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Institutions: A Case Study

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## **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions: A case study**

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### **Abstract**

The relevance of an internal communication assessment comes from the important role internal communication plays in organizational success. Essentially, the health and success of an organization are closely linked to the effectiveness of its communication. According to Tourish and Hargie (2004, p. 237), the main advantage of a communication assessment is that it “sheds light on the often hazy reality of an organization’s performance, and exposes problems [...] to critical scrutiny. It enables managers to chart a clear course for an improved performance”.

In order to help Moroccan higher education institutions cope with a highly competitive environment, they should be encouraged to operate as organizations that implement expert managerial skills. One of these important skills is successful internal communication management.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the important role, very often overseen, that internal communication plays in organizational success. Through the assessment of the internal communication of an educational system, this study shows the scope and impact internal communication has in educational institutions. This study also provides recommendations on how internal communication can be better practiced to be more effective.

**Key words:** Education institutions; organization; internal communication; assessment.

## 30 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

### **1.Introduction**

With the growing number of private education institutions in Morocco, education institutions are facing fierce market competition. They need to implement continuous efforts to keep high performance records in order to position themselves and nourish a positive image and reputation amongst myriads of education institutions offering similar services. As such, it seems that it is high time that education institutions in Morocco were considered as organizations, which should, even though being not-for-profit, benefit from the implementation of expert management strategies likely to enable them achieve their performance objectives and acquire a competitive edge.

As such education institutions are defined similarly to organizations as [...] a group of people who work together to achieve a common purpose. It can consist of two people or two million people, and can be structured as a small business or an army, corporation, government or church. An organization is bigger than the individuals and groups that comprise it, but smaller than the society that gives it its context and environment. (Eunson 2012, p. 510)

One important key factor in organizations, be them for or not for profit, is human capital. This is the reason why ensuring an effective communication with the workforce is vital for organizations. As Cornelissen (2008, p. 194) puts it to "communicate with their employees to strengthen employee morale and their identification with the organization and to ensure that employees know how to accomplish their own specialized tasks".

In order to highlight the importance of internal communication in organizational success, this paper presents a sample of a communication

assessment of the Moroccan higher education institution, Al Akhawayn University.

## **2. Approaches to Internal Communication**

Approaches to internal communication are rooted in the functions it has in the organization. Two major functions that are often highlighted in relevant literature are the management function and the communication with internal stakeholders function.

In fact, the highly technological global environment wherein organizations operate impacts the scope and role of internal communication within organizations. As such the organization needs to implement huge management efforts to adequately involve all stakeholders, keep them informed of their specific tasks, organization mission and vision, and identity. Any organization needs to unite its internal stakeholders, although internal is taking a broader scope in the last decades, to achieve organizational objectives; whereby internal communication plays a vital management role. Quirke (2008, p.12) argue that,

The blurring of boundaries between what's inside and outside an organization, where outsourced employees disappear off the organization chart but stay in the same office, means that 'internal' communication has to cover more than those who are inside. Outsourced partners, offshore call centers, joint ventures and supply chain partnerships are increasingly within the remit of internal communicators who aim to harmonize the different voices customers hear from an organization, and protect the values of its brand.

## 32 Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions

In order for the organization to attain its objectives, position itself in a highly competitive environment, and build successful external relations, it needs to keep its human capital, motivated and involved, which calls for the role of internal communication towards internal stakeholders. In this respect Blundel and Ippolito (2008, p. 273) argue that

It is essential to keep employees informed, involved and motivated, not only for the internal health of the business but because employees are an important channel to the outside world. Proud, satisfied employees will tell relatives and friends what an organization they are working for, whilst disgruntled ones will do the opposite. The views of 'insiders', whether positive or negative, will always carry considerable weight.



Figure 1: Classical internal communication definition. Adapted from Cornelissen (2008)

### 3. Contemporary Definition of Internal Communication: Corporate Information and Communication Systems

In addition to the classical perception of internal communication, Cornelissen (2008, p.197) introduces the contemporary concept of Corporate Information and Communication Systems (CICS) that has resulted from the evolution of the field of communication, which has moved from the use of traditional tools of communication to highly technological tools (e.g., Internet, blogs, e-mails).

Corporate information and communication systems involve the use of communication technologies for two major internal communication objectives management communication and corporate information and communication systems.

Corporate information and communication systems (CICS) has a larger scope than a dyad relationship between employee and manager. It targets all employees of the organization in all ranks and functions to keep them informed about organizational issues.

Although internal communication and corporate information and communication systems are different, "both areas of internal communication complement each other in ensuring that information flows vertically, horizontally, and laterally across the organization" (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 197).

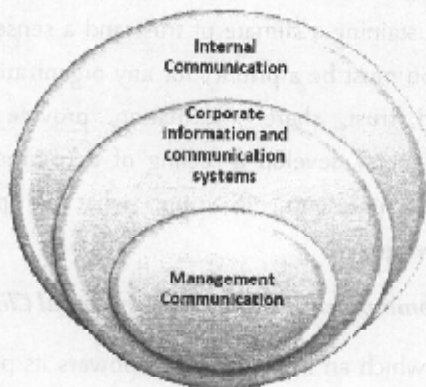


Figure 2: Contemporary internal communication definition. Adapted from Cornelissen (2008)

#### **4.Application of Internal Communication**

##### ***4.1 Internal Communication and Organizational Identification***

Organizational identification is “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member” (Cornelissen, p. 198).

Organizational identification is actually the outcome of internal communication success. According to Cornelissen (2008, p.198) combining upward and downward communication in a way that maintains employees well informed about organizational strategies, achievements and orientations is likely to create contented employees with a high sense of identification with their organization. In fact, Mai and Akerson (2003, pp. 1-2) assert that

Creating and sustaining a climate of trust and a sense of community within the organization must be a priority for any organization’s leadership. How leaders extend trust, share information, provide direction and orientation, and in general develop a feeling of a common stake in the organization’s future represents, in sum, what is preeminently a communications challenge.

##### ***4.2 Internal Communication and Organizational Climate***

The degree to which an organization empowers its people, involving them in the decision making process, and keeping open or closed channels of communication affects the organizational climate. According to Cornelissen (2008, p. 201):

Communication climate is defined as the internal environment of information exchange between managers and employees through an organization's formal and informal networks. A communication climate is characterized as 'open', when information flows freely between individuals, groups and departments and it is characterized as 'closed' when information is blocked. Organizational silence corresponds to a 'closed' communication climate because it involves a shared and widespread feeling among employees that speaking up is of little use.

### ***4.3 Internal Communication and Change***

With an ever changing environment, organizations are facing challenging situations of change management and change communication. Wojtecki, and Peters (2000, p.1) explain that

Change is a constant reality in today's workplace, causing substantial psychological stress within a workforce concerned about its livelihood and quality of life. [...] However, simply making information available is not the same as communication. People under stress can lose as much as 80 percent of their ability to process information. Situations in which concerns are high and trust is low, call for as much attention to the methods of communicating as to the messages.

In fact communication should be a manager's most effective tool to manage change. According to Cornelissen (2008, pp. 201-202) "Communication is central to how change is formulated, announced and explained to employees and also contributes to a successful implementation and institutionalization of the change». For a change to be effectively managed, change communication tools have to be adapted to the intensity of the



## 36 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

change. Moreover, the constant measurement and assessment of internal communication should be part of the management mission as stated by Harkness (2000, p. 73)

In an ever-changing work environment, the need for improved internal communication has never been greater. It is rising up the agenda of senior management. Effective measurement will make sure that it remains on the agenda

### **5. Case Study**

#### ***5.1 What will be assessed?***

This paper presents the results of a study that attempts to assess internal communication at Al Akhawayn University, a well known higher education institution in Morocco. This study is limited to the communication taking place amongst administrative staff and top-management. The following points represent the major concerns covered in this research.

1. Communication flow
2. Communication Relationships
3. Coordination/Knowledge sharing
4. Organizational Communication Structure
5. Organizational Climate
6. Communication for Change
7. Communication and Organizational Identification
8. Communication Channels at the work place
9. Internal Communication Strengths
10. Internal Communication Weaknesses

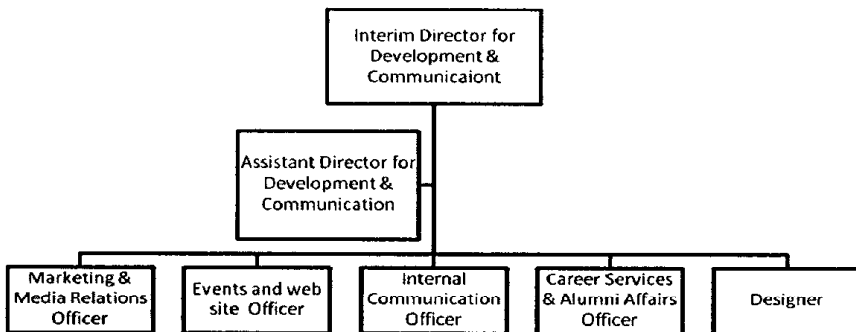
### ***5.2 What are the research units?***

Being the major actors in the internal communication process, the main target of this research are administrative staff members and top managers from Al Akhawayn University.

### ***5.3 What are the implications for action?***

The implications for action are closely related to the general goal of this study, namely the assessment of Al Akhawayn University (AUI) internal communication strategy, and its results. If ever the results prove that AUI internal communication has shortcomings, then we will present recommendations to be acted upon as improvement measures for internal communication at AUI.

### ***5.4 Al Akhawayn University (AUI) Department of Development & Communication Management Structure***



**Figure 3:** AUI Department of Development & Communication Management Structure.

Source, <http://www.aui.ma>, August 2012

## 38 Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions

### 5.4.1AUI Department of Development & Communication Mission

The Department is responsible for communication, marketing, public relations, external and media relations, promotional publications, alumni affairs, career services, events, and the website. It serves the university to build awareness of and support for AUI, and to develop, project, and ensure a strong, positive, clear, consistent, and coherent image of the university both internally and externally – an image that is consistent with reality and conveys the powerful identity and unique mission of this institution. (Source, <http://www.aui.ma>, August 2012)

As you can see from this mission statement, the Department of Development & Communication of AUI caters to the communication needs of different publics both internal and external.



Figure 4: AUI Department of Development & Communication as a formal network for communication with internal and external publics . Source: mine

The Department of Development & Communication of AUI was created in the year 1999. It was first constituted of three units, a unit for external communication and public relations, a unit for development, and a unit for

career and alumni relations. At the date of this research, the Department of Development and Communication regroups five strategic units.

- Marketing and media relations unit
- Events coordination and web site management unit
- Internal communication unit
- Career and alumni relations unit
- Design and layout unit

**Marketing & Media Relations Unit** is run by the Marketing & Media Relations Officer. The same person ensures the responsibilities of Assistant Director for Development & Communication. This unit manages all marketing actions and produces all the promotional items that the University needs. It maintains a digital library of university pictures to which all University refer for their promotional and communication use. It is also in charge of managing University media relations.

**Events Coordination and Web Site Management Unit** is run by an events and website officer. This person is in charge of University events coordination and University web site content management.

**Internal Communication Unit** is run by an Internal Communication Officer. This unit is in charge of disseminating information about University news to all AUI community through the University web site and via e-mail.

**The mission of Career and Alumni Affairs Unit** is to «encourage and enable all Al Akhawayn students and alumni to make fulfilling career choices, and implement well-informed decisions about their careers” (source,

#### 40 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

<http://www.aui.ma>, August 2012). It also oversees relations with Al Akhawayn Alumni.

A **Design and Layout Unit** is run by a designer who works closely with the Marketing & Media Relations Officer to offer creative services to all AUI community.

#### ***5.5 The Communication Channels used at Al Akhawayn University (AUI) for Internal Communication***

**E-mail System:** The technology and computing support at AUI are a priority. AUI is currently increasing its internet bandwidth to 155 megabits per second, and now has the fastest connection among all institutions of higher education in Morocco and North Africa.

The University community uses Lotus Notes for an integrated email and productivity system that may be accessed from the AUI web site [www.aui.ma](http://www.aui.ma). Because of its functionality and accessibility, the e-mail system is very widely used in day to day tasks of all AUI community. (Source institutional web site, <http://www.aui.ma>, August 2012)

**Phone:** AUI Campus has a strong phone infrastructure that connects all AUI community internally and externally.

**Website:** Is very important communications channel both for internal and external publics. Internally, it is used to post up-to-date news, and stories about AUI. It helps AUI community keep-a-breath of AUI different units' achievement and contributes into aligning internal message with the external message.

**Meetings:** Are strong communication tools that contribute to strengthening communication relationships between community members. They involve a lot of interaction, and exchange. At AUI, the use of this and communication channel vary in frequency and importance.

**Memos:** At AUI, memos are intimately related to official communications and are very widely used to communicate about financial, academic and personnel management decisions.

**Posters:** Are partially important. They are mostly used to communicate with students. Posters are often used to inform about events taking place on campus.

**Newsletters:** Are issued by university departments to communicate about their activities and to share news with AUI community.

## 6. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In this section, I will present the results of the empirical research gathered by order of research instrument, namely, sample survey and structured interviews.

### *6.1 Survey: General Description*

Close attention was made to elaborate a balanced questionnaire with six mainpoints; each point was elaborated through answers about five questions. The survey was anonymous and confidential. The confidentiality of the survey is important to receive honest answers on how people think internal communication functions within AUI.

To serve the general objective of this research, the survey targeted the two most important actors of internal communication at AUI, namely, top-

## 42 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

management and administrative staff. The survey was handed to representatives from these two categories belonging to the different services and units of AUI. Respondents were given twenty four to forty eight hours deadline to fill in the questionnaire. The number of respondents to this survey was 36 that included representatives from all University services, administrative functions and gender representations (female and male)<sup>1</sup>. I have tried to achieve through this sampling a real representation of all university components. With a percentage of 16% of targeted audience representation, I believe that the sample studied will give a clear image about the reality of internal communication at AUI and the results will have significant research results.

### ***6.2 Structured Interview: General Description***

Structured interview is a tool that I meant to use as a qualitative research tool to explore the communication experience of AUI in detail. The structured interview actually helped me produce interesting insights that the survey missed.

Because interview data processing is time-consuming, for the purpose of my topic, I chose to interview with only two key people, namely the Assistant Director for Communication and Development and the Internal Communication Officer. I have prepared nine interview questions.

### **6.3 Survey and structured Interviews: Main Hypothesis**

AUI is one of the leading academic institutions in Morocco that has an international presence. In this framework, the main hypothesis of the practical

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<sup>1</sup> This independent variable is not significant in my research.

part of my research paper is that *I suppose that Al Akhawayn University has an internal communication strategy that includes all the necessary constituents for a successful internal communication.*

This hypothesis will be tested through considering key constituents of internal communication, namely, flow of communication, coordination and knowledge sharing, organizational structure, organizational climate, communication for change and communication and organizational identification.

#### **6.4 Sub-hypothesis:**

Bearing in mind the close relationship between internal communication and its constituencies, *I suppose that the percentage with which internal communication is effectively achieved depends on the percentage with which its constituents are effectively applied.* All the elements of my survey are meant to verify both main and sub-hypotheses.

### **7. Survey Results**

#### **7.1 Section A: Flow of Communication**

Results' evaluation of this internal communication constituent at AUI revealed that percentage of 45% of respondents agree with the supposition that the flow of communication at AUI is effective, while 35% of them disagree and 20% of them refrained from answering this question. Although the percentage of positive feedback on AUI communication flow is a little bit higher than the negative one, the rates show a very slight difference between the two views, especially that the percentage of those who did not respond remains significant. The responses about questions in this section show



#### 44 Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions

mitigated views about the flow of communication at AUI. For instance answers about top-down communication, bottom-up communication, and communication barriers (Please see figure 5, 6, and 7) show that the percentage of views with regard to this issue almost equals the percentage of negative views.

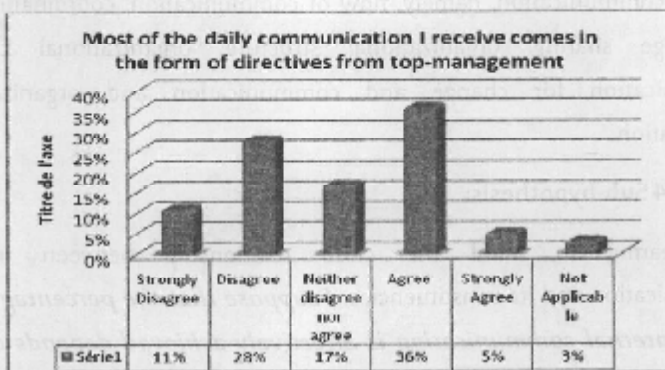


Figure 5: Variations of opinion about top-down communication at AUI

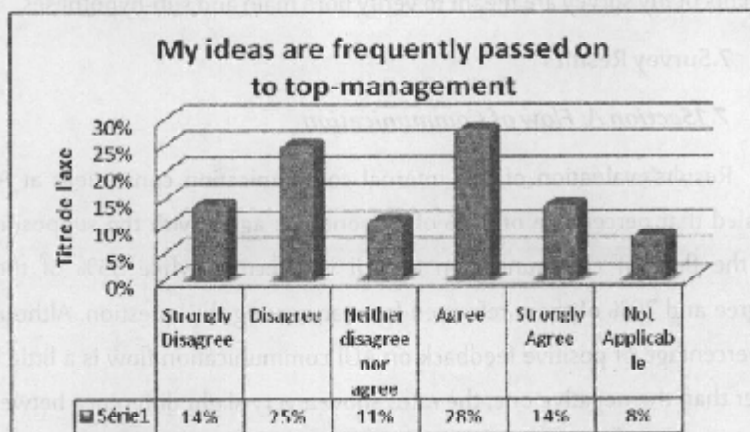


Figure 6: Variations of opinion about bottom-up communication at AUI

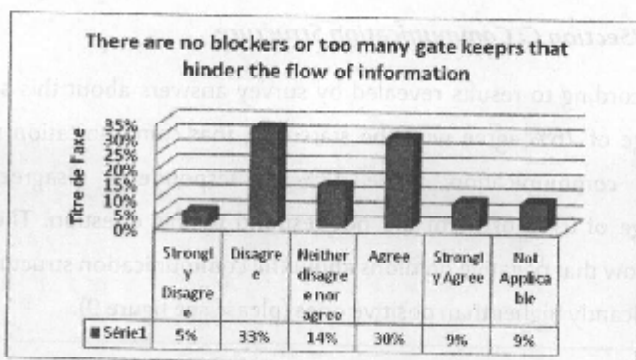


Figure 7: Variations of opinion about communication barriers at AUI

### 7.2 Section B: Coordination and Knowledge Sharing at AUI

Results revealed that a high percentage of 64% of respondents agree with the supposition that coordination and knowledge sharing at AUI are effective; while 17% of respondents disagree and 23% of them refrained from answering this question. These rates imply that coordination and knowledge sharing at AUI are quite effective (Please see figure 8).

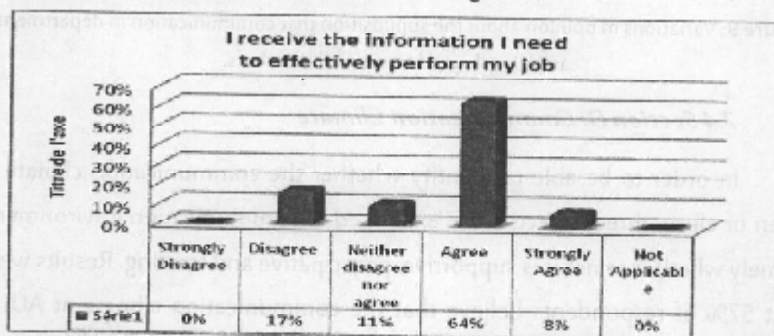


Figure 8: Variations in opinion of respondents about information availability at AUI

**7.3 Section C: Communication Structure**

According to results revealed by survey answers about this section, a percentage of 26% agree with the statement that communication structure enhances communication; while 47% of respondents disagree and a percentage of 27% of them did not respond to this question. These rates clearly show that negative opinions about the communication structure at AUI are significantly higher than positive ones (please see figure 9).

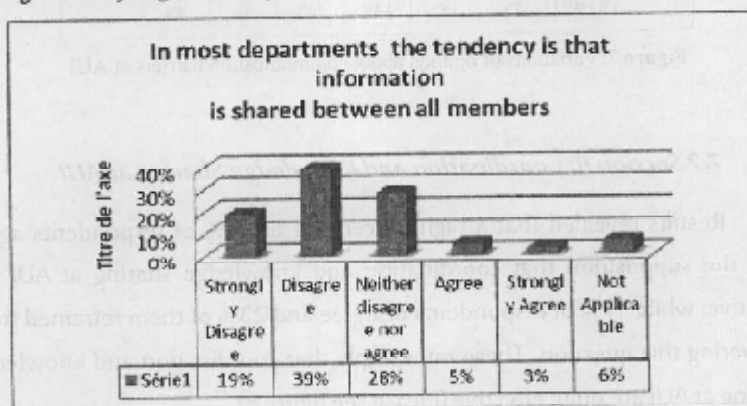


Figure 9: Variations in opinion about the supposition that communication in departments at AUI is shared between all members.

**7.4 Section D: Communication Climate**

In order to be able to identify whether the communication climate is open or close, three aspects were examined in communication environment, namely whether or not it is supportive, participative and trusting. Results were that 57% of respondents believe that the communication climate at AUI is open, 20% disagree with this supposition and 23% refused to answer this question. As you can see from figures 10, 11 and 12 there is a high level of

support and trust in the communication relationships of AUI workforce. However, answers about the participative element in AUI internal communication show that communication climate suffers because of a low percentage of respondents who believe that AUI involves its workforce in the decision-making process.

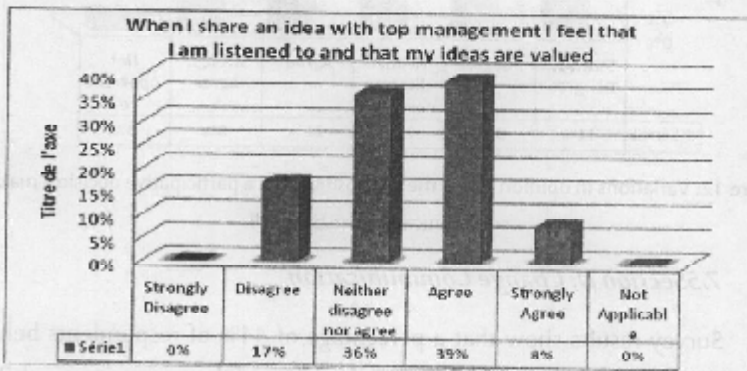


Figure 10: Variations in opinion about the supposition of the existence of a supportive environment for communication at AUI.

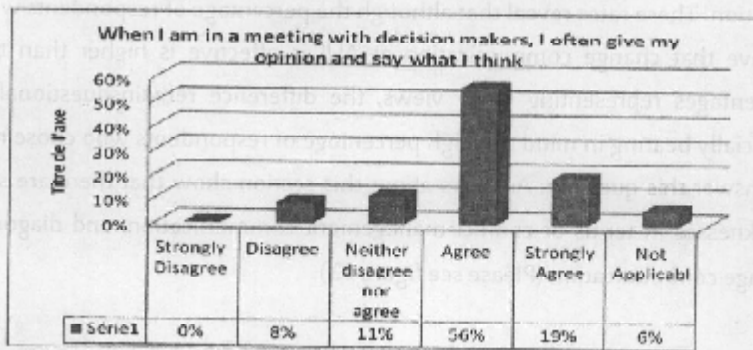


Figure 11: Variations in opinion about the supposition that there are supportive communication relationships between staff and top-management at AUI.

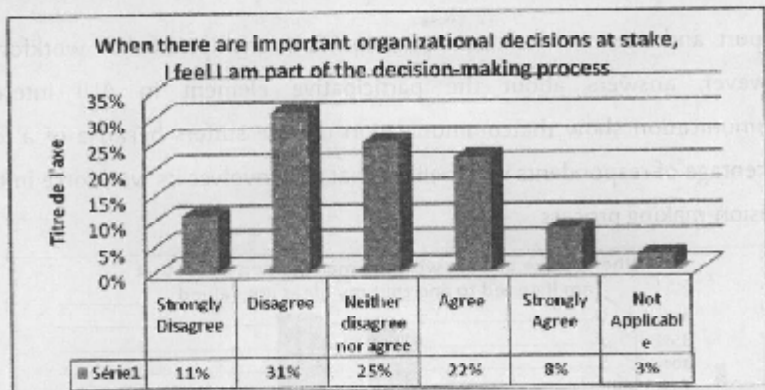
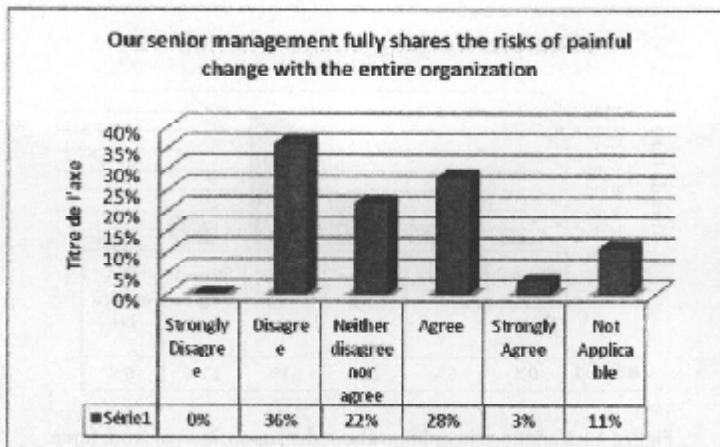


Figure 12: Variations in opinion about the supposition that a participative decision-making communication exists at AUI

#### **7.5 Section D: Change Communication**

Survey results show that a percentage of 44% of respondents believe that change communication at AUI is effective, while a percentage of 25% disagree with this statement and 31% of them chose not to answer this question. These rates reveal that although the percentage of respondents who believe that change communication at AUI is effective is higher than the percentages representing other views, the difference remains questionable especially bearing in mind the high percentage of respondents who chose not to answer this question. Answers about this section show that there are still weaknesses in terms of conflict management communication, and diagonal change communication (Please see figure 13).



**Figure 13:** Variations in opinion about the supposition of an effective diagonal change communication AUI.

### ***7.6 Section E: Communication and Organizational Identification***

According to survey results, a high percentage of 63% respondents agree with the supposition that AUI workforce has a strong sense of organizational identification, while 19% disagree and 18% refrained from giving their opinion on this. Answers in this section about the sense of identification show that internal Communication at AUI is able to generate a strong sense of identification (Please see figure 14). However, other answers show that cross functional communication at AUI does not function well (Please see figure 15).

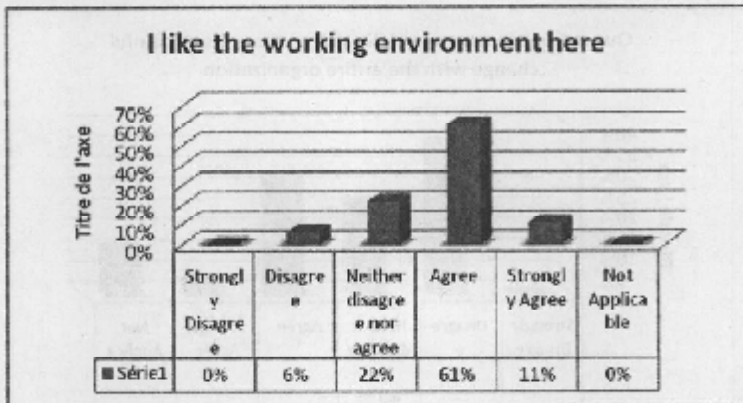


Figure 14: Variations in opinion about the supposition of work force satisfaction with the work environment at AUI.

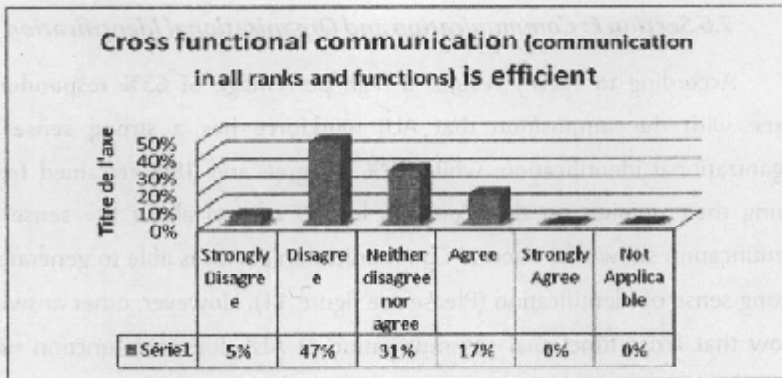


Figure 15: Variations in opinion about the supposition of cross functional communication effectiveness at AUI.

## 8.STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS RESULTS: INTERVIEW WITH THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT AT AUI

As table 1 shows the interview held with the Assistant Director for Communication and Development (ADDC) confirmed many of the results already presented through the survey and added more information elements that contributed into drawing a more realistic picture of internal communication at AUI.

Issue	Response
<b>Defining AI Akhawayn University Internal Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At the moment internal communication at AUI is limited to disseminating news about happenings on campus by members of the community.</li> <li>- Currently, AUI internal communication is mainly a journalistic task. It is about reporting news.</li> <li>- The current internal communication cannot be called as such because it doesn't include all the components that need to be there, namely, involvement of the Human Resource Office, the top-management, and each one in the AUI community to develop an internal communication manual (Charter).</li> <li>- Work is being done to improve internal communication at AUI, and the top-management is more aware of the importance of internal communication in the sustainable development of the institution.</li> </ul>



52 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

<p><b>Communication Relationships</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication interactions are limited to e-mails, phone calls, website...</li> <li>- A need for one-to-one meetings and user-friendly ways to share information, in addition to interdepartmental meetings.</li> <li>- Lack of internal communication culture within AUI community.</li> <li>- The need for a unit that supervises, and ensures the follow-up of communication process, plans for trainings to ensure communication effectiveness and enhance AUI community awareness of the importance of communication.</li> <li>- Need to improve visibility about work' tasks and work' achievements to boost confidence within employees, and help them trust their competencies and have trust in other coworkers, and top managers.</li> <li>- The top-down management structure reinforces the power relationship between managers and workers and widens the gap between employees and managers, and leaves room for communication barriers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Role of top-management in the communication process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top-management has to set the example for a great internal communication.</li> <li>- They have to be number one communicators.</li> <li>- They have to support employees in terms of the actions and strategies they come up with in order for workers to gain the reliability needed to reach their results.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Managers need to be leaders who trust their employees and create a healthy open environment for communication and sharing.</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of organizational culture, AUJ community need to gather around the same organizational values.</li> <li>- Most of Al Akhawayn staff knows the university mission and objectives, yet they need to implement more efforts in applying those in their daily tasks.</li> </ul>
<b>Information load at the work place</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An environment that it is understaffed the information about jobs is learnt by practice.</li> <li>- Not enough guidance in terms of job tasks information.</li> <li>- Not enough training specific to job roles.</li> </ul>
<b>Change Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Too much information kills information", there are things that can be communicated and there are things that should not be revealed.</li> <li>- Management is doing a good job with this respect.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top-down management structure</li> <li>- Need for more initiative to adopt new communication technologies that will help boost internal communication</li> </ul>
<b>Communication Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Motivated staff willing to learn and improve internal communication</li> <li>- The positive personal relationships between staff and their great sense of collaboration gives the university a big potential for a great internal communication</li> </ul>

<b>The would be most effective channel for communication</b>	- The best communication channel would be to combine in addition to the widely used ones, phone, e-mail, web site..., a more human tool for communication that encourages face to face and interpersonal communication, like one-on-one meetings, staff retreats...
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**Table 1: Interview with Al Akhawayn University Assistant Director for Communication and Development, August, 2012**

### ***8.1 Presentation of AUI Internal Communication***

When asked to present AUI internal communication, the Associate Director for Development and Communication (ADDC) argued that for the time being internal communication at AUI is limited to disseminating news about AUI community and about University events. It is a journalistic task. According to the ADDC there is no such internal communication at AUI per say, since it lacks many of the constituents that are necessary for its existence and growth within an organization. The ADDC mentioned that amongst these constituents is an internal communication manual (Charter) that would be the result of asynergy of efforts of AUI workforceat all levels and functions. The ADDC also mentioned the absence of a unit that supervises, and ensures the implementation of the internal communication manual, the follow-up of the communication process, in addition to being in charge of planning trainings to ensure communication effectiveness and enhance AUI community communication culture.

## ***8.2.1 Akhawayn University Internal Communication Weaknesses***

### **8.2.1 Top -down Organizational Structure**

The ADDC argued that top-down management structure at AUI reinforces the power relationship between managers and workers and widens the gap between employees and managers, and leaves room for communication barriers.

### **8.2.2 Communication Climate**

According to ADDC, AUI internal communication climate suffers from some shortcomings, which are closely linked to the formal communication structure that reduces the communication overhead and hinders an open flow of communication. In addition, the lack of a communication culture results in concentrating information at specific management levels excluding other levels and functions.

### **8.2.3 Work knowledge**

According to the ADDC, there is a need to improve visibility about work' tasks and work' achievements to boost confidence within employees, and help them trust their competencies and have trust in other coworkers, and top managers.

### **8.2.4 Communication Channels**

When asked about communication channels at AUI, the ADDC confirmed that the communication channels used at AUI are limited to formal organizational tools, like the e-mail and the phone. Internal communication at AUI still lacks an interpersonal dimension that would contribute more to its success.

## 56 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

### **8.2.5 Role of top-management in Internal Communication**

With this regard, the ADDC highlighted a poor communication culture that would help managers orchestrate the communication process effectively, and would enable them to be role models for their workforce, and number one communicators through fostering a climate of trust and support.

### ***8.3 AUI Internal Communication Strengths***

When mentioning the strengths of AUI internal communication, the ADDC highlighted a motivated staff that is willing to learn and improve internal communication, in addition to the positive personal relationships between co-workers and their great sense of collaboration. These are all factors that give the university a big potential for a great internal communication

Finally, the AUI Assistant Director for Communication and Development concluded by saying that AUI is a very young university, which is in an ongoing growth, and that work is being done to improve internal communication at AUI, especially that top-management' awareness of the importance of internal communication in the sustainable development of the institution is increasing.

### **9. Interview with the Internal Communication Officer at AUI**

The interview held with the Internal Communication Officer (please see table 2) highlighted AUI internal communication barriers and internal communication strengths and weaknesses.

According to the internal communication officer of AUI there are barriers, which constitute the main weaknesses of AUI internal

communication, and prevent it from reaching its full potential. According to table 2, these barriers are summed as follows:

- Formal organizational structure and hierarchy
- Unclear procedures
- Control of information
- Virtual distance
- Lack of interaction between staff and top-management
- Gap between the clarity of the vision and the output

Actually, this statement confirms many of the shortcomings that were revealed by the survey results as in the case of internal communication problems linked to the organizational communication structure being concentrated at some levels of organizational managements, and the lack of participative communication.

The strengths of AUI internal communication as presented by the internal communication officer are:

- Technological infrastructure
- Small audience
- Community spirit

Issue	Response
<b>Communication Barriers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structure and hierarchy,</li> <li>- Unclear procedures,</li> <li>- Control of information,</li> <li>- Virtual distance,</li> <li>- Lack of interaction between staff</li> </ul>

58 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

	and management, - Gap between the clarity of the vision and the output.
<b>Strengths of AI Akhawayn University internal Communication</b>	Strengths: - Technological infrastructure - Small audience - Community spirit
<b>Weaknesses of AI Akhawayn University internal Communication</b>	Weaknesses: - Management Structure and - Lack of new communication tools - Transparency Issues - Control of information - Grapevine Communication

**Table 2:** Interview with AUI Internal Communication Officer Results

**10. Conclusion on Data Analysis and Interpretation: SWOT Analysis**

This empirical research concluded to a SWOT analysis of AUI internal communication, namely through revealing its strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities and threats.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
- A strong coordination and knowledge sharing - A communication climate with a supportive and trusting	- Poor participative communication - Poor conflict resolution communication - Poor diagonal change

<p>environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An effective change communication</li> <li>- A strong sense of organizational identification</li> </ul>	<p>communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Barriers to top-down and bottom-up communication: While the survey' results showed mitigated views about top-down and bottom-up communication, the interviews proved that the formal organizational structure, and the lack of a communication culture hinder their effectiveness</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A young University that can easily approach young public (students), who are its major stakeholder</li> <li>- An open environment that encourages communication and change</li> <li>- A human capital and a technological infrastructure that can enhance communication</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A very strong sense of organizational identification that would negatively impact the communication process through encouraging information control and organizational power detention</li> <li>- A closed communication climate that would encourage grapevine communication</li> </ul>

**Table 3:** SWOT Analysis of Al Akhawayn University Internal Communication

In the light of the theoretical framework introduced earlier, I can conclude that further to the data retrieved from the sample survey and structured interviews, the SWOT analysis results of AUI internal



## **60 Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

communication reveal a gap between theory and practice. Internal communication at AUI has shortcomings that hinder its effectiveness. Nevertheless, AUI internal communication has opportunities that outweigh its threats, which reveals an important potential for AUI internal communication's success. In the following section, I will introduce some recommendations that are, to my opinion, likely to help AUI internal communication better explore the opportunities it has to become highly effective.

### **11. Recommendations**

#### ***11.1 Reinforce bottom-up communication***

Al Akhawayn University can empower more its workforce by encouraging bottom-up communication and making employees feel important contributors to the overall organizational functioning. According to Tourish and Hargie (2004, p. 248) "employees appreciate a climate in which bottom-up communication is encouraged. They want to feel that they play an active part in driving the operating system, rather than being mere functional parts of the corporate engine". Moreover, Moskowitz and Levering (2001, p.3) found that successful organizations "are providing an environment in which their workers are treated as important contributors rather than as hired hands" (as cited in Tourish and Hargie, 2004, p.248). This can reinforce participative communication as well, and can create an environment of support, which are all factors that boost employees' sense of confidence, and organizational identification as well as positively impact their performance and their motivation.

### ***11.2 Improve Top-down communication***

AUI can improve its top-down communication through encouraging more interpersonal communication through one-on-one meetings and face to face communication. As we have seen in the literature overview, Conrad and Poole (2005, p.5) highlight the importance of interpersonal and organizational dimensions in an effective organizational communication strategy (please see figure 4). As the Assistant Director of Internal Communication (ADDC) at AUI confirms "Communication interactions at Al Akhawayn University are limited to e-mails, phone calls, and website. There is a need for one-to-one meetings and user-friendly ways to share information, in addition to interdepartmental meetings" (Please see table 1). Similarly, Tourish and Hargie (2004, p. 249) confirm that "It is perhaps reassuring that in our ever-increasing technological world, humans still prefer to interact with one another in person. Employees especially want to meet and talk with their senior managers."

### ***11.3 Establish an Internal Communication Manual (Charter)***

AUI community should produce a manual of internal communication procedures that reflects a distinctive AUI organizational culture and values that have been negotiated amongst all members of the community. This manual will shape how communication takes place, and will apply procedures for its effectiveness and success.

### ***11.4 Create an Internal Communication Unit***

One of the major shortcomings of AUI internal communication is the absence of an internal communication function per say. In fact, the need for the creation of such unit has been highlighted by the Assistant Director for Communication and Development of AUI. This unit "supervises, and ensures

## 62 **Internal Communication in Moroccan Education institutions**

the follow-up of communication process, plans for trainings to ensure communication effectiveness and enhance AUI community awareness of the importance of communication” (Please see table 1). This function can be structured as a unit in a specific department or as a function distributed in different university departments.

### *11.5 Provide Communication Trainings*

The survey’ results have shown an important percentage of respondents who refrained from answering many questions. This might prove a divergence of opinion, but it also reveals that these respondents simply didn’t have the answer. This implies that there is a need for trainings, which would help AUI workforce understand what communication is and how it can be best practiced to fit with the culture of the University and its overall strategic objectives. In this respect, Tourish and Hargie (2004, p. 250) argue that “employees report that they personally wish to receive systematic training in the communication skills that are central to their work”.

## **12. Research Limitations**

It is worth noticing that like any academic research, this research has limitations that are closely linked to the nature of this research being limited in time by academic deadlines. If only more time was dedicated to this topic, a larger sample could have been used and more comprehensive research results could have been revealed. I should note also that internal communication remains only one component of an organizational communication strategy; another major component is external communication.

It would be very interesting to uncover the intricacies of external communication, which targets, as opposed to internal communication, the

external stakeholders of an organization. What would be the main constituents of external communication? How would it be effectively practiced? How would internal and external communication work together for the success of an organization? Answers to these questions can be the topic of other future organizational communication research papers.

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