however, was kept as it is currently used.

Relationship Management

As informed by the excellence theory, communication should be managed strategically to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its strategic stakeholders (Grunig et al. 1992; Grunig, Grunig and Dozier 2002). Applying two-way symmetrical communication practices and environmental scanning — which entail monitoring an organisation's external and internal environment to analyse and evaluate possible opportunities and threats as a result of interaction and relationships with other bodies, social groups or individuals (Gregory 2010; Steyn and Puth 2000) — enhances the development and maintenance of such relationships in the long term. This can happen because it creates opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding between an organisation and its stakeholders (Grunig et al. 1992; Grunig, Grunig and Dozier 2002, 10). Information obtained from two-way communication or dialogue is used to draw up organisational strategy and goals which means that stakeholders' needs receive attention at the highest level.

There are two main types of organisation–stakeholder relationships, namely, exchange and communal relationships (Hon and Grunig 1999). An exchange relationship is one in which members benefit from one another in response to advantages received in the past or advantages expected in the future (Hung 2005; Hung 2007), and are therefore derived from economic exchanges (Clark and Mills 1993). Communal relationships are characterised by commitment and goodwill, and each party is concerned about the other's welfare (Clark and Mills 1993; Grunig 2000; Paine 2013). Communal relationships are consequently those in which benefits are provided for the good of the other party, without the benefactor expecting the beneficiary to return the favour (Hon and Grunig 1999; Hung 2007). Entities do not engage in only one type of relationship, but they alternate between relationships depending on their situation and goals (Hung 2001; Hung 2007).

The quality indicators of organisation–stakeholder relationships are trust, mutual control, commitment and relationship satisfaction (Hon and Grunig 1999). Trust refers to one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open itself to the other. Trust has three dimensions, namely, integrity, dependability and competence. Mutual control refers to all participants having some say in situations that affect them because everyone is afforded the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Commitment entails the involved parties feeling that the relationship is worthwhile, whereas the degree of relationship satisfaction refers to the extent to which participants believe that they are benefiting from the relationship.

There are various cultivation strategies that can be applied to build strong relationships. These include providing stakeholders access to information and decision-making; openness and disclosing important information; assurances of legitimacy; building networks with those with whom stakeholders have connections; cooperating to build a mutually beneficial relationship; sharing tasks to solve problems together; keeping promises; and being positive about the association (Hon and Grunig 1999).

Internal Communication and Relationship Management

Internal communication management refers to the strategic management of interaction between and relationships with employees on all levels in an organisation (Welch and Jackson 2007). *Strategic* internal communication management implies that it is integrated into the entity's overarching strategy (Barrett 2002, 220), founded on a two-way relationship between employer and employees (Markos and Sridevi 2010, 90). Contextual organisational factors such as authentic leadership, a participative culture, organic structure and diversity enable internal communication practices because they provide a supportive environment to facilitate internal communication with employees (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier 2002; Men and Stacks 2014, 303). These factors correspond with a symmetrical organisational world view, characterised by interdependence, open systems, equity, autonomy, innovation and responsibility (Grunig and White 1992, 43–44). Quality relationships with employees not only contribute to organisational performance and attaining operational goals, but also help build and protect the entity's reputation and image (Men and Stacks 2014, 307).

According to Smidts, Van Riel and Pruyn (2001, 1051), it is important that leaders, or the managers who were the subjects in the study reported here, are aware of employees' needs and motivations, which highlights the importance of internal environmental scanning. In such a case, managers can address these needs and motivate them in an appropriate way, which in turn should increase the engagement of the workforce. Internal communication management contributes to organisational excellence when engaging in two-way communication with employees to help organisations formulate goals, values and strategies that are shared by both parties (Grunig 1992). This implies that when an employer's and its employees' personal goals are aligned, the management of internal communication contributes to the operation attaining its objectives (Barrett 2002; Daim et al. 2012; Grissom, Nicholson-Crotty and Keiser 2012; Grunig 1992; Markos and Sridevi 2010, 94; Papalexandris and Galanaki 2009, 368; Smidts, Van Riel and Pruyn 2001; White, Vanc and Stafford 2010, 6; Zheng, Yang and McLean 2010). Internal communication management therefore establishes an open organisational culture that provides employees access to information and decision-making processes (Markos and Sridevi 2010, 94; Mishra, Boynton and Mishra 2014, 183). In accordance with Men (2011) and Men and Stacks (2014, 307), this study defines a strong employee-organisation relationship "... as the degree to which an organisation and its employees trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to the other." The desired relational outcomes — that is, trust, mutual control, satisfaction, and commitment, as identified by Hon and Grunig (1999) — are operationalised in the definition.

An important circumstance that can impede optimum internal communication management is when an operation has a central head office and offices spread over large distances around the country. The literature emphasises face-to-face communication and social networks (such as friendship between colleagues) as important factors for feedback and strong employee-employer relationships (Erikson and Samila 2012; McCleod and Clarke 2009; PDT 2014; Weisband 2008). The latter can be hampered further when the nationwide offices use different hardware and software platforms from the head office. Weisband (2008) elaborates that local issues can distract managers to such a degree that they enjoy higher priority than the goals of geographically distanced co-workers. When they are physically apart, strong employee-employer relationships are seldom possible and communication practitioners need to find alternative ways to ensure that the outcomes of strong relationships are present to establish such connections with employees.

From the above theoretical discussion, main themes were identified to serve as criteria for analysing the results from the semi-structured interviews. Concerning *strategic* internal relationship management, the following constructs served as criteria for analysis: internal communication strategy that is aligned with the overarching corporate strategy; a symmetrical world view characterised by an open organisational culture that provides employees access to information and decision-making processes, interdependence, open systems, equity, autonomy, innovation and responsibility; internal environmental scanning, which refers to opportunities where the public relations officer *listens* to nationwide managers to determine their views and needs; and opportunities for nationwide managers to engage in two-way communication with the head office/top management. Regarding SEESA's relationship building strategies or activities, the following constructs served as criteria for analysis: opportunities for nationwide managers to engage in two-way communication with the head office/top management; and all communicative activities aimed at enhancing the outcomes of strong relationships (trust, mutual control, commitment and relationship satisfaction).

CASE STUDY

Currently, labour law in South Africa is applied stricter than ever before. Increasing actions against transgressing employers necessitate businesses from all sectors to ensure that employees' rights are not impaired (Healy 2014, 4; Israelstam 2013, 8). While there are organisations, such as the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), that protect employees against exploitation and unfair labour practices, there are also entities that protect the rights of *employers*. SEESA, the largest of its kind in South Africa, assists organisations in complying with labour law and provides legal services to employers in South Africa. It was established in 1998 and currently the body has 20 offices across South Africa, with a head office in Pretoria. It has four main

service delivery departments, namely *SEESA Labour*, *SEESA BEE*², *SEESA Consumer Protection and POPP*³, and *SEESA Skills Training*. Each department is represented by a national manager (except for *SEESA Skills Training* that has two national managers), all situated in the Pretoria head office. These personnel are not included in top management. For each of the SEESA service delivery departments there are provincial managers spread across the country. Gauteng's provincial managers are also situated in the head office, but do not form part of top management. Larger service delivery departments, such as SEESA Labour, also have assistant managers. Internal communication for all offices is managed by one communication practitioner (whose official title is Public Relations Officer or PRO) situated at the head office.

The regional offices differ structurally with some having only a few employees and no manager, while others are nearly as large as the head office, comprising several departments and managers. All offices therefore do not provide the same services; those without a manager are overseen by a neighbouring office's manager.

RESEARCH METHOD

An exploratory, qualitative research approach was followed, using SEESA as a case study. The research question was: *How should SEESA strategically manage internal relationships with nationwide managers?* A mixed-method approach was followed, where qualitative and quantitative methods were used during different phases of the research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). This study did not aim to generalise findings, but rather to obtain understanding. However, including all possible participants, instead of selecting a limited sample, created a clear image of the situation and the findings may be applicable to similar organisations. Every manager⁴ (60 in total, including the national and provincial managers situated in the head office) in SEESA was included in the study to obtain as much data as possible and to represent managers from every office around the country. However, 38 out of the 60 potential responses were ultimately obtained.

Through a process of triangulation, the findings were supported by implementing qualitative and quantitative research methods to study the phenomenon defined by the research question (Du Plooy 2009). Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine the perceptions of top management on internal relationship management with nationwide managers. Interviews were conducted with the Managing

2 *SEESA BEE* provides services regarding Black Economic Empowerment legislation.

3 The acronym *POPI* refers to the Protection of Personal Information legislation.

4 The study focused on only managers of SEESA's national offices because employees in the offices are mostly legal advisors and marketing consultants. They visit clients and potential clients daily, are seldom at the office and many do not have access to computers at work. SEESA head office does not communicate often with these employees and as such they are dependent on their managers for information from the head of the organisation.

Director, the Corporate Development Manager, who is at the head of the Business Intelligence Unit under which internal communication management falls, and the PRO. These senior managers and the PRO were questioned on their perceptions of the role of internal communication management in a nationwide organisation; strategic internal communication management and opportunities for two-way communication between management and managers of the nationwide offices; and relationship building with the latter. Their perceptions on internal relationship management were compared to that of the managers of the nationwide offices to indicate possible shortcomings and areas where internal communication and relationship management could be improved. The findings of the qualitative semi-structured interviews were qualitatively interpreted in terms of narrative discourse analysis (Du Plooy 2009), according to the main themes identified in the literature study.

Second, a content analysis of SEESA's communication strategy was planned, but the entity had no communication strategy in place. The communication activities of the SEESA head office were therefore categorised according to Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship building strategies (access to information and decision-making; openness and disclosing important information; building networks with those with whom stakeholders have connections; cooperating to build a mutually beneficial relationship; sharing tasks to solve problems together; keeping promises; and being positive about the association) to determine whether the organisation's head office's communication activities contribute to establishing strong relationships with nationwide managers.

In the third instance, a quantitative questionnaire, adapted from the Hon and Grunig (1999) relationship questionnaire (see Addendum A), was used to determine the perceptions of SEESA's national, provincial and regional managers about the nature and quality of their relationship with the head office or top management. The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions, as well as demographic questions on the managers' department, job title, gender, age, and office location. The questions were answered by means of a 5-point Likert scale that reflected the degree to which the managers DISAGREE STRONGLY (1) OR AGREE STRONGLY (5) with the statements. After pilot-testing among eleven senior employees (not managers), the questionnaires were distributed electronically to all 60 managers as a practical and cost-effective means of reaching the entire population at this level. A total of 38 useful responses were received. Statistical analysis software (SPSS and Statistica) were used to analyse the data where appropriate.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

SEESA's Internal Communication and Relationship Management Practices

According to all interviewees, SEESA does not have a formal communication strategy, which implies that internal communication and relationship building are unplanned. SEESA's top management was uncertain about what strategic communication and relationship management entails and there was a self-proclaimed lack of environmental scanning and internal communication management. The Managing Director was especially concerned about the effect of a lack of internal communication management on managers' ability to adapt to external change because they work in a turbulent environment where it is inevitable.

No communication practices implemented by the SEESA head office are formally planned or evaluated to determine their effectiveness. The PRO added that the organisation does not have any formal guidelines or systems in place to encourage two-way communication between the head office and the managers, except for e-mail and top management's open-door policy. However, the Corporate Development Manager declared that one of the most important drawbacks of an open-door policy is that some employees can skip the formal communication hierarchy, obtain information and not share it with other parties.

Top management realises the value of two-way communication, and is of the opinion that the informal social events contribute to facilitating it. However, the Managing Director admitted that despite the informal communication events and relaxed organisational culture, it was sometimes difficult to obtain regular, timely feedback from regional managers. The Managing Director would therefore prefer a formal internal communication strategy, especially to convey the organisational strategy to all employees. He added that employees did not really attend innovation workshops or make use of suggestion boxes — in other words, top management created opportunities for two-way communication, but employees did not use them. The Corporate Development Manager added that a formal internal communication strategy could assist them in determining all employees' communication needs so that they can address them appropriately.

SEESA's top management believe that its culture determines communication in the organisation and that their culture encourages two-way communication, which, according to them, creates a positive environment for strong relationships with employees.

SEESA's Relationship Building Strategies

SEESA head office's communication activities were categorised according to Hon and Grunig's (1999) relationship building strategies to determine whether they contribute to establishing strong relationships with nationwide managers. The results are depicted in the following table.

Table 1: SEESA head office's implementation of relationship building strategies

Relationship building strategy	Implementation by SEESA head office
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Access	<p>Open door policy.</p> <p>An electronic system named 'Goofy', on which all employees with access to computers can store and access information.</p> <p>An intranet providing access to organisational policies, photos of social events, as well as resources such as a leave calculator and leave forms.</p>
Openness	<p>Annual management conference.</p> <p>National managers' bi-annual visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Directors' annual visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Roadshows to nationwide offices (occasionally).</p>
Positivity	<p>Monthly function for all employees of every office.</p> <p>Many social events, especially during national managers' and directors' visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Smaller annual team building events for each office, department at head office as well as a large team building event for all departments at head office.</p> <p>Innovation workshops.</p>
Assurance of legitimacy	<p>No formal implementation.</p>
Building of networks	<p>Corporate social responsibility by donating to organisations identified by employees in nationwide offices.</p>
Sharing of tasks	<p>No formal implementation.</p>
Cooperation	<p>National managers' bi-annual visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Directors' annual visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Annual management conference.</p>
Keeping promises	<p>National managers' bi-annual visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Directors' annual visits to nationwide offices.</p> <p>Annual management conference.</p>

According to the Managing Director, strong relationships with employees are a prerequisite for them identifying with the organisation, leading to improved commitment to SEESA over the long term. The head office therefore mostly uses social activities to build relationships with managers of the regional offices. The directors and national managers visit the offices, which is generally a social event, during which there is the opportunity for the managers to communicate personally with directors from the head office. There are annual management conferences where all the managers get together to discuss issues and strategies, as well as possible cooperation. Ample opportunity for socialising is available during the conferences. Further opportunities for two-way communication are provided during innovation workshops, monthly functions, road shows during times of change and annual team-building events. However, none of these events is strategically planned from a relationship management point of view, and so their outcomes cannot be evaluated. Moreover, these events are focused on employees

at a managerial level; few opportunities exist for two-way communication between the head office and personnel in lower positions.

SEESA's top management emphasises the need for internal communication to establish *trust* with employees. The Managing Director affirmed the importance of interpersonal communication in this regard. Despite top management perceiving trust as being vital in organisation-employee relationships, the level of trust between managers and the head office had not been evaluated before. The PRO added in this regard that there is no formal strategy in place to determine whether managers perceive the head office as being dependable, competent or having integrity, but the open-door policy allows them to "speak up if something bothers them."

SEESA's Managing Director noted that top management views two-way communication and building relationships with managers as being essential to demonstrate the entity's *commitment* to its employees. He believes that by showing commitment to the relationship with managers, it in turn leads to enhanced commitment to SEESA from these employees.

According to the PRO, no formal strategy is in place to determine whether the managers are *satisfied* with their relationship with head office. Top management believes, however, that SEESA's informal organisational culture and focus on two-way communication contribute to managers' satisfaction with the relationship.

SEESA Managers' Perception of Relationship Management from the Head Office

To guide the discussion on the perceptions of SEESA's managers of relationship management from the head office, descriptive statistics of the quality of the relationship outcomes and type of relationships between the country wide offices and SEESA head office are depicted in Figure 1.

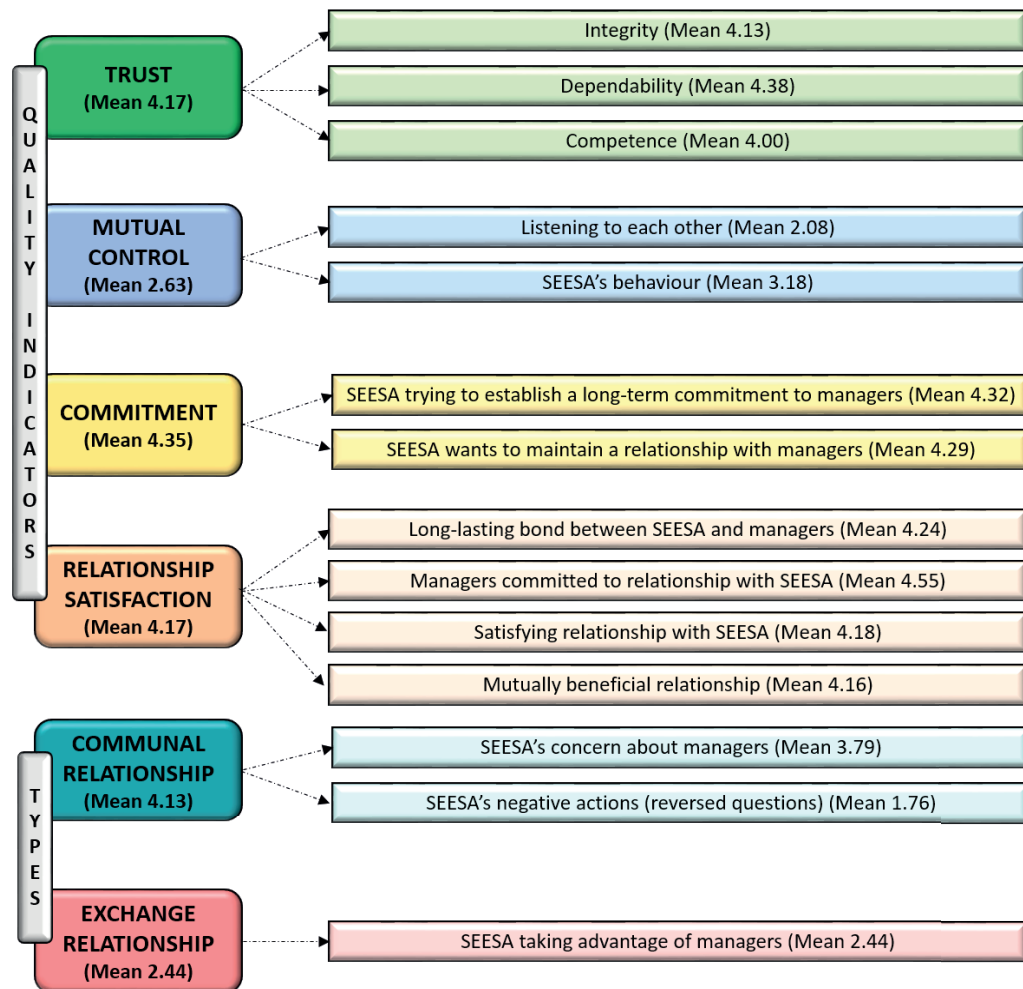


Figure 1: Descriptive statistics of the quality of the relationship outcomes and type of relationships between the country wide offices and SEESA head office ($n = 38$)

All the participating managers' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with the SEESA head office were good regarding trust (Mean: 4.17), relationship satisfaction (Mean: 4.17) and commitment (Mean: 4.35). The only outcome of strong relationships that scored low was mutual control (Mean: 2.63), where some managers indicated that they feel that they do not have much control in their relationship with the head office. The participating managers furthermore indicated that they and the head office are not attentive to what each other says (Mean: 2.08). This low score is interesting considering the informal two-way communication opportunities created by top management,

indicating a need for more formal communication with head office, as well as actions from head office showing that they listen to managers' views and needs. The results imply that the managers consider that they are not included in strategic decision-making, which corresponds with the lack of formal internal communication and environmental scanning.

SEESA's top management allows more autonomy for managers functioning at higher levels. Therefore, managers' perceptions of the level of mutual control increased as their age increased ($r = 0.149$) because mostly older managers are employed at higher managerial levels. However, some older managers ($r = -0.229$) and those lower ($r = 0.242$) in the hierarchy indicated perceptions of lower commitment and relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.166$) and a stronger exchange relationship ($r = 0.153$).

The participating managers strongly agreed that they experience the SEESA head office as being committed to establishing (Mean: 4.32) and maintaining a relationship with them (Mean: 4.29), and they themselves were also committed to SEESA as an organisation (Mean: 4.55). Furthermore, the managers were satisfied with their relationship with the SEESA head office (Mean: 4.18) and considered it mutually beneficial (Mean: 4.16).

The managers indicated that they have a strong communal relationship with the SEESA head office (Mean: 4.13). Indications of exchange relationships scored lower (Mean: 2.44) but were still present. Female managers experienced the relationship to be slightly more communal (Mean: 4.27) than male managers (Mean: 4.07) indicated it to be.

To determine whether the managers' relationship with top management differed on the grounds of the geographical distance from the head office, data was coded according to the following distance groups:

- 1 = SEESA head office in Pretoria
- 2 = offices situated 200-500km from head office
- 3 = offices situated 500-1000km from head office
- 4 = offices situated 1000-1500km from head office

It appeared that geographical distance had little or no effect on SEESA head office's relationship with its managers. Trust ($r = -0.035$), commitment ($r = -0.030$) and relationship satisfaction ($r = -0.141$) declined marginally with distance from the head office, but this trend was too small to be statistically significant. Overall, all managers perceive their relationship with head office as very strong, indicating that the latter's informal relationship-building strategies are effective, regardless of geographical distances.

CONCLUSION

SEESA's top management is convinced that strong relationships with managers around the country, as well as all other employees, are of the utmost importance in ensuring the organisation's effectiveness and survival. They are aware of the important role of internal communication in establishing such relationships, hence their focus on events that create informal, interpersonal opportunities for two-way communication. Furthermore, the head office intuitively applies the relationship-building strategies of access, openness, positivity, assurance, networking, sharing of tasks, cooperating and keeping promises by means of their open-door policy and informal events and visits. Top management therefore encourages an open, participative culture as well as ample opportunity for two-way communication. However, the impact of the communication function cannot be determined and its contribution to organisational excellence is lost because these actions are not strategically planned or evaluated from a relationship management perspective. This might be why SEESA's top management indicated their uncertainty about how the communication department can contribute to organisational excellence.

SEESA's world view cannot be classified as being either symmetrical or asymmetrical, but it reveals characteristics of both; for example, the lack of formal internal environmental scanning to determine managers' needs and views shows an asymmetrical inclination. However, top management's emphasis on their open-door policy and facilitating informal events for interpersonal, two-way communication leans to a symmetrical world view. The entity's open, participative organisational culture also supports such a world view.

Regardless of the lack of a formal communication strategy and environmental scanning to determine needs of employees, there are strong, communal relationships between SEESA head office and the national managers. However, in a countrywide organisation like SEESA, thorough environmental scanning is necessary to ensure that relevant information is communicated to offices in all geographical areas, the needs and views of employees are determined and communicated to the top and that there is opportunity for two-way communication and feedback between employees and the head office. This should lead to the managers having more control in their relationship with the SEESA head office, and perceiving it accordingly, because their views and needs are then addressed during strategy formulation.

SEESA's top management wants the communication role to focus on achieving organisational goals. Since the PRO is not part of top management nor fills a strategic role, this is seldom possible. However, SEESA's open, participative organisational culture, encouraged by top management's symmetrical world view and communication practices, provides the ideal support for the PRO to function in a strategic role. The head office's view of internal communication and relationship management therefore confirms Steyn's (1999) research, which found that top management prefers the communication practitioner to fulfil a strategic role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When the PRO functions as strategist, which in this study's case entails monitoring development and changes in the internal environment, gathering information on the needs and views of employees and anticipating their consequences for the organisation's strategies and policies (Steyn 1999, 24), it should lead to improved internal communication and relationship management within SEESA as a national organisation.

Strategic planning will give way to conscious relationship management with employees in a measurable and structured way. Where organisational culture currently plays a key part in encouraging relationship building, it can then be managed nationally with goals integrated with the overall operational strategy. Furthermore, systems can be put in place to ensure that two-way communication between countrywide offices and the head office becomes the norm.

Moreover, the PRO should be included in events such as roadshows and office visits to conduct internal environmental scanning. Furthermore, if the PRO is less office bound and visits regional offices more often, a better understanding of region-specific cultural differences can be gained in order to manage them effectively. A further advantage would be an improved understanding of different offices' needs and establishing relationships through interpersonal communication. Communication and relationship building strategies aimed at strengthening perceptions of commitment and relationship satisfaction with older managers as well as those at a lower level, could be implemented. Moreover, mutual control should be strengthened in the relationship with junior managers. Internal communication channels such as a closed Facebook group for internal communication, smartphone applications or interactivity functions for the existing intranet can be researched to facilitate two-way communication with employees around the country.

It appears that, from an excellence theory as well relationship management theory perspective, a formal communication strategy is indispensable in ensuring that the outcomes of strong relationships are present in those between a national organisation and its managers (internal stakeholders). The most important finding of this study is that the outcomes can be present when a formal communication strategy is lacking, but then the communication function cannot take credit for building these strong relationships because it is not acting in a strategic capacity and so does not contribute to operational excellence. When there is no formal communication strategy, strong relationships in a national organisation can manifest themselves informally when the entity is inclined towards a symmetrical world view, has an open and participative organisational culture as well as ample opportunities for engaging in two-way communication with top management.

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ADDENDUM A

Please read each statement carefully and mark the number that reflects the degree to which you DISAGREE STRONGLY (1), DISAGREE (2), FEEL NEUTRAL ABOUT (3) AGREE (4) or AGREE STRONGLY (5) with each statement.

Trust

Dimensions: Integrity, competence, dependability

1. The SEESA Head Office treats people like me fairly and justly. (Integrity)				
1	2	3	4	5

2. Whenever the SEESA Head Office makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me. (Integrity)				
1	2	3	4	5

3. The SEESA Head Office can be relied on to keep its promises. (Dependability)				
1	2	3	4	5

4. I believe that the SEESA Head Office takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions. (Dependability)				
1	2	3	4	5

5. I feel very confident about the SEESA Head Office's skills. (Competence)				
1	2	3	4	5

6. The SEESA Head Office has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (Competence)				
1	2	3	4	5

Control Mutuality

7. The SEESA Head Office and people like me are attentive to what each other say.				
1	2	3	4	5

8. The SEESA Head Office believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.				
1	2	3	4	5

9. In dealing with people like me, the SEESA Head Office has a tendency to throw its weight around. (Reversed)				
1	2	3	4	5

10. The SEESA Head Office really listens to what people like me have to say.				
1	2	3	4	5

Commitment

11. I feel that the SEESA Head Office is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.

1	2	3	4	5
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12. I can see that the SEESA Head Office wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.

1	2	3	4	5
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13. There is a long-lasting bond between the SEESA Head Office and people like me.

1	2	3	4	5
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14. Compared to other organisations I have worked for, I value my relationship with the SEESA Head Office more.

1	2	3	4	5
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Satisfaction

15. I am happy with the SEESA Head Office.

1	2	3	4	5
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16. Both the SEESA Head Office and people like me benefit from the relationship.

1	2	3	4	5
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17. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with the SEESA Head Office.

1	2	3	4	5
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18. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship the SEESA Head Office has established with people like me.

1	2	3	4	5
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Communal Relationships

19. The SEESA Head Office does not especially enjoy giving others aid. (Reversed)

1	2	3	4	5
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20. The SEESA Head Office is very concerned about the welfare of people like me.

1	2	3	4	5
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21. I feel that the SEESA Head Office takes advantage of people who are vulnerable. (Reversed)

1	2	3	4	5
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22. I think that the SEESA Head Office succeeds by stepping on other people. (Reversed)				
1	2	3	4	5

Exchange Relationships

23. Whenever the SEESA Head Office gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return.				
1	2	3	4	5

24. Even though people like me have had a relationship with the SEESA Head Office for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favour.				
1	2	3	4	5

25. The SEESA Head Office will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something.				
1	2	3	4	5

26. The SEESA Head Office takes care of people who are likely to reward the organisation.				
1	2	3	4	5