

## AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION APPROACHES USED BY SMES IN ZIMBABWE

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**ABSTRACT:** *Literature highlights the importance of communication in the formulation and implementation of strategies. The level of communication has been seen to positively correlate with the overall performance of organisations. Unfortunately the level of communication in SMEs in Zimbabwe has not received much research neither have studies revealed the communication processes used by SMEs. This study sought to establish the communication approaches used by these SMEs and their contribution to the overall performance of these organisations. This was a qualitative study using the multiple case study approach involving eight organisations. In depth interviews and non-participant observations were used to collect data from owner/managers. The major findings were that SMEs used informal communication channels to share information with employees particularly the grapevine to gather organisational information. This tended to create organisational disharmony with each employee striving for favours from the owner. Employees were also given information on a need to know basis and this adversely affected overall organisation performance due to inadequate or delayed information.*

**KEYTERMS:** Strategy Implementation, Communication, Smes, Performance

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### INTRODUCTION

All organisations whether big or small require people to undertake various activities in them to prosper and grow. It is human elements that will identify an existing or an impending problem with the current direction or focus of the organisation which puts the human element at the front, centre and back of the strategy process, (Duke, 2013). Duke II (2013) states that the greatest challenge to confront the manager is arguably that of articulating a clear and suitable direction in which the organisation is headed. Surviving and thriving in the long term involves getting the right people focussed on the right things and engaged in collective effort (Holbeche & Matthews, 2012). The importance of effective communication in an organisation cannot be overemphasized in both strategy formulation and eventually implementation and monitoring organisational performance. Communication has been defined as a process through which people acting together create, sustain and manage meanings through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols within a particular context, (Conrad & Poole, 2012).

People in organisations act together and need to communicate regularly in order to achieve organisational goals. However, to effectively drive these, the manager requires the capacity to communicate complex ideas in simple ways; an ability to build and play in teams as well as trouble-shoot, (Duke II, 2013). This is easier said than done and most organisations encounter significant problems in trying to move forward which can be directly attribute to communication problems or barriers. Nelson et al (2007) calls for further research to

investigate suitable organisational interventions to enhance communication processes and the dimensions of relationships. This study will investigate the communication interventions adopted by SMEs owner/managers in driving strategy formulation and implementation in Zimbabwe and whether these approaches enhance organisational performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Communication plays a significant role in an organisation's performance. Implementation effectiveness is negatively affected by conflict and positively by communication especially in interpersonal and written form (Li et al, 2008). Li et al (2008) add that if members of an organisation are not aware of the same information, or if information passes through different levels, there will be a lower level of consensus. The organisation may fail to effectively implement strategies as employees might not know what is expected of them. Personal communication seems to be a very strong practice among SMEs, especially in Zimbabwe. According to Peng & Littlejohn (2001), communication and cooperation between diverse participants within an organisation have been recognised as crucial elements to maintain stability. Execution is carried out by different people at different levels in the organisation. Most managers struggle to communicate strategic plans to employees who did not participate in formulating them, yet are expected to implement the plan (Dandira, 2011). Functionalists are mainly concerned with the performance of organisations and regard an organisation as an entity where communication is a variable that shapes and determines operations and performance (Peng & Littlejohn, 2001). This approach focuses on goals and the intended and unintended outcomes of communication; it explores ways to improve communication systems and behaviour in an organisation. When a new strategy is implemented, staff members generally respond in four ways: indifference, resistance, disbelief and support (Speculand, 2009). These reactions are determined by how the strategic plan is communicated to the implementers. Dandira (2011) believes that most organisations lack people who can articulate the contents of a strategic plan and its vision. How they respond will have a significant impact on how well a strategy is implemented. The quality of communication practices (Nelson, Brunetto, Farr-Wharton & Ramsay, 2007) is likely to be associated with role clarity and job satisfaction. Effective communication is critical for the development and maintenance of positive working relationships. According to Kumar et al (2006), excellent communication, which is one of the key ingredients in the success of the strategy implementation model proposed by Okumus (2001), and transparency between the parties involved, as well as clearly defined performance factors, play a vital role in the implementation and execution phase. They argue that well aligned communication and relationships are the foundation of trust building between the parties in the implementation and execution process. Successful implementation goes beyond ensuring that staff members understand the strategy; they must know exactly what to do and be motivated to do it (Speculand, 2009). The quality of relationships between employees and management determines employees' ability to access relevant information in order to solve day to day problems that arise in the workplace (Nelson et al, 2007). Organisations need to develop mechanisms that send formal and informal messages about the new strategy.

Any delay caused by poor communication or coordination could create conflict between the parties and have an impact on the business and relationships (Kumar et al, 2006). Communication barriers are reported more frequently than any other type of barrier to strategy implementation, which might be influenced by the organisational structure (Li et al,

2008). Managers spend a lot of time communicating and promoting strategy i.e. trying to sell it to different stakeholders (Souminen & Mantere, 2010). Much communication about new strategy focuses on its launch, but it must also cover other issues like the actions that need to be undertaken to participate in the new strategy, ways to motivate those who implement the strategy, measures to track the new strategy and the new behaviours to be encouraged (Speculand, 2009). Communication in African culture is mostly top down, with the owner manager running the show, and is mostly negative. In the African culture, those in authority cannot be questioned and what they say is final; this approach is prevalent in SMEs activities and is at odds with the communication models advocated for strategy implementation. According to Nelson et al (2007), most SMEs do not have a developed HRM infrastructure, nor do they have well developed knowledge management processes and vehicles such as operational manuals, instructions and guidelines. Hence within the SMEs context, the relational dimension assumes that employees will use a range of communication processes, particularly the relationship with the supervisor, to gather information and skills in order to perform their tasks effectively. This emphasizes informality in communication; where a sour relationship exists between the supervisor and the employee, strategy implementation is unduly affected. This can be a cause of frustration on the part of employees who might not receive all the information necessary for strategy implementation, to the detriment of the organisation. Social capital theory therefore provides an important perspective to better understand how the quality of communication processes affects working relationships and in turn impacts on organisational outcomes such as customer ambiguity, job satisfaction and employee commitment (Nelson et al, 2007). "The findings of this study suggest that much remains to be done in communication strategies in SMEs, given that a number of interviewees linked the problem of strategy implementation to communication," (Aaltonen and Ikavalko, 2002). This observation is confirmed by Al-Ghamdi (1998), who recommended that company management develop a good information system that will help managers to obtain the highest quality of knowledge in order to facilitate strategy implementation. Most SMEs in Zimbabwe have not developed effective systems for smooth communication and effective strategy implementation. A common concern is the creation of a shared understanding of strategy among the organisational members (Aaltonen & Ikavalko, 2002).

However, Aaltonen & Ikavalko (2002) argue that sufficient communication does not guarantee successful implementation; what is important, is the interpretation, acceptance and adoption among implementers, since a lack of understanding of strategy is one of the obstacles to strategy implementation. They contend that there was an insufficient link between goals and objectives and it was challenging to transform strategy into concrete objectives; and this problem becomes worse the lower one is located in the organisational hierarchy. Several different information exchange strategies can be used, including those focussed on individuals, individual counselling by managers and those at group level such as staff meetings, cross functional teams and focus groups, and the use of internal media (Enz, 2012). The effectiveness of organisational communication processes affects the identity of the organisation and the organisational climate and in turn, impacts on the performance of the organisation (Nelson et al, 2007). If employees are not satisfied with the information received, they are likely to be uncertain about a range of organisational issues as well as their responsibilities. The content of such communication includes clearly explaining what new responsibilities, tasks and duties need to be performed by the affected employees; and should also include the why behind job activities (Li et al, 2008). Very few SMEs have systems to communicate vital information or why a new strategic decision was made in the first place.

Uncertainties may increase role ambiguity and in turn affect job satisfaction and employee commitment, which are all essential for successful strategy implementation. A case in point is the study by Marasini, Ions & Ahmad (2008), which found that although the decision to implement an (Enterprise Resource Planning) ERP system was made by the directors of the company, the decision was a directive from the managing director. Consequently, this decision was unpopular with employees because of the complexity and inflexibility of the system. According to Li et al, 2008:

*“Organisational communication plays an important role in training, knowledge dissemination and learning during the process of implementation, as it relates in a complex way to organisational processes, organisational contexts and implementation of objectives which in turn have an effect on the process of implementation.”*

Therefore the adoption of appropriate communication practices may well be an important strategy to influence employees' perceptions of organisational practices and policies and therefore employee commitment (Nelson et al, 2007). Nelson et al's (2007) findings confirm that employees' level of satisfaction with various aspects of communication processes affects their level of ambiguity about customers, their job satisfaction and organisational commitment and therefore could impact on SMEs' ability to grow. Therefore SMEs wishing to pursue growth and development strategies should be mindful of the impact of communication processes on organisational culture and outcomes (Nelson et al, 2007). In situations of one-on-one supervision, this can be achieved by recognising the kind of work that needs to be done and ensuring that company members accept their task and mandates (Huebner, Varey & Wood, 2008). Huebner, Varey & Wood (2008) argue that voice is a necessary condition if strategic issues or themes are to be turned into action and therefore the crucial point is whether the speaker's voice is accepted as legitimate.

There might be challenges on communicating various aspects of the strategy process and Masarini et al (2008) found that the formation of a community of practice (CoP) enabled a team to share ideas, find solutions and identify best practice. Employees have to find implementation methods that are not management guided. This is likely to be the case when employees have a buy in which is highly unlikely in most SMEs in Zimbabwe.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This was a qualitative study using the multiple case study approach. Eight organisations were selected using convenience sampling given the fact that only organisations with fewer than 100 employees and were five years or more were chosen for this study. In depth interviews were conducted with the owner/managers over two hour sessions and these interviews were collaborated by non-participant observations. After typing the interview responses were given to the owner/managers for verification. Once verified the information was coded using Atlasti after which code families and memos were created. Using the data available certain emerged which were reflected in the findings.

## FINDINGS

During the interviews, owners revealed very different perceptions of the need for effective communication in the organisation. For example, HRE 3 felt that employees could not be trusted with information and stated that:

*“It was very difficult to let all people know about projects because of the fear that ideas could be stolen and individuals will pursue them for their own good.”*

As a result employees were given enough information to enable them to perform current tasks only. This seemed to hold back implementation of strategy as employees waited for the next batch of information for the next step. There seemed to be an over reliance on meetings to discuss what had transpired in the organisation during the week. These weekly meetings also created gaps in the flow of information which can only be addressed at the next meeting. They also tended to be the owner’s address to employees with little contribution from the affected employees. A major weakness of this approach was that there was very little use of previous experiences as there was very little information sharing beyond what the owner wanted done.

“Pharoah Ptah-hotep instructed his sons and managers in the importance of listening skills, the need to seek advice and information from subordinates, the importance of staying informed about what is taking place around them, and the necessity of clearly explaining each worker’s tasks and documenting these in writing” (Conrad & Poole, 2012:74). These lessons seemed not to have been learned by the business owners as they did not deliberately establish communication systems to tap into the ideas of employees. The voice of the employees was hardly listened to and prior organisational knowledge was never used to move the organisation forward. At times key personnel never bothered to attend the scheduled meetings.

*“Most IT people do not like holding meetings, they more interested in their technical work. We definitely need to improve on information sharing, and to this end we have had to use emails extensively. We need to discuss issues face to face and in the process improve on accountability”* (HRE 3).

GRU 2 had six branches in Zimbabwe but there was no communication between branch managers, nor were there joint meetings to discuss the activities in the various areas. There was no formal sharing of information and the experience among the business units. The communication between branch managers was informal and driven by the grape vine whilst that with head office was limited to placing orders and reporting sales figures. The needs of branches were often not met, resulting in serious stock outs or the delivery of items that the branch did not need. For example, the Gweru branch received 10 tonnes of fine salt which was way in excess of requirements. Purchases were not made on the actual requirements of the branch but what the buyer considered beneficial to the whole organisation. There was no effort to establish what customers wanted; the thinking was that if something was available, it would eventually sell. A lot of capital was tied up in products that moved slowly; this eventually affected the availability of products in demand which made the organisation inefficient.

Another interesting finding of interest was the fact that every employee had direct communication with the owner of the business, enabling the owner to obtain first-hand information from the workforce. "The decision makers at the top of the organisation must receive accurate, complete, concise, and timely information about the extent to which orders have been carried out and tasks completed" (Conrad & Poole, 2012:78). However, the organisational environment became poisoned, leading to the impromptu suspension of supervisors and transfers and these were based on the available information. The owner tended to only visit a branch in response to a crisis and employees were never brought together for a group meeting. One-on-one meetings perpetuated gossip and witch-hunting. Four branch managers were suspended at one outlet but were subsequently reinstated after serving three months suspension.

There was a lack of trust and employees tended to be cautious in the execution of their tasks. Each employee tried their best to be closest to the employer, to the detriment of the organisation. This cautious approach slowed down strategy implementation; hence the study revealed growth only in terms of the number of outlets and employees; information on sales growth was not available due to a lack of records and a strategic plan. This approach resonates with Conrad and Poole's (2012) observation that if subordinates do not trust their supervisors, other factors come into play.

GRU 2 used an interesting communication tactic in the form of the transmission of a message that the owner was watching over everyone in the organisation. The owner used the grapevine to keep everyone in line and when action was required, the branch manager and other key personnel would be suspended for periods ranging from a month to three months. A powerful message was thus transmitted that one had to perform or they would find themselves out of work. The fear factor was used to get results and employees were played against one another to the benefit of the entrepreneur. This is a regular occurrence in countries with high unemployment rates like Zimbabwe. This threat hardly ever works in economies with near or full employment. Nor does it work where labour laws and courts to resolve disputes work properly.

In most cases, the employees were starved of information; the information they did receive was geared towards ensuring that they performed their allotted tasks. They were debriefed after the tasks were completed.

The meetings were intimidating in that employees did not fully participate due to the apparent lack of trust among the parties. This lack of trust was observed during the interviews when the owner lowered his voice and closed the door when commenting on issues related to employees.

The most common method of communication was weekly meetings, complemented by email communication. In GRU 2's case, communication was limited to ordering stock items and informing the owners of sales figures and banking. This information was of little use in strategy implementation since in some cases the orders received were different from those ordered. The owner targeted purchase discounts in order to enable the business to sell products more cheaply than its competitors.

In contrast, GRU 1 communicated the activities that the organisation intended to undertake, but emphasized the problems that the organisation was facing, especially financial problems.

*“We have an open door policy where employees come to the office with their problems. They are encouraged to come up with suggestions which are discussed. Teamwork and team spirit are also encouraged and easy to institute when you transparent in your dealings. The fact that we are in arrears is indicative of our cash position and this has affected salary payments as well. We generally talk about the problems the company is facing.”*

Talking about these problems was instrumental in buying employee loyalty. In this regard, communication was used effectively to ensure the survival of the organisation; employees had to forgo salaries for the good of the organisation. They received temporary relief by being allowed to transport small loads for their own benefit. However this approach had the effect of undermining the organisational structure; employees tended to bring trivial issues to the owner/manager. This was observed when an employee came to complain about the supply of the wrong bolt required to repair a truck. This could have been handled administratively.

*“Eventually when we get a contract, the employees determine what is to done with the money. In cases they select the employees with the greatest need to benefit first i.e. the employee with the most pressing need. Sometimes they suggest how the money can be used for organisational purposes e.g. payment of overdue bills likely to affect their operation like electricity bills etc” (GRU 1).*

While GRU 1 communicated its problems to employees as well as the way in which it hoped to solve the problems, at GRU 2 and HRE 3, communication was limited, resulting in mistrust and a top down management style.

In the case of the fuel retailer, MRE 1, compliance was considered to be pivotal to successful strategy implementation since the costs associated with penalties would negatively affect the organisation’s target to sell 400 thousand litres of fuel per month. MRE 1 stated:

*“Compliance with statutory bodies is also key to the success of our business. Once regulations are issued I communicate with my people. I ask them to read the articles that affect us as a business e.g. the recently published story to do with licensing of service stations and the fines. I personally phone to alert them and then send a text message to emphasize the requirement to immediate implement the new requirement. Businesses fail to do well because they do not comply with regulations.”*

This meant that the operator had to bring employees to the right level of industry knowledge failure of which the employer will be heavily censured by the regulatory bodies. This would be a direct cost to the business and costs have to be minimised. Communicating the legal requirements become a necessity for the oil industry and will be less applicable to less regulated sectors. HRE 2 and BYO 2 adopted a very different approach to communication compared with those in the traditional lines of business. At HRE 2, communication commenced by communicating the vision of the organisation during morning prayers:

*Our philosophy involves starting work at 7h00 and this involve directors prayer meeting which end at 8h00. From 8h00, we have prayers with all staff members who voluntarily join us for the prayers. Eventually others have tended to join us in these prayers even when at first*

*they were not convinced of their value. We have managed to turn around some individuals through this practice.”*

The prayer sessions were used to keep everyone focussed on what the organisation wanted to achieve. The goal was very clearly linked to spiritualism and thus appealed to the spiritual being of workers and worked on their emotions. The link between faith and work was clearly demonstrated as more employees were said to be patronising the morning prayer sessions and cloning their superiors. Not only was the focus on the emotional side of work, but there were also efforts to energise employees every morning by means of slogans that were repeated in every prayer session, and a call to action on the part of all workers. This passion seemed to have a positive effect, reflected in the growth of the organisation in focussing on cohesion and team work. It could however compromise independent think thereby creating a sterile organisation as communication had a religious slant. This might lead to unquestioning minds with employees failing to communicate messages that fell out of the religious slant They also came together to discuss the execution of projects prior to going into the field.

*“Constant communication helps to make employees remain locked in the vision and the direction in which the organisation is moving. Employees should always be informed about the progress the organisation is making towards satisfying and meeting its goals.”* (HRE2).

HRE 1 also highlighted the importance of teamwork, pointing out that communication was instrumental in the successful execution of tasks and stated that communication is essential in the fast paced advertising industry, where products are client specific. In this regard HRE1 stated:

*“The organisation’s values are precision- there is no room for mistakes in this very precise business. We need to exercise a great deal of care in getting everything right before it gets to the customer. Any mistakes will have dire consequences on the company and could result in lost business. We have to thoroughly check everything before it gets to the customer especially the small things. We cannot leave it to the customer to discover it.”*

This requires a lot of communication among the various units of the organisation with the other unit correcting the mistakes of the other. Without communication mistakes will slip through to the customer at a significant cost to the business and this ensured that all organisational members were aware of the organisational standards required of them. Compliance to these standards was essential for implementation and this emphasises the need to value what is important for the organisation.

Dobni et al (2001) observe that brilliant strategies do not always succeed often succumbing to not so brilliant processes which reinforce the traditional organisational communication practices they foster. Entrepreneurs use different methods of communication, emphasizing what they consider to be important for the welfare of the organisation, like in the case of HRE1. This was also particularly true for HRE3, where employees could not be trusted with information as the owner felt that the employees would use the information for personal benefit rather than the wellbeing of the organisation. Hijacking IT projects was said to be prevalent in this industries whereby employees would undercut tender figures submitted by the owner. The non-sharing of information among organisational members meant that some employees did not share the bigger organisational picture. Information was thus given on a need to know basis, and not to build organisational capabilities. These will likely affect



reception of messages when one feels that they cannot be trusted and will affect organisational efficiency as lack of information could create bottlenecks. In Marasini et al's study (2008) although the decision to implement an ERP system was made by the directors of the company; the decision to implement was a directive from the managing director.

This was identical to the set up at BYO1 where employees were not informed about the impending deceleration of business activities in the bookshop business and the redirection of resources to the new agro-business. Some employees (4) who were given a chance to move actually resigned despite assurances that they will be given the right training. Chance are that the justification of any change might not be explained resulting in resistance.

The effectiveness of organisational communication processes affects the identity of the organisation and the organisational climate, and in turn, impacts on the performance of the organisation, (Nelson et al, 2007). If employees are not satisfied with the information received they are likely to be uncertain about a range of organisational issues as well as their responsibilities. These uncertainties may increase role ambiguity and in turn affect job satisfaction and employee commitment, (Nelson et al, 2007), which are essential for successful strategy implementation. For example at BYO1, employees were told that they would receive some form of training before they were deployed to the agro-business but despite initially agreeing to the redeployment, they eventually decided to leave the organisation as they did not buy into the new direction.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study confirms earlier findings in the area of strategy implementation. The power to make decisions relating to strategic and managerial issues lies with the owner and this obstructs managerial activities and causes organisational crises, (Garengo & Bernadi, 2007). They further argue that the entrepreneur is in charge of both operational and managerial functions; he/she usually neglects managerial activities and so hampers the company's development. Information about the company performance is often lacking, only some performance indicators and some traditional information about production costs are available. This crisis situation also manifested itself at both GRU1 and BYO1 where the owners were responsible for both operational and managerial issues. The communication of the organisation's direction was limited but there was an overdose of the organisation's problems and challenges so as to pacify the employees. For example, at GRU1 employees went for 10 months with receiving salaries, but they were well informed about the business' problems so that they had no justification for complaining to the employer. The SMEs exploited the employees' sympathy and allowed for transgressions by employees to be conveniently ignored despite being at variance with company policies and regulations. All organisations in the study used one version or another of forgiving employees with GRU2 suspending employees for between one and three months and thereafter reinstating them without loss of benefits, BYO1 and HRE3 felt that firing employees was not a practice suitable for SMEs stating that they would rather rehabilitate the individual than hiring a new employee. All agreed that employees who had been forgiven for transgressions were the most loyal and hard working. The message was that get outline and you will be punished but the owner will be willing to give the employee another chance.

The majority of SMEs did not have formal communication strategies in place and these were depended on what needed to be done. Communication was meant to sugar coat organisational problem and to pacify employees. Apart from crises there was very little communication between the owner and the employees and this was clearly evident at GRU2 where the owner only talked to employees when there was a break in and never when issues were flowing smoothly. Employees were interrogated on what could have transpired and they were encouraged to spy on each other and pass the damning information directly to the owner. Those who were able to generate good information were rewarded by promotions and the victims were suspended for periods up to three months. This encouraged the use of the grapevine and to create an atmosphere of mistrust among employees. The work environment was poisoned by depending exclusively on the grapevine for essential organisation communication.

This study also investigated the flow of information in SMEs. Most organisations in the study had no formal communication structures and all employees had direct communication with the owners. While some particularly GRU1, GRU2 and BYO1 regarded this as an open door policy, the quality of information was not always beneficial to the organisation but to employees who had the ear of the owners. This created a lot of disharmony as the information given to the owners could not be verified. This seems to confirm the notion that in SMEs all communication had to go through the owners who will make the final decision on any issue. Not all employees were given an equal platform to talk with the owners hence some views or contribution never got to the owners. This will result in a failure to recognise the contribution of all employees to strategy implementation more so given that the employees are the actual implementers of strategy. These traditional approaches have not focussed on tangibles such as the people and processes necessary to develop an ongoing and sustainable implementation context, and in this regard, the organisation lacks implementation harmony (Dobni et al, 2001). Dobni et al (2001) argue that this can be traced to what they refer to 'cerebral strategizing', which they define as the inability to move from the boardroom onto the playing field.

One of the pillars of effective strategy implementation is an effective communication system. The SMEs in Zimbabwe did not seem to create effective communication systems. There was extensive use of the grapevine to garner information and as a mode of organisational communication to safeguard their businesses. This approach resonates well with the vision of the owners, which centred on personal security rather than business development and growth. Organisations were handicapped by this lack of communication systems.

## **IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

Organisational communication has always been considered a strong building block for organisational performance but this study has identified some gaps in how SMEs apply organisational communication in day to day activities. Practicing SMEs need to adopt communication approaches that add value and help organisational performance. SMEs should adopt more formal communication media and should use varied methods to ensure that everyone in the organisation was on the same hymn page. Better communication can contribute to improved organisational performance.

It is recommended that SMEs owner/managers should adopt more formal communication systems as the informal systems currently in use were detrimental balance. There is also need

to improve information sharing among employees and business units beyond current practices of emphasizing organisational problems like cash flow problems to the detriment of other issues. SMEs need to exploit organisational knowledge that they already possess in case like procurement to enhance organisational performance. They also need to extend the communication media used in the organisations rather than depending on meetings which are dominated by the owner/managers.

## CONCLUSIONS

Organisational communication is very limited in most SMEs and it tends to be informal. There is extensive use of the grapevine where information about fellow employees is clandestinely passed on to the owner, rather than information that could promote business activities and performance. Poor communication models tie in with the SMEs owners' desire to ensure their personal security. For example, orders for GRU 2 were communicated telephonically, but this was not followed up with a formal written order that one could use to compare with the received order.

Meetings are another key means of communicating with employees, but in the majority of organisations there was no record of what was discussed and whether there was any follow up. For example, GRU 2 assumed that misbehaviour had been dealt with by the immediate suspension of the branch manager or dismissal of employees. This reflected the toughness of the owner.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Communication is key to organisational functioning but recent trends have also seen the emergence of religion in the workplace. It will be interesting to examine whether the religious slant abates or hinders information flow in an organisation and whether this approach actually contributes to the performance of SMEs or any other organisation for that matter.

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