LSE Media and Communications

Media@LSE MSc Dissertation Series

Editors: Bart Cammaerts, Saumyadeep Mandal and Hao Wang

COMMUNICATING INSIDE TO PEOPLE FROM THE OUTSIDE

How junior international employees in strategic communications companies in London perceive workplace well-being through internal communications

NAM NGHIEM

Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

Copyright, NAM NGHIEM © 2024.

The author has asserted their moral rights.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. In the interests of providing a free flow of debate, views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the compilers or the LSE.

ABSTRACT

Taking interest in the unexpectedly low level of well-being of London residents and the lasting mental health issue in strategic communications industries, the research initiated with the question "What are the differences between the communicative construction and lived experiences of workplace well-being of junior international professionals in London-based strategic communications companies?" It interviewed two sets of participants from strategic communications companies based in London, recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, including non-UK professionals with less than three years of experience, and internal communications/HR specialists. The interviews centred around participants' perception of workplace well-being through internal communications at their companies. The following thematic analysis revealed three main differences between the perception of the two groups: (1) More proactively negotiated and implicitly co-created conception of ideal working values and environment among junior international employees; (2) Difference in evaluation of engagement with the company through internal communications; (3) More dynamic formation of sense of community in lived workplace experiences.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, London has been drawing young talents from across the globe for its diversity, rich culture and numerous international career opportunities. This is especially true for strategic communications industries, as the city is home to the biggest names in the field of Europe and the world, including M&C Saatchi, Dentsu Aegis Network and WPP (owner of Hill+ Knowlton Strategies, Ogilvy, GroupM, Wunderman Thompson, to name but a few. Many of these young individuals eventually secure their "dream" jobs or positions that are socially perceived as prestigious. However, despite such excitement and prosperity, the level of well-being of Inner London's residents is shown to be significantly lower than those in Outer London, and the overall well-being of Londoners fares worse than those residing in other parts of the UK. Respectively, strategic communications industries are not exempt from this pattern. According to research by the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) (2022), mental health issues have consistently been considered by practitioners as the top challenge in the field for two consecutive years. This issue is particularly concerning for international (non-British) professionals in junior positions. They are underrepresented in the profession (CIPR, 2022) and must work diligently to establish a foundation for their future careers. Unlike their British counterparts, they lack direct access to broader social support systems (e.g. parents, childhood friends, native cultural assets, etc.), which makes their workplace experience a significant aspect of their lives. Cornelissen (2020) emphasised that workplace experience is primarily constructed by internal communications, while Hall (1973, as in Hall, Hobson, Lowe & Willis, 1991) further exerted that in the communication process, the communicator also encodes messages based on their knowledge of the receiver. This means that the well-being, mostly from work, of junior international professionals depends on how internal communications/HR specialists understand what that means to them. Therefore, to address this issue, this research was carried out under the research question: **What are the differences between the communicative construction and lived experiences of workplace well-being of junior international professionals in London-based strategic communications companies?** Academically, the research will fill the knowledge gap between internal and external communications in organisational communications and within internal

communications itself. Reflecting back to the work of Cornelissen (2020), Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory & Practice, a foundational literature in the field, among thirteen chapters, only two of them specifically looked into internal communications and its major aspects (leadership and change communication). In many areas in this work that are relevant to both internal and external communications, such as Corporate Identity, Branding and Corporate Reputation, or to some extent, Issues Management, there is very little theoretical discussion, practical implication and case study on how they play out in an internal environment. Regarding internal communications specifically, the research will open up further understanding of the field with the influence of culture, as existing theories in the field has mostly approached the organisational environment as a mere technical operation and the employees as a mere (professional) person, while workplaces around the world are becoming more and more internally international with increasing movement of workforce across regions and the globe, reflected in immigration trends, emergence of economic communities such as the EU, AEC, etc. In practice, the research could suggest solutions for improving internal communications in relation to engaging international workers, and further, diversity & inclusion in international companies in the UK, which would bring distinctive boost in skills, knowledge, innovation, training delivery, organisational integration, and connection to international markets & domestic local networks (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, 2015).

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

The study will examine the conception of workplace well-being in the process of communication from internal communications/HR specialists to young international employees and in the working environment that causes or results from this process. Particularly, workplace well-being, generated through internal communications, will be analysed in three domains. First, it will discover how internal communications/HR specialists construct workplace well-being in their employee communication practices. Second, it will analyse how young professionals perceive workplace well-being from these communications. This will also take into account the moderation of cultural elements, as those in the study has to adapt not just to a transition from study to work environment, but also to an international,

foreign life setting. Lastly, the research will examine internal communications/HR specialists' perception of workplace well-being as well as the (non-)presence and achievement of workplace well-being among young international professionals in the organisation's working environment through internal communications. Differences among these domains will help indicating the scale and aspect of setbacks in internal communication towards workplace well-being. It could whether stem from the approach of communication practice, the disconnection from principles of organisational goals and values, or the disengagement with employees and the contemporary global working environment.

Contemporary internal communications: Overview

Internal communications are communicative activities carried out towards employees internal to the organisation and often also termed as employee communications (Cornelissen, 2020). However, companies, especially big corporations, are investing more in employer branding, sometimes also referred to as part of recruitment marketing (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017), and many current young professionals were attracted to them through this. Moreover, these activities are also done by internal communications/HR specialists. Therefore, the research will also cover employer branding communications where relevant, considering how it is also part of the organisational communications that affects young international professionals' experience of workplace well-being.

Through a communication technologies perspective, internal communications include two areas: management communication and corporate information and communication system (CICS) (Cornelissen, 2020). Yet, management communication mostly takes place in an interpersonal setting (Tengblad, 2006), which would be outside the scope of work of an internal communication practitioner. Furthermore, from a strategic communications perspective, this scope is far from exhaustive, as these areas mostly focus on disseminating information. Yeomans & FitzPatrick (2017) pointed out that effective internal communications operation involves not only pushing out information, but also enabling employees to pull out information at their convenience, understanding employees' internalisation of information, generating sense of community among employees, and encouraging debate and critical opinions from employees. All of the latter purposes predominantly function on "change

champions" (certain employees who are more well-informed and has a deep understanding of organisational affairs), physical events, collective activities and even mainstream social media (e.g. Instagram) (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017), considering how employee communications are also connected to employer branding/recruitment marketing. This opens up additional areas of internal communications for the research, including organisational social network & community management, and corporate events & activities.

Practitioners' construction of internal communications

Contemporary internal communications involve both communicating internally to current employees of the organisation, and recruitment marketing externally to professionals who might later become those employees. Both of these communications are also needed to establish a good brand (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017), therefore it will be most relevant to examine the practice of internal communications through branding theories. Branding in the context of employee communications is known as employer branding, specified by Lloyd (2002) as the construction of the organisation as a desirable place to work. Jain (2013) conducted a study on the general impact of employer branding on motivation and retention of employees. Putting these findings in the scope of work of an internal communications professional, there are two dimensions in the construction of employer branding (through internal communications), including transparency and leadership (clear communication of essential and beneficial information to employees and their service delivery, and united commitment to perform, maintain and develop the values that the organisational brand comprises of, as well as construct a distinctive organisational identity), and organisation fit (how the support and personnel community of an organisation is suitable for the needs of employees, preferably more than other organisations) (Jain, 2013). Still in the context of internal communication professional's job description and its exchange with employees, Sullivan (2004) indicated that, in order to initiate and capture these employer branding elements, organisations can (1) facilitate a culture of sharing and continuous improvement, (2) motivate proactive word-of-mouth from employees, (3) enhance job applicants' awareness of the organisation's best practices, and (4) utilize branding assessment metrics.

(1) implies that the organisation should encourage, closely monitor and evaluate, and reward the development and sharing of better professional and operational practices within it, while simultaneously assisting these activities with processes that enable rapid knowledge and information sharing between organisational units (Sullivan, 2004). Such practice can strengthen transparency and leadership in construction of employer branding through internal communication, as specified in the framework of Jain (2013). (2) is quite self-explanatory, but Sullivan (2004) added that employees should be sparked to voluntarily talk about the organisation's good management, business practices and personal life impacts to other people, including those they do not know. Moreover, considering the impact of employees' accounts being much more significant than those of the organisation, and in enhancing organisational pride and personnel retention, employees should be inspired to spread their words to not just people outside the organisation, but also those inside it (Sullivan, 2004). This shall also be strengthened by potential internal rapid sharing processes as discussed in (1). Strategically, (3) can be delivered by communicating about practices in common organisational communication platforms including trade show booths, recruiting materials, annual reports and especially the organisation's website, which is most consumed by candidates when getting to know about the organisation. In execution, the responsible practitioner has to identify candidates that are likely to apply to work for the organisation, and craft materials about organisational practices in accordance to their appeal (Sullivan, 2004).

Regarding (4), despite a scarcity of studies on internal branding monitoring and evaluation, this idea could still be effectively examined using theories in brand equity due to their conceptual similarities. Brand equity is constructed being consensually understood as enhancing values to the product contributed by the brand (Christodoulides, 2015; Farquhar, 1989). As employer branding is meant to recruit and engage employees, the product in its case will be the working experience at the organisation, and the consumers will be employees. Through analysis of existing theories and construction of consumer-based brand equity measurement, Porto (2018) specified six metrics of brand equity, namely, in order of importance, perceived quality, awareness, loyalty, exclusiveness, willingness to pay a price premium, and association. Perceived quality is how consumers comprehend the overall

excellence and superior performance of a brand (in relation to its intended function and product category) compared to others (Netemeyer, Krishnan, Pullig, Wang, Yagci, Dean, Ricks & Wirth, 2004). Accordingly, in employer branding through internal communication, this can be understood as how employees recognise the working experience at the organisation is more excellent and efficient, in relation to the role of the job in fulfilling their purposes in life, than other organisations, in a similar position. In relations to the dimensions of Jain (2013), this can also be seen as a more comparative performance of organisation fit. In the domain of internal employer branding, awareness and exclusiveness will not be applicable. Employees in the organisation will definitely be fully aware of it, and exclusiveness is related to products with limited supply and extensively different features across brands, not to mention it tends to be designated to evaluate luxury brands (Oliveira-Castro, Foxall, James, Pohl, Dias & Chang, 2008; Wilke & Zaichkowsky, 1999; Hudders, Pandelaere, & Vyncke, 2013; Porto, 2018). The dissertation focuses on the strategic communication industries, which implies that the working experience (in the same position) are not vastly different across relevant organisations nor luxuriously rare.

Willingness to pay a price premium will also not be applicable, because employees do not have to pay to get the working experience at the organisation, if not saying the vice versa. It is defined by Netemeyer et al. (2004) as how much money a consumer is inclined to pay to obtain its preferred brand over other brands, considering the same package size/quantity. This metrics also reflects how much consumers like to stay engaged with a particular brand, and is similar to loyalty, which is whether consumers continue to buy products from a brand, how frequently they do so and what is the volume they buy each time (Ehrenburg, Uncles & Goodhardt, 2004; Porto, 2018). However, loyalty also cannot be applied to internal employer branding, because commitment to the organisation for a significant amount of time in professional work is fundamentally compulsory. Simultaneously, as employees are paid for their working experience at the organisation, in the domain of this study, these metrics can be combined and adapted as engagement with a salary premium, the extent to which the employee is willing to stay at its current organisation rather than working in the same position in others if they are offered a higher salary.

Brand association is the link between the brand and other information in the memory of consumers, which generates the meaning of the brand in them (Keller, 1993). In employer branding, brand association is established through the integration of employer brand message and employees' personal characteristics (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017). Association can take the form of attributes and benefits (Keller, 1993). Attributes are descriptive and they indicate elements related to the performance, purchase and consumption of the product/service. Those related to its performance are product-related attributes, which are factors fundamental for the product/service to function as understood by consumers. For an intangible subject like working experience, such attributes would be the requirements of the job. Non-product-related attributes are those related to the purchase and consumption of the product/service, understood in four main types – price information, packaging/product appearance, user imagery, and usage imagery (Keller, 1993). Again, as working experience is intangible, not to mention its "consumers" – the employees – are paid for it, and the research is specifically about the strategic communication industries, meaning that the way the working experience is consumed is already determined, only user imagery (types of people that are perceived to use the product/service) (Keller, 1993) shall be taken into account in the research. Particularly, it will be understood as types of people that would work for the organisation. Benefits are personal values that consumers expect the product/service to bring them, and they can be functional, experiential and symbolic (Keller, 1993; Park, Jaworski & McInnis, 1986). This implies that identified beneficial brand associations in the employer branding in the study can serve as explanations or performances of organisation fit as discussed by Jain (2013). Functional benefits are essential operational advantages offered by the product/service (Keller, 1993). They are developed out of basic physiological and safety motivations (Maslow, 1970) and aim to remove and avoid problems (Fennell, 1978; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Experiential benefits are added feelings that come with consumption of the product/service. For intangible subjects, these benefits can be variety or cognitive stimulation. Both functional and experiential benefits usually come from product-related attributes (Keller, 1993). In contrast, symbolic benefits are offered by non-product-related attributes, and elements that enhance social approval, personal expression and externally generated self-esteem of consumers. In other words, such values are perceived by consumers when the implications of the brand

enrich their self-conception. This association is also especially prominent in products/services that are socially visible and facilitate identification (Keller, 1993; Solomon, 1983), suggesting that it can be a common notion in the study, as organisational working experiences have clear job descriptions and titles.

International employees' interpretation of internal communications

Fiske (1991) noted that culture is the primary determinant of how people would react to social exchanges. Through social cognitive processes, individuals with different cultural backgrounds interpret the same organisational messages about their relationship with the organisation in systematically, culturally different ways (Thomas, Au & Ravlin, 2003). As international professionals hold different cultural backgrounds from where they are working, it is likely that, even when communication is carried out in a technically precise manner by internal communications practitioners, there will be variations in the way these professionals process and interact with these communications.

In such multicultural contexts, diversion in internal communication possibly reflect the organisation's shortage in understanding of its employees' personal needs and expectations of it. Employees' perception of benefits they will get from the organisation in exchange of their contributions, for instance, framework for performance recognition, job security, training, payment, allowance & bonus, and career development, are termed psychological contracts (Argyris, 1960; Schein, 1965; Rousseau, 1989). Psychological contracts can be transactional or relational. Transactional contract has specific, monetary conditions that fulfil short-term demands and may have legal/rational legitimacy (Thomas et al., 2003; Brown, 1997; Suchman, 1995). In contrast, relational contract has general, socio-emotional conditions that support long-term needs and affect employees both personally and professionally. It takes effect based on moral responsibility (McLean Parks & Schmedemann, 1994; Thomas et al., 2003). Psychological contracts are formed based on brand associations generated through employer branding initiative. Particularly, employer branding is implemented through communication channels. Employees would perceive organisational information from these channels, as well as their live interaction with the organisational environment in accordance to their individual beliefs. As these perceptions are constructed in relation to the employer brand message, brand

associations are formed. They lead to development of elemental beliefs about the characteristics of the job and the organisation, which are the foundation for psychological contracts (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017; Foldy, 2006; Burke, Martin & Cooper, 2011; Edwards, 2010).

Thomas et al. (2003) proposed that different individual cultural profiles can alter how psychological contracts are formed and characterised as transactional or relational. Particularly, based on existing cognitive structures, through cognitive processes including selective attention & encoding, storage and retrieval biases, individuals with individualist cultural values are likely to make sense of organisational messages as transactional contracts, while those with collectivist cultural values tend to interpret these messages as relational contracts. The respective types of psychological contract reflect individualists' perception of values conveyed by the organisation as fulfilling their want to develop themselves independently, and collectivists' perception as satisfying their needs to grow, fit and contribute in a group. Through selective attention specifically, collectivists take into account the message's context and its other implicit communication more often than individualists.

However, Thomas et al. (2003) conducted the analysis based on the assumption that employees will perceive what they need from organisation messages one way or another. In other words, their cultural profiles will automatically moderate organisational messages to align with their (culturally shaped) personal workplace well-being needs, and different cultural backgrounds are just different ways leading to the same outcome. It is also possible that employees understand these messages correctly in a culturally relevant way to them, but they are not what these employees need. Despite they discussed about employees' reception of psychological contract violation, that only happens when there is already a mutually agreed psychological contract, thus the aforementioned situations have not been properly taken into account. Similar to how (advanced) foreign language speakers can still not understand some elements of the linguistic culture of that language, there could be elements in the cultures of the employees that the internal communications/HR specialists do not know, because they did not grow up with and get naturally socialised into those elements. Yet, this implication is understandable, as the work of Thomas et al. (2003) is an analysis of theories, thus has no empirical evidence. Therefore, this body of theory will provide a framework for examining in

what sense and how young international employees' sense of satisfaction at work (unexpectedly) variates/extends from what internal communications/HR specialists expect, or in other words, have been co-creating or unable to recognise and capture.

On the contrary, in cases in which organisational communications for workplace well-being come through to international employees, the communication practice has definitely shown understanding and consideration of their specific cultural characteristics. Later in his study of cross-cultural communication and management, Thomas, together with Stahl, Ravlin, Poelmans, Pekerti, Maznevski, Lazarova, Elron, Ekelun, Cerdin, Brislin, Aycan & Au (2008) conceptualised this notion as cultural intelligence, a system of social and emotional knowledge and skills, connected and coordinated by cultural metacognition, that gives people the ability to adapt to, select and shape the cultural dynamics in their environment. Based on this definition, behaviours that generate effective intercultural interaction can be considered as good indicators of cultural intelligence (Thomas et al., 2008). Considering this factor in the focus of this study, workplace well-being of international employees, scholars in expatriate management such as Aycan (1997) indicated two factors: good personal adjustment and efficient delivery of professional objectives in a multicultural setting. While the latter is quite self-explanatory and varies across individuals and contexts, good personal adjustment implies professionals' ability to interact with culturally different individuals or situations just as comfortably as they would with those from the same culture to them. Yet, this theoretical perspective puts too much emphasis on employees' responsibility to integrate to an international environment, despite intercultural communications have a two-way dynamic. It can be argued that Aycan (1997) actually mentioned that fruitful intercultural working experience also calls for support and assistance from the organisation before and during the working term, and Cushner & Brislin (1996) also manifested this approach, as well as added that the whole working process should take place with a tolerant attitude from current employees. However, both of these works still centred around the notion that there is a static, pre-existing culture in the company, which probably largely overlaps with the contemporary national culture of the host country (Aycan, 1997; Cushner & Brislin, 1996), and foreign employees has to be shaped into that, or in other words, culture assimilation. New Graduate Visa policy leads to increased internationalisation of the highly skilled workforce in the UK,

especially at entry level, meaning that the aforementioned overlap is gradually diminishing (a company with an international personnel in the UK does not necessary have a British working culture). Together with increasing demands from the society to implement DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), more than supporting and assisting, organisations also need to adjust their culture to accommodate cultural characteristics of new foreign employees and add them to it. Therefore, along with examining the performance of cultural intelligence indications in international employees, the research will address this gap in theory by analysing how internal communications of companies has engaged and nurtured young international employees in ways that it would not have without them. Moreover, this part of the theoretical framework is also useful to analyse unsuccessful intercultural organisational communications as well as successful cases, as it can help identifying what elements of cultural intelligence should have been there from the account of employees.

(Re)production of workplace well-being with internal communications

Cornelissen (2020) provided an overview of the objectives and flow of information of internal communications in corporate communications. Particularly, internal communications have to assist employees in their tasks and work objectives delivery with relevant and specific information (sense of practical support), to construct a strong community in the organisation (sense of community), and stimulate strong organisational identification (Cornelissen, 2020).

Organisational identification is "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organisation, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organisation(s) of which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashford, 1992, p.104). It depends on how much the employees can associate their personal identities and values with those of the organisation (Cornelissen, 2020), as well as the perceived prestige of the organisation to the external public (Smidts, Pruyn & van Riel, 2001), which might be beyond the scope of influence of internal communication practitioners. Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong & Joustra (2006) exerted this through their research, indicating that organisational identification is primarily shaped by perceived external prestige of the organisation, meaning that it cannot be directly generated through internal communication. However, they expanded this notion, elaborating that there are two levels of organisational identification: identification with the whole organisation, and at a

smaller scale, identification with one's daily work group. Internal communication, or particularly the communication climate it generates, has the most significant influence on the latter (Bartels et al., 2006). This could be expected in big organisations, where the scope of work is much more specialised. Communication climate, as defined by Dennis (1974), is "a subjective experienced quality of the internal environment of an organisation: the concept embraces a general cluster of inferred predispositions, identifiable through reports of members perceptions' of messages and message-related events occurring in the organisation" (p. 29), and consists of eight dimensions: supportiveness, openness & candour, participative decision making, trust, confidence & credibility, high performance goals, information adequacy, semantic information difference, and communication satisfaction. Effective achievement of these dimensions requires input from both internal communicators and employees. This, also considering the dimensions' effects, demands another factor to be analysed – the balance between downward and upward communication. It will be especially interesting to see how upward communication might be present in different areas of internal communication through this research, as it typically features in management communication (Cornelissen, 2020), which is outside the scope of internal communication practice.

Both organisational identity and sense of practical support are significantly shaped by adequate and reliable communication. According to Bartels, Peters, de Jong, Pruyn & van der Molen (2010), internal communication is adequate when information about expectations for employees and recognition of their contributions at work appears useful and sufficient. Reliable internal communication is when information from managers is perceived as trustworthy and instrumental to task completion (Bartels et al., 2010).

Cornelissen (2020) proposed that the generation of sense of practical support and sense of community through internal communications are bound together. Organisations have been using collaborative, interactive and communal digital media platforms, such as open online databases, online message boards and blogs, or file- and video-sharing sites, to utilize employees' professional creativity and performance (Cornelissen, 2020). Respectively, case studies of Weeks & Barsoux (2010) and Kanter & Bird (2009) on IBM showed that these digital platforms fostered the formation of communities of practice, a social space where

professionals exchange knowledge, solve problems and create new values together. In that process, Lave & Wenger (1991) pointed out that these communities of practice have flexible boundaries, with their people bond together informally through the experience of doing things together, from just having lunch in the same table to tackling complex business problems. This means that, based on the framework of Monge & Contractor (2003), communities of practice are based on an overlap of innovation networks, the connection formed towards constructing and distributing new ideas, and maintenance networks, the social relationships at work. In the context of big organisations, where work is highly specialised, making it necessary to collaborate to deliver work objectives, the mix might also include production networks, the connection created to complete work tasks (Monge & Contractor, 2003). Yet, this theoretical perspective tends to attribute the formation of employees' professional support through networks and communities from internal communication exclusively to communication technologies. Similar to theories about cultural intelligence, it has not taken significant consideration of strategies from internal communication practitioners in managing these technologies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Overall, the literature review shows that both employer branding and outcome of internal communications are conceptualised as the idea of the working experience at an organisation over time perceived through respective organisational communications. Therefore, the differences between the communicative construction and lived experiences of workplace well-being of junior foreign professionals in London-based strategic communications companies, as demanded by the research question, can be understood through how internal communications/HR practitioners and junior international employees perceive elements of employer branding and internal communication outcomes differently, which could be explained by the various ways internal communication activities were practiced and came through.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Strategy

Interviews were used to investigate and answer the research question, considering how its distinctive functions and purposes, as analysed by Warren (2002), align with the objectives of the research. The research aims to understand how these perceptions vary between these types of people, possibly through the influence of their professional and cultural experiences and backgrounds, and based on that, improve current employee communication. Respectively, interviews examine the varieties in human experience. Particularly, comparing to other ethnographic fieldwork methods, data generated through interviews can assist formulating general patterns or themes among different types of respondents. These data can derive concepts in relation to the meaning of people's experiences and life worlds (Warren, 2002). Importantly, international workers are the minority in strategic communications industries, and interviews can effectively feature and amplify the perspectives of underrepresented segments of a population. Warren (2002) indicated that sampling in interviews is specifically guided by disciplinary theories, does not have strict requirements regarding (minimum) number of participants, and involves direct contact with participants or through personal referrals. This grants the researcher complete control in making sure that all individuals included are appropriate, thereby ensuring that the collected accounts truly represent the intended social group. In other words, sampling in interviews guarantees more optimal validity for this research, comparing to other research methods such as survey, content analysis or to some extent, experiment, which has larger sampling scale, and thus are likely to reflect more of the perspective of the majority group. On the other hand, arguments by Berger (1998) pointed out considerable uncertainty regarding the quality of the data obtained through interviews. Firstly, the researcher cannot predict what kind of data it will obtain, and cannot predefine the notion it is looking for until the data collection process has commenced (Berger, 1998). While conducting interviews, the researcher dealt with this by being highly flexible, making iterative decisions quickly, and concentrating on participants' accounts in order to capture and probe on most important narratives that are relevant to the research topic. Second, Berger (1998) frequently observed that individuals may lack

awareness of the underlying reasons behind their actions, leading to their inability to provide meaningful responses. In the context of this research, this drawback can have an adverse impact on the efficiency of data collection, particularly the quantity of valuable insights obtained relative to the time and effort invested. Respectively, the researcher allocated a significant amount of time during the interview to establish rapport, provide suggestions, offer examples, and clarify concepts in order to encourage interviewees to reflect on the underlying concepts behind their thoughts and behaviours that they may have previously overlooked or not fully explored. Furthermore, this disadvantage was eased with the development of an extensive theoretical framework. This allows the objectives of interpreting participants' perception to be carried more by the data analysis, while the interviews can take place more smoothly by asking participants more simple, mentally digestible questions (e.g. what they did, what they experienced regarding certain phenomena at work).

Berger (1998) anticipated data from interviews to be a large, extensive volume of (textual) information, which, in the case of this research, needs to be processed in a short amount of time. In respect to this, thematic coding analysis offers a simple structure for summarising and organising substantial volumes of texts in great details. This method characterised prominent (recurring) notions in texts into brief, exhaustive themes, and integrated them into a conceptual system driven by the research question, sometimes as well as the theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Flick (2018) added that attaching patterns to one structure is especially coherent and useful for comparing groups regarding an issue. This further specifies that thematic coding analysis is compatible to this research, directly at what its question demands – how the perception of internal communications/HR specialists and young international professionals on similar topics regarding workplace experience are different from each other. Thematic coding analysis is also prominent for its high iteration – it enables the merging, splitting, addition, removal and refinement of themes throughout the research process. This iterative nature facilitates more frequent emergence of new insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, conducting data collection and analysis in parallel becomes possible with thematic coding analysis, leading to enhanced research efficiency. This successive research approach, combined with how this analysis is attached to one structure, allows new, unexpected notions - which could be key to uncovering the differences in

perception of internal communications/HR specialists and young international professionals - to be more clearly and abundantly identified. Yet, Braun & Clarke (2006) also flagged the most significant conceptual drawback of thematic coding analysis: it enables a broad range of patterns and notions to emerge from the data due to its flexible structure, which can make it difficult for the researcher to decide what features of the data is truly important and worth focusing on. In this dissertation, the researcher mitigated such confusing prospect by only developing the interview guide after having the theoretical framework fully formulated and consulted with more experienced scholars.

Sampling

As the research question might have suggested, the sample consisted of two sets of participants, and was recruited through purposive sampling. The first set of participants was international professionals employed in strategic communication companies based in London, such as those working in media, public relations, advertising, (digital) marketing, corporate communication agencies, and consultancies. More specifically, the focus will be on individuals with less than three years of experience. This attention on more junior level employees is due to the challenge of working extra hard towards establishing a solid foundation for their long-term careers that they tend to face at this phase of their professional lives. Moreover, as newcomers to a different country and potentially the working world, they must (simultaneously) adapt to the transition from the environments of their home countries and their educational institutions. These factors suggest a heightened need and awareness of professional well-being within this particular group, offering the potential for rich and in-depth insights into their perceptions of it through internal communications during interviews. Regarding the second set of participants, the research targeted internal communications/HR specialists working in the same type of companies as the employees in the first set. These specialists possibly have experienced similar internal communications materials and activities as the aforementioned employees, but from the production side. Therefore, inclusion of such a group will serve as a valuable reference for comparing and identifying any differences as outlined by the research question in a clear and logical manner.

The purposive sampling procedure was supported with snowball sampling. Particularly, after initial participants in accordance to the aforementioned criteria were recruited, these participants would refer the researcher to other participants through their networks (Bernard, 2013; Arksey & Knight, 1999; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Weiss, 1994), considering how professionals tend to be acquainted to other professionals in similar fields for career development. Both of these sampling techniques prove to be highly efficient when dealing with hard-to-reach populations, especially those that are relatively small in size and geographically dispersed (Bernard, 2013). This holds true for the specific population under study, namely non-British, junior professionals working in strategic communications companies in London. It is worth noting that only 11% of all PR practitioners in the UK are not white British, not to mention this group includes non-white British, senior practitioners, and/or individuals located outside of London (CIPR, 2022). Additionally, London holds vast population and geographic expanse. In order to avoid unwanted consequences for their jobs, junior international professionals were not required to refer internal communications/HR specialists from their companies and vice versa. If junior international employees and internal communications/HR specialists in the research came from the same company, it would be merely coincident.

Design of research tools

The interviews were conducted online, via Zoom, and in English. They were recorded and later transcribed for analysis in Atlas.ti. Considering their different perspectives of the workplace experience, different theoretical implications, and possibly different cultural and professional backgrounds, there were two separate interview guides for junior international employees and internal communications/HR specialists. Regarding the thematic analysis, existing methodological literatures specified that such analysis would either be inductive or theoretical. In the former, themes will be freely identified and reflected from the data without requirement or relation towards any theoretical/analytic interests, framework and preconceptions from the researcher and existing studies in the field. Vice versa, in theoretical thematic analysis, the analysis will be initiated with certain theoretical/analytic interests, framework and preconceptions formulated by the researcher and current disciplinary

literatures, and it will look for parts of the data that reflect these features. Inductive thematic analysis tends to be more descriptive, while theoretical thematic analysis is believed to be more analytical (Patton, 1990; Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, thematic analysis in this research combined both of these approaches. While a specific research question and a theoretical framework had been established at the beginning, the interview guides proactively included not only topics that were formulated based on these concepts, but also compulsory probing questions encouraging participants to discuss experiences at work that are specific to them (e.g. How has the company adapted to your cultural background in its internal communications, which we haven't discussed in this interview?; How do you think the needs of international employees at work can be different comparing to British employees?). Moreover, the list of codes and themes for analysis also allowed creation of new codes/themes to accommodate responses to these probing questions and any parts of participants' accounts that were not fully relevant to the pre-determined theoretical framework. Implementing this approach combination would ensure the analysis remain focused and in-depth, while also critically integrate relevant and prominent emerging notions. This is essential considering how one's workplace experience can be shaped by various (irrelevant) personal factors, and the fact that the researcher has never worked in a strategic communications company in London, as well as certain theories in the theoretical framework, such as the work of Thomas et al. (2003), have not been empirically elaborated – all of which could hinder the optimal theoretical and practical applicability and exhaustiveness of the analysis.

The analysis was undertaken following the procedure proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). However, there was one particular change: after the data was transcribed and familiarised by the researcher, themes were named and defined based on the theoretical framework. Afterwards, initial codes were generated based on their overall content, and put into relevant themes, or new themes were established, if needed. The next step was reviewing and refining the themes, in which the specifics of the themes were revised, adjusted, and possibly merged, split or removed in relation to their coherence with the codes, the data set and other themes as a thematic "map", or in other words, the storyline of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following the deliberation of Mayring (2000) on methods that analyse content qualitatively, this was done after 10-50% of the data had been processed. Lastly, a report was constructed

in an academic style. In that process, codes were selected based on their prominence and themes were discussed not just in relation to each other and the research question, but also to the aforementioned literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Detailed interview guides and list of themes and codes can be seen in the Appendix.

Ethics and Reflexivity

This research design and sampling strategy pose two ethical issues on participants. Firstly, in case participating junior international employees and internal communications/HR specialists happened to come from the same company, things they said could have repercussions for each other's jobs. To mitigate these risks, all participations were kept confidential from each other. If the opinions of participants' colleagues were brought up in the interview, only their content would be discussed and the fact that it was said by their colleagues, or even by anyone, would not be mentioned at all. Secondly, considering that the research topic revolves around workplace experiences, it is possible that participants may bring up distressing or sensitive accounts, rendering them or their colleagues emotionally vulnerable. Arksey & Knight (1999) highlighted that research participants jointly possess rights regarding the materials generated during and after the study, including the exact wording of their interview statements. Moreover, participants often cannot anticipate the extent of personal information they may disclose in advance (Arksey & Knight, 1999). To address these rights and concerns, the consent form will explicitly extend the freedom to opt out and decline certain questions. Participants will have the right to terminate the interview at any point if desired. Additionally, they will also have the option to request the removal of their answers pertaining to painful or sensitive topics from the record or transcript at a later stage.

Regarding reflexivity, the positioning of the researcher in this project is a 23-year-old international student, who would have been a junior professional if working, thus usually socializes with other junior international professionals. Consequently, he might have been unconsciously biased towards the views of the employees in constructing the interview guide, and data interpretation and analysis, due to affinity and better understanding of the demographic group. However, the researcher has never worked in a strategic communications company in London, which allowed the perception of workplace experience

in the research to be freely shaped by participants. In other words, data collection was minimally influenced by the positioning of the researcher.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In respect to the theoretical framework statement, important quotations, codes and themes that are featured in this Result and Interpretation section were determined on the basis of whether they feature both the accounts of internal communications/HR specialists and junior foreign professionals, express different notions of the same theme, and are broadly relevant to each other.

Employee communications emphasise excellence, but employees also regard suitability

Internal communications/HR specialists put a lot of effort in presenting how the companies are a great and legitimate place to work, but they do not explicitly elaborate how those factors would especially benefit their potentially suitable job applicants and later employees, despite having a clear idea of types of people that would fit in and thrive in those environments. Particularly, in relation to the dimensions of employer branding and approaches to initiating them as implied by Jain (2013) and Sullivan (2004), accounts of internal communications/HR specialist express transparency and leadership, culture of sharing and continuous improvement, and enhancement of the organisation's best practices, but not organisation fit.

> I think it [monthly company meeting] was just a great way to get people together to make sure that the founder or the senior leadership team were being transparent with the health of the business, with the health of, sort of, client relationships, and I think it just gives that sense of, like, to employees, that "Oh, OK" … I think traditionally lots can be kept from employees, and they're sort of kept in the dark about different clients and different, like, the income of the business and whatnot. So I think it was just a way to sort of shine a light on that… (Participant 5, internal communications practitioner, Company WP)

For instance, organising company-wide events for company leaders to report the performance of the company and its relationship with the clients provides employees essential and beneficial information to employees and their service delivery in a clear manner. This is because when working in a strategic communications agency, the income of employees comes from the revenue of the company, which is generated from activities it does in fulfilment of the requests from clients. The requests of clients only arise when they are positive about the working relationship with the agency. Consequently, establishing good service provision and relationship with clients would give employees monetary bonus based on performance and credential for their profiles in the profession. This information also contributes to figuring out when and how employees can improve how they can deliver their services to clients. Moreover, the fact that this information is presented to employees from all functions of the company implies that they would have been communicated so that these employees can comprehend regardless of their expertise. As clear communication of essential and beneficial information to employees and their service delivery is identified in the analysis of Jain (2013) as one of the most significant indication of transparency and leadership in employer branding, internal communications/HR specialists in strategic communications companies in London are showing this dimension in their work. Employees in this research mentioned these notions after being exposed to similar activities, which confirms the specification of Jain (2013).

> …it [periodical emails about updates in the company's operation] actually helps to build or strengthen the image of an established company because I can see that they are trying to communicate those things to their employees, like, letting people know what's going on, or if there's going to be, like, a delay issue because of this and that. So I think that's good regarding communication, **transparency**… (Participant 4, international employee, Company W)

However, the organisation fit of the employer brand was only performed through employees' independent reflection of the company's excellence in relation to themselves.

> I think just the fact that it's relatable so that I could compare it to what I want in terms of what I want to do in my career. And in terms of culture, people, just whether or not these people are the type people would like to work with. And technically, it's also the sort of information that I was looking for, so now I'm just glad that I could find it… (Participant 6, international employee, Company H)

Furthermore, these employees put roughly as much attention to this fit as the organisation's excellence.

> And from the job itself, I got the impression I was going to get a lot of training as well. So the impression was that I was going to learn a lot about the industry while I'm in this position.
>
> People told me that, again, it is quite a demanding, but you would enjoy certain reputation from working there because they were quite well-known within the industry. (Participant 7, international employee, Company G)

For example, when this employee was asked about her expectations about working at Company G before she started her job, she provided similarly thick descriptions of her impression of the company's reputation and of how it can provide her specific training she needs for her career development. Furthermore, both the employees and internal communications/HR specialists expressed preference and emphasis towards stimulating such employee-led awareness in communicating the perception of working experience at the organisations.

> [I expect that I would get] to meet like-minded people who are obviously supportive, and fun to work with…Within the company, **we have a lot of, like, societies, like, groups, support groups**, and we don't really have any Asian related support group…And that I think is a miss, but at the same time, **I also feel like that's something maybe people from my community should have suggested to the company.** (Participant 6, international employee, Company H)
>
> It's not my thing only, but **we are relaunching the employee-led groups or business groups or networks…So you know, we are now launching them and that will give people the chance to network, to connect also across departments** (Participant 2, internal communications practitioner, Company F)

This challenges the approach of Sullivan (2004), which asserts that an extensive and impactful employer branding has to be constructed through combining encouraging contribution of employees (e.g. facilitate a culture of sharing and continuous improvement, motivate word-of-mouth from employees) and proactively adapting the presence of the organisation's good practices to (prospective) employees' awareness and preference from the organisation. It can

be argued that employees' perceived fit with the organisation is personal, thus organisations cannot proactively clarify that. Yet, all participating internal communications/HR specialists demonstrated clear ideas of types of people that would fit their companies, and of what they could bring to those types of people.

> They [People that would work at Company F] are all very open-minded, nice to work with [other] people…And ultimately, people that want to make a difference and really help the company grow…
>
> I would say [working at Company F brings to employees], again, international exposure because you are part of a global company… And I think a sense of pride because you see lots of what we do, watched by millions and millions of people across the world… (Participant 2, internal communications practitioner, Company F)

Under the framework of Keller (1993) in the context of employer branding, internal communications/HR specialists in this study has included user imagery, a non-product-related brand attribute in their (prospective) employee communication strategies. Associating employer brand to (prospective) employees involves incorporating (desired) employees' personal characteristics to employer brand message (Ruchika & Prasad, 2017). Thus, these notions show that internal communications/HR specialists had the insights needed to also fit the communication of the working experience actively at their companies to their desired employees. This suggests that internal communications/HR specialists intentionally established an engaging concept of organisational values and environment through negotiating and co-creating with (international) employees.

Employee communications of the working experience value interaction, but employees value perception from it

Values of branding assessment metrics as suggested by the adaptation of brand equity measuring theories by Porto (2018) and Netemeyer et al. (2004) in employer branding and employee communications were only expressed by employees. For example, when being asked about her expectations about the job before she started working through employer branding material, Participant 1 (international employee, Company WP) discussed her

motivations for applying and taking the job offer from the company based on what she read on its website:

> I expected them…to have… I would say is like **a spirit of a team**, which means that everyone would help each other out. And **people who really care about not just the work, but also other people in the agency.**
>
> Since it was my first job, I just want it to be **the place where I would learn a lot about PR, and also about the wider industry.**

Later in the interview, she was asked to review a popular internal communication activity at her company, a monthly company award, where everyone at the company would talk about at the company's achievements in relation to their personal achievements during the month as well as organisational plan for the following month, and take part in bonding activities:

> The company is more like **a team of family rather than just a business** through this activity.
>
> I think it kind of… **exceeded my expectations based on the description on the website.** Because I feel like when I am actually in there, we do **talk a lot more about the work** and also **learn more about people and learn more about what people are actually doing** throughout the months and it's different from the description on the website. It's because **it's on the website, it's less detailed, and we usually go more into details during these awards. So yes, it is actually better, in my opinion.** (Participant 1, international employee, Company WP)

The bold parts in this case showed that the job at Company WP was supposed to fulfil her career purpose of forming close, meaningful, professionally passionate work relationships and gaining knowledge about PR and the advertising and communications industries; and it delivered those purposes, as she met colleagues who actively referred to their jobs and enable her to know more about her working fields through their sharing, as well as about whom she even got to know personally, similar to family members. Notably, this is better than what is implied on the company's website, which is a reasonable point of reference as Company WP is her first company thus she does not know the context at other companies in the industry. Interpreted in this research based on the framework of brand equity metrics by Porto (2018)

and Netemeyer et al. (2004), these notions indicate perceived quality of Participant 1 in assessing her experience at work.

What deviated from the aforementioned framework is the factors that internal communications/HR specialists perceive from the working experience at companies. The employer brand assessment metrics reflected from the theories of Porto (2018) and Netemeyer et al. (2004) – perceived quality and engagement with a salary premium – focus on evaluating how employees feel about their engagement with the working experience generated from employee communication activities. However, internal communications/HR specialists in this study mostly concentrates on monitoring engagement with employee communication activities itself.

> If it's an event, for instance, I would definitely look at participation rates and then I send out a feedback survey afterwards so I can check if you know what people think about it, how do they write [about] the content? How do they write about the speakers and if they have any suggestions? If it's…let's say it's an e-mail or it's a piece of content on the Internet, I will look at opening rates, views, clicks and things like that, so very tangible things. (Participant 2, internal communications practitioner, Company F)

Such different focuses in evaluation also leads to lack of understanding of perception of employer brand values in the (international) employee experience for internal communications/HR specialists.

> Obviously, I cannot gouge for now if the perception changed, right? So if they really feel that we are creative, international and cool and all of that stuff, that I cannot measure for now. (Participant 2, internal communications practitioner, Company F)

> I don't think there's ever been like a metric put on these meetings. I guess the success is that we keep doing them and we've done them ever since I joined a year and a half ago and, you know, people enjoy them…There's no sort of definitive KPI that we've sort of set against them. It's just a thing that we do because we enjoy doing it and it seems to work for everyone as well. (Participant 5, internal communications practitioner, Company WP)

Simultaneously, employees expressed lack of representative cultural awareness in employee communications practice, as their cultural backgrounds are not as extensively recognised as other cultural backgrounds, even comparing to minority ones.

> I think these events when they celebrate certain communities, I would say it would be better if they celebrate all communities rather than just certain communities. Because if they were celebrating Black History Month, then it would be good if they also celebrate a East-Southeast Asian Heritage Month, which is the background I'm from. But they don't do that, so I would prefer if they could give equal spotlight to everyone… (Participant 7, international employee, Company G)

One participant, who is one of the few Vietnamese employees in her company, pointed out that this is due to internal communications/HR specialists' lack of awareness of specific cultural characteristics among employees: "I think it also comes down to the population of the employee's ethnicity, that helps them with those insights and with those activities…They should get more Asian people on the board and do those activities." (Participant 4, international employee, Company W). Furthermore, existing work related to cultural intelligence of Aycan (1997) and Cushner & Brislin (1996) revealed a limitation in the practice of international employee engagement, that there is a fixed, pre-existing culture in the company, possibly based on the cultural demographic of the host country, and foreign employees will be assimilated into it. All these factors indicate that internal communications/HR specialists' lack awareness of various specific cultural characteristics in the organisation in their approaches to practice has led to the shortage of specific culturally suitable employee communication activities for international employees. Consequently, the specialists do not have representative and sufficient practical reference to understand the perception of workplace experience from internal communications among an international personnel, therefore have to focus on interpreting mere internal communications engagement, which they know more about and are less likely to vary by cultural factors. This results in different valuation of workplace well-being between its communicative construction and lived experience, along with the following lack of consideration of international employees' feelings and perception about their jobs and companies through employee communication initiatives among internal communications/HR practitioners.

More varied connection perceived in the lived experience of workplace well-being

Reflecting the workplace experience through the communities of practice theory by Monge & Contractor (2003), international employees expressed to have developed all of innovation networks, maintenance networks, and production networks.

> **Through the company's internal communications, hopefully the production [networks]**, the last one, right? **And the innovation one [innovation networks]. And obviously the second one, just friends at work [maintenance networks]**, tend to be people within my team, so don't really get into the communication stuff to activate that, but rather internal communications activities…**I would order it as production, innovation and then maintenance.** (Participant 6, international employee, Company H)

On the communicative construction side of that experience, internal communications/HR specialists only presumed maintenance networks and production networks.

> So probably **I can create the second type of connection more [maintenance network]**. Because if with my work I create, let's say, you know, interactions or events or moments throughout the year that people can connect more…**Innovation, interesting. No, innovation with my job, I don't think so. It's more like high level, I guess**…**The third one [maintenance networks] [is] to do their job. Maybe I can also influence that slightly** if through internal communications I help them get clarity on, you know, the company's vision, the company's mission, what they're doing and how their job, you know, can contribute to that. **So I would say type 2 and 3 [maintenance networks and production networks]** (Participant 2, internal communications practitioner, Company F)

Previous literature review on possible variations in the internal communication process from employer to employee implies that this difference between the communicative construction and lived experiences of workplace well-being in strategic communications companies in London shall be related to how psychological contracts were addressed.

According to what was identified through the previous theme and the critical discussion of theories by Thomas et al. (2003) in the Theoretical Framework section, it can be argued that

internal communications/HR specialists do not have an extensive, representative awareness of cultural characteristics in the organisation, thus there is too little mutual cultural reference between them and international employees for a relational contract to formulate. Instead, these contracts can still be formulated through (individual) brand associations. Participant 3 (international employee, Company I) elaborated on what she perceived her job and her company to be about through the information she had been exposed to:

> …the company gave her a chance to work with clients and even attend some pitches or some events, which **broadened her horizon.** So the company kind of gives her the chance to not only **mingle with other team members**, but also gives her opportunities to upscale herself through those kind of events…So those are the things that she thinks it's very good for her career progress. And the company is also open for you to not only just stick to this team but if the opportunity arises, you can change to another team or another department, like you can be paid social or programmatic or display or anything. That opportunity that you can, you know, want to explore your skill or something like that. So giving us more open doors like that would, you know, [make us] **feel more safe, like, there's like no one path for us, there are all the opportunities**, which is great.

Based on the framework of Keller (1993), the participant made an association of the working experience at Company I to experiential and functional benefits of (employer) brand. Regarding experiential brand association, she considered getting to work directly with clients, participating in big events or pitches, moving around different functions at work would, as reflected in bold parts, make her feel mind-opening about media services, belonged and professionally secured. Regarding functional benefits, the aforementioned aspects of work was believed to, as implied by underlined parts, improve her professional life by providing her practical exposure, developing her working abilities, and connecting her to other career potentials. Respectively, some of Participant 3's psychological contracts – activities for establishing the bond with other employees, peer learning programme for developing skills – came after these answers and could be elements for fulfilling what she believes about the job and the company. She would want bonding activities so that she could cooperate smoothly with her colleagues when working. She would want some learning plans so that she could expand her understanding of the field, and have the expertise needed to deliver new working

experiences given to her, to upgrade and future-proof her career profile, and to pursue other career possibilities for her. This confirms the elemental formulation of psychological contracts in relation to brand associations critically reflected through the proposals of Ruchika & Prasad (2017), Foldy (2006), Burke et al. (2011), and Edwards (2010).

In this research, participants' accounts of organisational experience reflected that only some of the psychological contracts specified by participating employees were delivered, some were not. Similar to Participant 3, below are some expectations on her jobs reflected by Participant 6 (international employees, Company H), as can be seen in the bold parts, in which those at the first paragraph are relational contracts, and those at the second paragraph are transactional contracts:

> …from those [employer branding] materials, obviously, I was hoping that they were gonna do what they say on the website, like we're gonna **provide an inclusive and very collaborative, fun working environment**… [I would get] to **meet like-minded people who are obviously supportive, and fun to work with**…it's really to **build a good relationship with my colleagues, hopefully some close friends as well.**

> [I expect to] **learn a lot, it's just generally about industry knowledge, or either just skill sets, experience** thus...So for example, to be very specific would be… **how to build a relationship with your clients…or, like, building a whole social media channel for a bank would be something.**

While she did not point out any initiatives from the company to help her expand her expertise and skillset, and generate a good relationship with clients, she highlighted how the "big night-in" at the company (in which all employees in the company will shout out to their colleagues for good things they have done, socialise with each other, have food and drinks, and present to others about what they do outside work) had fulfilled her relational contract. This also implies how internal communications/HR specialists' focus on maintenance network can be reflected from their work.

> Like, office life is also about connecting people within different teams because on a day-to-day basis I would only work with people who are part of my team and maybe a few more, but not the whole agency. So **it's a good occasion for us all to just network, talk to each other, get to**

> **know each other from outside of work, personal life** and obviously it kind of showcases the company's effort to **build a personal culture, like more human, just more tight-knit in a way because once you know someone on a personal level is different from knowing someone just on the surface so that definitely helps to build like a family.** A bit cheesy, but I think that's kind of the way they see it as well. (Participant 6, international employee, Company H)

Regarding undelivered transactional contracts, Participant 6 proactively fulfilled them herself by utilising the internal communications activity that is supposed to deliver her relational contract and generate her maintenance networks. She identified people she socialised with at the event based on their expertise, and initiated collaboration with them to learn new expertise in her working field and develop more groundbreaking and effective (digital) communications ideas to satisfy her clients. As she came to those people to develop and distribute new ideas, she additionally and unexpectedly generated innovation networks.

> …in intimate events where I get to meet people…outside of my team [but] within the agency, which I mentioned last time, and people from various different teams, from the specialist team who can help me with my day to day work and when we need a brainstorm to create a new idea for the client, for example, is when I form that innovation relationships with our colleagues.

> It's really casual. It's just all the employees gathering together? And then that helped me to know their specializations, to reach out to them when we have a new brief on the clients, that we need new ideas that happen to be their specializations. And then I just reach out to them so that we can have a brainstorm together… (Participant 6, international employee, Company H)

Such process of fulfilling psychological contracts towards different perception of sense of community in the lived experience of workplace well-being in relation to employee communication is the combination of emergence of (international) employees' agency in the operation of employee communication, and the flexible boundaries of communities of practice. The performance of (international) employees' agency is similar to what was revealed in the first theme of this section, as internal communications/HR specialists practice what they believe to fit the employees, and the employees would figure out, perceive and adapt the fit by themselves. However, the difference is that while this co-creation is intentional and expected by internal communications/HR specialists in establishing organisational identity

and values among employees, it is not expected in generating sense of community, as expressed by participating internal communications/HR specialists earlier. Furthermore, such collaboration was started out of Participant 6's own intention and not requested by her managers. She elaborated that if a collaboration is compulsory, her managers would have already assigned her to a group before the beginning of the project through the company's internal communication channels, which also reflects how internal communications/HR specialists project the formation of production networks through their (involved) internal activities. This notion also implies possibility of autonomous emergence of new forms of multidisciplinary collaboration at junior levels in large organisations, where work is often precisely specified and specialised. Therefore, it suggests new possibilities to the understanding of internal communications and its social functions in the organisation implied by Yeomans & FitzPatrick (2017) and Cornelissen (2020). Although Yeomans & FitzPatrick (2017) recognised the influence of employees in internal communications, this influence has only been considered as employees' thoughts and behaviours within the agenda specified by internal communication activities. The discussed dynamic adds that optimally effective internal communications operation involves not only mere delivering and managing information, and understanding and practically maintaining employees' respective follow-up thoughts and organisational behaviours to the information, but also recognising, monitoring and coordinating independent influence of employees on the discourse and organisational impacts of communication activities. Regarding Cornelissen (2020), it proposes another focus for more extensive understanding of construction of communities of practice through internal communications, particularly the motivation and social shaping of technology of employees, along with communication technologies and approaches of internal communication practitioners. Employees' eagerness is supported by the flexible boundaries of dynamics of communities of practice. Towards the extended perception of network under discussion, the principle of a community of practice with flexible nature and identities laid out by Lave & Wenger (1991) were reflected. Participant 6 proactively intended to initiate collaboration in professional service delivery and development with her maintenance networks from the "big night-in" at Company H. However, only when she implemented the experience of brainstorming new (digital) communication ideas together that she started to additionally

perceive innovation networks from the social community of practice generated through internal communication activities of the company, considering what the experience was about. Moreover, the flexible dynamics in communities of practice that enabled this combination expands the framework by Monge & Contractor (2003). While these authors indicated that different types of network can overlap in communities of practice, insights from the interviews implied specifically how they can be compatible and supportive to the development of each other:

> …it's just so much easier getting to talk to people from different teams and **if there is any specific project that needs collaboration, just amongst various teams within the agencies, it's also easier because I already met them outside of work.** Even though it's still in the building, it's easier to collaborate. (Participant 6, international employee, Company H).

CONCLUSION

Comparing the perceptions of workplace experience through internal communications of internal communications/HR specialists and junior international employees at strategic communications companies in London revealed three main differences between the communicative construction and lived experiences of workplace well-being at these companies. Firstly, internal communications/HR specialists showcase the companies' excellence and professional legitimacy, enticing (prospective) junior international employees, but this group also examines suitability when perceiving these factors, shaping their own fitting. Secondly, junior international employees assess their feelings within the organizational experience through interaction with internal communications, while internal communications/HR specialists concentrate on interaction with internal communications itself. Thirdly, internal communications/HR specialists create a sense of community at workplace focusing on generating maintenance and production networks, while junior international employees can autonomously and additionally formulate innovative networks through these practices.

The research's theoretical implication is evident in extending employees' strategic active role in communications, particularly towards workplace well-being, and in defining its outcomes

and the relevant conversion process. It challenged Sullivan (2004) on outreach approach and practice to formulate a relatable and engaging conception of workplace well-being, and specified workload division between internal communications/HR specialists and (international) employees in that process by demonstrating Jain's (2013) elements. It also enriches Yeomans & FitzPatrick (2017) and Cornelissen (2020) to showcase employees' capacity to perform within their positioning and revise this conception. The study deepens Monge & Contractor's (2003) framework, which clarifies contextual motivations for (international) employees' autonomous, strategic and extensive capabilities. Psychological contract formation simultaneously challenges Thomas et al. (2003) while confirming Ruchika & Prasad (2017), Foldy (2006), Burke et al. (2010), and Edwards (2010). This intriguingly questions the influence of culture on international employees' workplace well-being perceptions through internal communications. However, connections of the second difference to Aycan (1997) and Cushner & Brislin (1996) indicate culture can still inform effective internal communications to international employees. Regarding potential academic contribution of this study, incorporating employer branding into analysis adds more longitudinal understanding of internal communications and insights on how branding is performed in a (multicultural) internal context.

The findings and theoretical implications necessitate further research on the extent of cultural impact on internal communications to international employees. Comparing local and international employees' perceptions, or case studies of international companies, can identify which specific aspects of internal communications that culture contributes to. Development of evaluation criteria and method for cultural understanding and intelligence is essential, guiding internal communications/HR specialists in bridging the gap in understanding international employees' perception through internal communications.

Empirically, in relation to the literature review, characteristics in the research findings stem from approach in communication practice and partial employee disengagement. Therefore, the research implies a need for internal communications/HR specialists to understand international employees' social dynamics, (perceived) fitting, and interests at workplace more specifically and extensively, and to integrate them more closely to internal communication

activities execution. One practical solution involves adopting engagement strategies from universities experienced in diverse international personnel interactions. Additionally, since most international employees were former international students, these approaches offer practicality. Providing incentives and authority for (international) employees to decide and implement internal communication activities is another solution, capitalizing on their autonomous capabilities. This enhances the process and benefits of internal communications in the entire organization.

Methodological implications include time constraints in data collection, and sampling proportion. Participants' unpredictable work schedules led to unusually rescheduled, cancelled or shortened interviews, possibly affecting data depth. Snowball sampling might skew research sample toward having more participants with collective cultural background, due to expatriate employees' tendency to socialise with those of similar cultural backgrounds. This could have impact on diversity in the research findings.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C. (1960). *Understanding organisational behavior*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Arksey, H. & Knight, P. (1999). *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Aycan, Z. (1997). Acculturation of expatriate managers: A process model of adjustment and performance. In Z. Aycan (Ed.), *New approaches to employee management, Vol. 4. Expatriate management: Theory and research* (pp. 1-40). Elsevier Science/JAI Press.

Bartels, J., Peters, O., de Jong, M., Pruyn, A., & van der Molen, M. (2010). Horizontal and vertical communication as determinants of professional and organisational identification. *Personnel Review*, *39*(2), 210–226. https://doi.org/10.1108/00483481011017426.

Bartels, J., Pruyn, A., de Jong, M., & Joustra, I. (2006). Multiple organisational identification levels and the impact of perceived external prestige and communication climate. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, *28*(2), 173–190. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.420.

Berger, A. A. (1998). *Media research techniques*. SAGE Publications.

Bernard, H. R. (2013). *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *10*(2), 141–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/004912418101000205

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, A. D. (1997). Narcissism, identity and legitimacy. *Academy of Management Review*, *22*, 643–686.

Burke, R. J., Martin, G., & Cooper, C. L. (2011). *Corporate reputation: Managing opportunities and threats — Psychological and behavioral aspects of risk*. US: Gower Publishing.

Chartered Institute of Public Relations. (2022). *State of the Profession 2022: Public relations: A growing industry, standing still*. https://newsroom.cipr.co.uk/new-stateofpr-research-finds-a-growing-industry-stunted-by-skills-shortage/

Cheshire, J., & Uberti, O. (2016). *London: The Information Capital: 100 maps and graphics that will change how you view the city*. Penguin Books.

Christodoulides, G. (2015). Brand equity. In C. L. Cooper (Ed.), *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management* (pp.1-2). Oxfordshire, UK: Wiley.

Cushner, K., & Brislin, R.W. (1996). *Intercultural Interactions: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cornelissen, J. (2020). *Corporate communication: A guide to theory & practice*. SAGE.

Dennis, H. S. (1974). *A theoretical and empirical study of managerial communication climate in complex organisations* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. Purdue University.

Department for Business Innovation & Skills. (2015). *The impacts of migrant workers on UK businesses*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/406760/bis-15-153-impacts-of-migrant-workers-on-uk-business.pdf

Edwards, M.R. (2010). An integrative review of employer branding and OB theory. *Personnel Review*, *39*(1), 5–23.

Ehrenberg, A.S., Uncles, M.D., & Goodhardt, G.J. (2004). Understanding brand performance measures: Using Dirichlet benchmarks. *Journal of Business Research*, *57*(12), 1307-1325. 10.1016/j.jbusres.2002.11.001

Farquhar, P.H. (1989). Managing brand equity. *Marketing Research*, *1*(3), 24-33.

Fennell, G. (1978). Consumers' perceptions of the product-use situation. *Journal of Marketing*, *42*(2), 38–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/002224297804200207

Fiske, A. P. (1991). *Structures of social life: The four elementary forms of human relations*. New York: Free Press.

Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.

Foldy, E.G. (2006). Dueling schemata: Dialectical sense making about gender. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *42*(3), 350–372.

Hall, S. (1973). Encoding/decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, media, language: Working papers in cultural studies, 1972-79* (pp. 117-127). Taylor & Francis Group. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/londonschoolecons/detail.action?docID=1 79321

Hudders, L., Pandelaere, M., & Vyncke, P. (2013). Consumer meaning making. *International Journal of Market Research*, *55*(3), 391-412. 10.2501/IJMR-2013-036

Jain, S. (2013). Employer branding and its impact on CSR, motivation, and retention of employees using structural equation modelling. *Delhi Business Review*, *14*(2), 83–98.

Kanter, R. M., & Bird, M. (2009). *IBM in the 21st Century: The Coming of the Globally Integrated Enterprise*. 310-006. https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=37975.

Keller, K.L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, *57*(1), 1-22. 10.2307/1252054.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lloyd, S. (2002). Branding from the inside out. *BRW*, *24*(10), 64–66.

Mael, F., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organisational identification. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, *13*(2), 103–123. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030130202

Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Mayring, P. (2000). Qualitative content analysis. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *1*(2), Article 20. https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.2.1089

McLean Parks, J., & Schmedemann, D. L. (1994). When promises become contracts: implied contract and handbook provisions on job security. *Human Resource Management*, *33*, 403–423.

Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N.S. (2003). *Theories of Communication Networks*. Oxford University Press.

Netemeyer, R.G., Krishnan, B., Pullig, C., Wang, G., Yagci, M., Dean, D., Ricks, J., & Wirth, F. (2004). Developing and validating measures of facets of customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Business Research*, *57*(2), 209-224. 10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00303-4

Oliveira-Castro, J.M., Foxall, G.R., James, V.K., Pohl, R.H., Dias, M.B., & Chang, S.W. (2008). Consumer-based brand equity and brand performance. *The Service Industries Journal*, *28*(4), 445-461. 10.1080/02642060801917554

Park, C. W., Jaworski, B. J., & Maclnnis, D. J. (1986). Strategic brand concept-image management. *Journal of Marketing*, *50*(4), 621–635. https://doi.org/10.2307/1251291

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Porto, R. B. (2018). Consumer-based brand equity of products and services: Assessing a measurement model with competing brands. *Revista Brasileira de Marketing*, *17*(2), 150–165. https://doi.org/10.5585/remark.v17i2.3547

Rossiter, J. R., & Percy, L. (1987). *Advertising and Promotion Management*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Rousseau, D. M. (1989). Psychological and implied contracts in organisations. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, *2*, 121–139.

Ruchika, & Prasad, A. (2017). Untapped relationship between employer branding, anticipatory psychological contract and intent to join. *Global Business Review*, *20*(1), 194–213. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150917713897

Schein, E. H. (1965). *Organisational psychology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Smidts, A., Pruyn, A. Th., & van Riel, C. B. (2001). The impact of employee communication and perceived external prestige on organisational identification. *Academy of Management Journal*, *44*(5), 1051–1062. https://doi.org/10.5465/3069448.

Solomon, M. R. (1983). The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic interactionism perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *10*(3), 319–329. https://doi.org/10.1086/208971

Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: strategic and institutional perspectives. *Academy of Management Review, 20*, 571–610.

Sullivan, J. (2004, February 23). *The 8 elements of a successful employment brand*. Dr John Sullivan. https://drjohnsullivan.com/uncategorized/the-8-elements-of-a-successful-employment-brand/

Tengblad, S. (2006). Is there a "new managerial work"? A comparison with Henry Mintzberg's classic study 30 years later. *Journal of Management Studies*, *43*(7), 1437–1461. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00651.x

Thomas, D. C., Au, K., & Ravlin, E. C. (2003). Cultural variation and the psychological contract. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, *24*(5), 451–471. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.209

Thomas, D. C., Elron, E., Stahl, G., Ekelund, B. Z., Ravlin, E. C., Cerdin, J.-L., Poelmans, S., Brislin, R., Pekerti, A., Aycan, Z., Maznevski, M., Au, K., & Lazarova, M. B. (2008). Cultural Intelligence: Domain and Assessment. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, *8*(2), 123–143. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595808091787

Verčič, A. T. (2021). The impact of employee engagement, organisational support and employer branding on internal communication satisfaction. *Public Relations Review*, *47*(1), 102009. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102009

Warren, C. (2002). Qualitative Interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context & Method* (pp. 83-101). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588

Weeks, J., & Barsoux, J. (2010). *IBM: The value of values*. IMD-4-0320. https://www.thecasesolutions.com/ibm-the-value-of-values-a-49808.

Weiss, R. S. (1994). *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press.

Wilke, R., & Zaichkowsky, J. L. (1999). Brand imitation and its effects on innovation, competition, and brand equity. *Business Horizons*, *42*(6), 9-18. 10.1016/S0007-6813(99)80033-0

Yeomans, L., & FitzPatrick, L. (2017). Internal Communication. In R. Tench & L. Yeomans (Eds.), *Exploring public relations: Global strategic communications*. Pearson Education.