Voice of the management or employee advocate? How editors of employee magazines see their professional role

Thomas Koch, Jana Vogel, Nora Denner and Sarah Encarnacao

Department of Communication Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany

Abstract

Purpose – Editors of employee magazines work in a grey area between public relations and journalism. On the one hand, they need to accommodate the company management's interest in a positive presentation; on the other, they must meet the employees' need for objective and independent information. Although employee magazines reach millions of recipients every day, its editors have rarely been the focus of academic work. The purpose of this paper is to change this and scrutinise the way the editors view their professional role and the role conflicts to which they are subjected.

Design/methodology/approach – We conduct 15 qualitative semi-structured interviews with editors of employee magazines to analyse their professional role and possible conflicts in their work.

Findings – The editors' self-concept varies significantly along two dimensions, which the authors use as the basis for distinguishing four types: the management ambassador, the employee representative, the mediator and the service provider.

Originality/value – The study sheds light on employee magazines, a medium between public relations and journalism that has not been analysed before. It helps to specify the role of these magazines and its editors' between the expectations of the management and the employees.

Keywords Role conflicts, Internal communication, Employee magazines, Staff magazines

Paper type Research paper

Particularly in times of continuous processes of change, companies need to inform, involve, and motivate their employees to guarantee the organization's success (Kitchen and Daly, 2002). Even in the age of ongoing digitalisation and the spread of social media, the employee magazine remains a core instrument often used in internal corporate communication (Yaxley and Ruck, 2015). Although it uses journalistic methods, it is not independent, but is commissioned by the company management. While the management aims to use the magazine to inform and motivate its employees for its own benefit, the readers expect objective, even critical, reporting (Clampitt *et al.*, 1986; Grabuschnig and Vizgirdaitė, 2015). This could result in a conflict of interest for the employee magazines' editors (by the term editor, we refer to anyone who is involved in the production of content and responsible for editorial decisions for an employee magazine). Although the medium of the employee magazine reaches millions of recipients every day, its editors have rarely been the focus of academic work. This study changes this and scrutinises the way the editors view their professional role and the role conflicts to which they are subjected. We conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews with editors of employee magazines in order to analyse their self-concept and potential sources of conflict. It is on this basis that we finish by developing a typology for the editors.

Theoretical background

The employee magazine – tool of the internal communication

Within every organisation, a variety of different communication processes occurs among various stakeholders ranging from managed communication by the senior management to office gossip and informal water cooler chitchat (Dolphin, 2005; Welch and Jackson, 2007). Internal communication refers to the strategic management of these interactions and relationships between different stakeholders at all levels within an organisation (Welch and Jackson, 2007). If conducted effectively, internal communication is a key factor for management success (Mishra *et al.*, 2014; Ruck and Welch, 2011; Yeomans, 2009) and one of the fastest growing fields in public relations (Tkalac Verčič *et al.*, 2012; Welch, 2012). It serves numerous objectives, but several researchers stress the importance of two main functions: providing information to the employees and creating a community feeling within an organisation (e.g. De Ridder, 2003; Elving, 2005).

In order to reach the employees, different types of media and, within these, different channels are used (White *et al.*, 2010). Although other channels (such as intranet news, blogs, social media, e-mail newsletters, discussion forums, etc.) gained importance over the last 20 years, one important tool of internal communication remaining is the employee magazine (Quirke, 2008; Yeomans, 2009). Employee magazines are publications that are produced on behalf of an organisation's management to cover organisation-related news to its internal stakeholders. The first employee magazines were published as far back as the nineteenth Century, when industrialisation made internal communication within companies increasingly important (Yaxley and Ruck, 2015). From the very start, these publications served as a strategic instrument of internal communication, addressing the employees in a targeted manner (Click, 1967; Smith and Mounter, 2008). The intention was to compensate for the loss of personal contact between employees and employers in large companies (Hayes, 1922). Hence, the number of employee magazines increased enormously at the start of the twentieth Century, with the format having asserted itself as a leading instrument of internal corporate communication by the mid-twentieth Century (Yaxley and Ruck, 2015). Even with the range of digital media available growing, employees still enjoy reading the employee magazine – albeit preferring it in an electronic format (Friedl and Tkalac Verčič, 2011; Welch, 2012).

Up to now, research in this field has focussed predominantly on the content and communication strategies of employee magazines. There are various studies that look at the preferences of the readers of employee magazines. These show that "personal news" is a particularly popular section that takes up a large proportion of the employee magazines (Pavlik *et al.*, 1982; Raney, 1959; Sparks, 1997). The employee magazine fulfils various purposes. Even almost 100 years ago, the employee magazine served to disseminate company-related news and to bolster solidarity between the employees within the company (Hayes, 1922). Information and motivation remain the main functions of an employee magazine to this day (Grabuschnig and Vizgirdaitė, 2015). Furthermore, they are intended to encourage dialogue between all hierarchical levels, create a sense of togetherness and thus strengthen the employees' identification with the company (Clampitt *et al.*, 1986; Welch, 2015).

Clampitt *et al.* (1986) identify three stakeholders for employee magazines – editors, employees and management – who can interact with one another in three ways. First, they can all work together and try to take everyone's needs into account equally in the employee magazine (collaboration); this appears the ideal scenario. Second, the editors can adapt the management perspective; the employee magazine then serves merely as a platform for management (capitulation). If the employee magazine avoids all kinds of conflict, it acts mainly as an entertainment medium with non-critical content (trivialisation).

Even today, many employee magazines seem to follow the trivialisation or capitulation approach, often serving merely as a voice of the company management. Employee magazines

remain a medium of positive self-presentation. The company management often seems unwilling to report on any negative topics or to address problems (Clampitt *et al.*, 1986, Yaxley and Ruck, 2015). However, this kind of whitewashing can have negative consequences: the wider the gulf readers perceive between reality and the content presented, the less credible and accepted the medium will be. Through the multiplication effect of the employees, this can ultimately damage the company's image considerably (D'Aprix, 1979; Smith and Mounter, 2008).

These observations underscore the area of conflict between employee and management in which the editors find themselves. They are expected to fulfil both journalistic and PR roles simultaneously (Argenti, 2009; Grabuschnig and Vizgirdaitė, 2015). Smith's (1961) description also indicates this dual role: "The house journal editor thought of himself either as a journalist who happened to have strayed off the beaten track of the national or local press into the wilderness of industry or commerce, or else (and more often) as an employee of a firm who had been given the curious, and frequently unwelcome, job of editing and producing a magazine" (p. 193). Hence, the editors of employee magazines were often referred to as "in-house journalists" (Grabuschnig and Vizgirdaitė, 2015, p. 37).

This study aims to clarify whether editors of employee magazines see themselves more a journalists or PR practitioners and the extent to which they meet the expectations of management or take the interests of employees into account. Because editors of employee magazines work in a grey area between PR and journalism, potential role conflicts and the professional self-concept of journalists and PR practitioners are addressed below.

Employee magazines' editors' perceptions of their role and role conflicts
The process of professional socialisation creates, reinforces and modifies personality structures. This means that the working conditions have an impact on an individual's personality. Alongside this socialisation effect, selection effects can also occur: people choose working environments that correspond to their personality structure. During the professional socialisation process, employees learn to act appropriately for their role and internalise patterns of behaviour typical of that role. Important factors include the duration of exposure, i.e. how long and intensively one is exposed to a particular working situation, and the initial effect, which means that the most adaptation occurs at the start of an activity. The choice of profession and the professional socialisation thus shape the expectations a worker has of himself (Frese, 1982).

As well as these expectations of themselves, however, individuals are also shaped by the expectations of others. Characteristic sets of expectations like this allow certain social roles to emerge (Biddle, 1979). Each person takes on various social roles over the course of her/his life. As well as a professional role within a company, for example, each person also has a private role in her/his family or group of friends, although this is not relevant in this study (Burns, 1979; Markus and Wurf, 1987; Marsh and Shavelson, 1985). Assuming a social role leads to behavioural expectations of that position, known as role expectations (Biddle, 1979). Hence, we ask the following research question:

RQ1. What expectations of different peer groups do editors of employee magazines feel exposed to?

Where expectations are inconsistent, conflicts can arise (Goode, 1960). Inter-role conflicts occur when different external expectations are placed on two or more roles held by the same person. A typical example is the conflict between professional and family roles: both family and professional contacts might expect a person to be available in the late afternoon. At the point where PR and journalism intersect, Fröhlich *et al.* (2013) investigate inter-role conflicts of freelance journalists with secondary employment in PR. Their work shows that those surveyed were aware of the conflict potential of working simultaneously in journalism and PR, and consider these conflicts as aversive and strenuous.

This study does not focus on this kind of inter-role conflict, however, but concentrates on conflicting expectations within a single social role, known as intra-role conflicts. In this, those affected perceive contradictory expectations of external peer groups for one and the same role. This might be differing expectations of a professional role, for example. Belz *et al.* (1989) anticipate potential intra-role conflicts among PR staff. PR practitioners are subjected to the expectations of their own company that they communicate problem topics in a restrained way, for example, while journalists expect comprehensive and transparent representation. No research has yet been done into the potential role conflicts faced by editors of employee magazines. This is despite this being a huge source of potential conflict, as the company management and the employees have different expectations of the editors.

If the expectations of external reference persons are not met, this can result in social sanctions. Role conflicts can put a strain on the persons affected, leading to stress and reduced job satisfaction (Goode, 1960; Miles, 1976; Obermaier and Koch, 2015). Those affected therefore use various strategies to reduce or eliminate the strain caused by role conflicts. On the one hand, they might use prevention strategies to avoid conflict in advance. On the other hand, they make efforts to reduce conflicts that have already arisen using coping strategies (Fröhlich *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, we ask the following research question:

> *RQ2.* Where do editors of employee magazines see conflicts and which strategies do they employ to resolve them?

Meeting the expectations of the company management is similar to the work of a PR practitioner, a key part of whose work is the image function: representing an organisation in a positive light and convincing its stakeholders of the company's opinion (Neijens and Smit, 2006; Reich, 2010). In this role, PR practitioners see themselves as representing sectional interests of the client. Editors of employee magazines, who set themselves the goal of meeting these expectations, thus adopt the management perspective (Clampitt *et al.*, 1986). Addressing the expectations of readers, on the other hand, is more of a journalistic activity, as it implies objective and critical reporting on various topics (Hanitzsch, 2011; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1996; Willnat and Weaver, 2014; Willnat *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, we are interested in the following research question:

> *RQ3.* What objectives do editors of employee magazines pursue in their work?

The perception of the expectations of the environment and of the objectives one pursues with one's work produce a subjective understanding of one's own role: the self-concept. This is constantly developing and can be continuously reconstructed (Burns, 1979; Marsh and Shavelson, 1985). In the case of editors of employee magazines, the expectations of management and the magazine's readers could shape the professional self-concept of the editor, for example. But does the self-concept of employee magazine editors correspond more to the field of journalism or PR? And do the editors tend to represent the interests of the employees or the company management? We believe that proximity to the management could be an important factor for the self-perception of the editors. Taking from similar conceptions of "power distance" in the area of journalism studies (e.g. Hanitzsch, 2007; Hallin and Mancini, 2004), editors who are close to management's decision-making processes might better understand and probably even feel obliged to defend the rationales behind the decisions made. This may contrast with editors on the other side of the spectrum who are more remote from management and hence may see their role more in terms of "watchdogs" opposed to management, at least being more devoted to the interests of their (employee) readerships. These objectives and expectations form the basis of the self-concept that is at the heart of our last research question:

> *RQ4.* How do editors of employee magazines view their own professional role?

Method

Due to the openness of the research questions, we opted for qualitative semi-structured interviews. Our interview guide consisted of 18 main questions and multiple follow-up questions to help ensure we addressed all relevant issues. Prior to being interviewed, we sent participants a fact sheet explaining the purpose of the study. We began all interviews by introducing ourselves and the project. Then, we asked about editors' day-to-day work, their professional image and the objectives they pursue in their work. The focus then moved on to the expectations of management and the readers (i.e. employees). Finally, the editors were asked about specific conflicts and how they would handle them.

In selecting potential participants, our first step was to compile a list of employee magazines in Germany. Subsequently, we drew a random sample from this list and researched contact data online and in the magazines' imprint. In sum, we contacted editors from 43 German companies from various sectors and asked whether they would be willing to participate in the study. Thus, this study focusses on permanent employees and companies and does not take other organisations (e.g. NGOs or political parties) and freelancers into account. From the larger list of positive initial responses, we further reduced the sample by ensuring to have sufficient variance among the interviewees: We wanted our sample to be diverse regarding age groups, positions and circulation rates of the magazines. This left us with 15 editors who agreed to an interview.

Two thoroughly trained research assistants carried out the interviews via telephone. All interviews were conducted between 7 December 2015 and 7 January 2016. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. They lasted approximately 30 minutes on average.

The transcripts of the interviews were evaluated using qualitative content analysis. We draughted categories prior to the data collection. After transcribing the interviews, we repeatedly combed through the data to gain an understanding of the editors' reflections. In a first step, we studied the interviews independently. In a second step, we discussed patterns and perceptions in different meetings. After the initial readings and the meetings, we evaluated and revised the categories and re-categorised the data. In a third step, we defined the categories in multiple examinations of the material more precisely, compressed and summarised the categories, ultimately resulting in a comprehensive category system into which the material can be structured. We defined and described each category in detail to ensure consistency.

Of the 15 people surveyed, 4 were male and 11 female. The age range was 27-53 years. All interviewees were university graduates, holding positions from recent graduates to chief editors (an overview can be seen in Table I in the results section). The length of time they had worked on an employee magazine varied from 1 to 25 years. Therewith, we cover a wide range of editors to represent the actual working environment in editorial offices of employee magazines.

Results

Perception of expectations (RQ1)

Those surveyed named two groups of people in particular who have expectations of their work: the management on one side and the company employees on the other, who also form the magazine's core readership. Both groups have both implicit and explicit expectations of the editors, some of which are similar to one another. For example, both groups agree that the employee magazine should provide information on current issues, follow decisions and change processes, and communicate a corporate identity and culture. There are also consistent expectations regarding certain formal aspects of this kind of magazine, including the structure of the magazine, the fact that certain topics appear regularly, periodical publication and publication in print. However, some of the expectations also contradict one another. Below we will explain where these kinds of contrary position meet.

Editor type	Participant	Gender	Age	Years working for the company	Circulation of the employee magazine	Position chief editor
Management ambassador	B	m	59	25	7,400	
	E	f	–	2	16,000	
	G	f	27	3	4,600	
	M	f	30	1	3,200	
	O	f	37	5	1,200	x
Employee representative	A	m	53	15	19,000	x
	C	f	27	2	1,300	
	D	m	54	20	80,000	
	F	m	50	3	60,000	x
	I	f	29	4	21,500	
Mediator	H	f	39	12	20,000	x
	L	f	29	4	60,000	
	N	f	30	2	5,000	
Service provider	J	f	32	12	6,700	
	K	f	28	1.5	2,700	

Table I.
Distribution of the participants across the four editor types

Those surveyed consistently state that the management has very specific expectations of the editors of employee magazines. According to them, these expectations are the result of the high value the management places on the magazine, as demonstrated, for example, by the management's desire to have a say in the magazine's content and approve certain texts before publication. The expectations relate particularly to the choice of topics and the way certain content is framed. When it comes to choosing topics, managers often approach editors with specific suggestions that they want implemented and included in the magazine in line with a prescribed list of priorities. This also includes the question of the managers' presence, with "colleagues, especially at management level, always very keen to appear in the magazine" (Participant G). With regard to how topics are framed, there is an expectation of positive reports on the company itself and its products and services. After all, the employee magazine is "an instrument of company management, company steering and […] not an independent medium" (Participant B). As justification for the need for positivity, the management often quotes the fact that public image can also be shaped by an internal medium.

The editors believe that the magazine is also highly valued by employees. They base this opinion on the high rates of participation in activities and the great willingness to appear as protagonists in the magazine. In addition, the editors state that they regularly receive positive feedback, for example, directly or through employee surveys. The employees sometimes have differing expectations, as they are not a homogeneous group, differing in terms of age, education and position in the hierarchy, among other aspects. For example, expectations regarding the text editing and certain focus topics vary: different groups of readers need to be able to follow the content and every reader should "discover something he finds attractive and interesting in every issue" (Participant C). When it comes to the content, the readers demand objective, sophisticated and critical reporting and authentic texts that reflect reality. Their interests also need to be represented in the medium. In order to meet all these demands, the editors attempt to see things from their readers' perspective and prepare topics critically. "If I just present [the employees] with the typical blah blah from the management, our paper is not credible and the topic does not come across" (Participant D).

Considering the expectations of employees on one side and management on the other shows that the editors are subjected to sometimes-contradictory demands. Management puts limits on their choice of topics, transparency and the way they prepare texts. After all,

unlike the employees, whose only form of redress comes in the form of not reading the magazine or ignoring requests, the management as a client has various sanction options at its disposal, all the way up to financial and staffing consequences. Based on the expectations they perceive, those surveyed can be placed on a continuum between strong orientation on the interests of the management and employees, and see this challenge as a "tightrope walk" (Participant B) or "balancing act" (Participant L).

Role conflicts (RQ2)
The perception of such contrary expectations is the origin of role conflicts (Biddle, 1979; Goode, 1960). But despite the sometimes-contradictory expectations the management and employees place on the editors, the majority of those surveyed state that conflict is a rare occurrence in their everyday work. However, all those surveyed recognise the potential for conflict and consider balancing reader orientation and management interests a daily challenge. This applies both to the choice of topics and to the way the articles are written.

When it comes to choosing topics, the desire of the readers to see critical aspects and problems addressed collides with the management's expectation that certain topics will be avoided: "I often reach my limits. I would like to cover more critical things, but as soon as you start to look for critical topics, you unfortunately can't find anyone who […] will actually say anything critical" (Participant I). The process of finding topics is therefore not independent, as "strategically important texts" often have to be taken into account and messages with a positive spin incorporated (Participant H). Finally, the editors avoid conflict by bypassing critical aspects from the offset: "As time goes by, it is so obvious and so embedded in your thinking that you stop feeling limited in what you can choose for the employee magazine, as it is clear from the start what you are allowed and not allowed to do" (Participant C). Potential for conflict is also seen when topics are researched. Critical questions are not wanted, while certain messages absolutely have to be communicated in the text: "And there is often friction within this coordination process, as a good, journalistic text that is pleasant to read does not always communicate all the messages that the expert sitting opposite you wants communicated" (Participant H). Critical reporting and transparency are therefore only possible to a limited extent, although some editors would like to see them used more often.

The fact that conflicts rarely arise in everyday working life despite these differing expectations is down to a range of prevention strategies used by the editors to avoid conflict before it arises. When looking for topics, for example, they discuss closely with the various stakeholders in order to prevent conflict. Participant E describes how some can be evaded in advance through discussion. In addition, texts are created in such a way as to meet the demands of both stakeholders: "There are certain formulations that you avoid automatically" (Participant G). According to those surveyed, critical topics can also be diffused by the choice of how they are presented: while a portrait or report is less suitable, critical voices could be communicated in a comment piece or column.

However, it is impossible to avoid conflict in the workplace completely. Where it does arise, those surveyed try to use mediation techniques and arrive at a compromise. "Well, you just have to try to find the best possible solution for all parties. That is usually a compromise that everyone can live with" (Participant N). In addition, those interviewed stated that they convince colleagues using arguments, provide advice and involve line managers where necessary. Ultimately, however, this kind of conflict situation is part of everyday working life and has to be accepted, they say. This is achieved when both sides make concessions. "I have come to terms with it now. You cannot get hung up on an individual word […]. If you love your text and fight over every word, you will wear yourself out. Healthy pragmatism is always a good approach" (Participant H). Some editors consider the potential for conflict a frustrating part of the job, while others an exciting one.

Objectives of the editors (RQ3)

In their work, editors of employee magazines pursue similar goals to both PR practitioners and journalists. Some editors whose role entails goals similar to those of PR stated that the company in question is always in the background as the client. "Certain messages come from above and have to be processed and communicated" (Participant A). When this is the objective, the focus is therefore on taking account of management interests, in particular efforts to motivate employees and encourage them to identify with the company. Through the magazine, employees should feel more integrated into the company and see themselves as part of something bigger. They should be proud of their company, which encourages them to apply themselves more. "The main purpose is definitely to inform people and thus to create loyalty and a sense of identification with the company" (Participant L). In order to achieve these goals, some editors see their work as similar to the approach of PR practitioners. They emphasise that they do not have the last word when decisions are taken, and describe approval and coordination processes as characteristic of their everyday work. As a result, they see their approach as different from journalistic activities: "If I approached it as a journalist, I would approach it more objectively […]. It is a different job from journalism" (Participant O).

In contrast, other editors emphasise that their work pursues more journalistic goals. Some of those surveyed equate PR with promotional texts, from which they clearly distance themselves. Instead, they pursue the goal of writing sophisticated texts that also examine critical issues. For Participant A, for example, the priority is "honesty and putting the situation of the employees clearly at the heart of reporting", while Participant I also tries to "not only [depict] the upper levels, but especially the lower levels". The everyday work of the editors therefore demands many journalistic skills, and all those surveyed mentioned these in various forms. This includes core journalistic skills such as text work, finding topics and a sense of what matters: "You have to have a nose for topics, for what concerns the company" (Participant M). Journalistic standards are the critical justification for their choices in their day-to-day work: "We want, and that is our personal standard, to provide high-quality journalistic work" (Participant C). The reader should feel that she/he is receiving good information that is objective and critical to a certain extent, said Participant O. The goal is to provide neutral information and "not to be a voice of the management" (Participant N). These journalistic standards often cause a tense relationship between the editors themselves and their role as editors of an employee magazine.

Some of the goals stated are not specific to PR or journalism, but apply to both equally. For example, the editors emphasise the role of information. An employee magazine is "primarily an information medium" (Participant K) and should therefore also offer background and analysis, as well as covering the latest developments at the company. The editors value a variety of topics and high-quality articles that communicate complex content in an easy-to-understand way. In their view, an employee magazine should cover a wide range of company topics; as a result, some of those surveyed consider knowledge of the sector and the company as important to their activities. As well as variety of content, some editors also named a high entertainment factor as a goal: "The employee magazine definitely has to be interesting and varied" (Participant O). Creative text work and a good writing style are therefore fundamental skills for half of those surveyed, essential in order to work in their profession. The editors also see communication skills as essential for their job. They are communicators who approach people openly, are curious and have a certain insight into human nature (Participant G). Such skills are acquired during professional socialisation, in order to achieve the relevant goals. It was found that many of those surveyed had worked as journalists in the past, while experience in the PR sector was rare.

Self-concept of the editors (RQ4)
In the final phase, we examine the self-concept of the editors surveyed. We approach this question from two perspectives: the different expectations held of the way the role is conducted, and the goals that those surveyed want to achieve through their work. It is clear that there is no uniform self-image of the role, but that those surveyed describe the role very differently. First, their view depends on which stakeholders guide their decisions. While some of those surveyed predominantly follow the interests of the management, others stick more closely to the employees' expectations (cf. Chapter 4.1). This continuum between considering the expectations of the management and/or the employees serves as the first parameter for creating a typology of those surveyed. Second, the self-concept of the editors also develops from the goals they pursue in their work. Some of these goals and the associated approaches to their work can be attributed to the field of PR, while others to journalism (cf. Chapter 4.3). This continuum forms the second parameter on which the typology below is based. Both comparative dimensions – orientation on the expectations of management or employees on the one hand and classification in the field of journalism or PR on the other – form a two-dimensional parameter space. We positioned each person surveyed in this parameter space along the two comparative dimensions based on his/her responses, before grouping them. The parameter space allows the formation of four types (cf. Figure 1).

Five of those surveyed can be classified as management ambassadors (B, E, G, M, O). In their role as editors of employee magazines, they are "tied very closely to the management" (Participant B). They are therefore guided by their expectations that the corporate strategy will be reflected in the employee magazine; in case of doubt, a management ambassador lets the interests of the readers take a back seat. She/he perceives the magazine as a "management tool" that is developed together with the management (Participant G). Accordingly, it is primarily not a "newspaper for employees but […] a management instrument" (Participant E). However, the management ambassador is well aware that the readers expect transparency and critical reporting. Their everyday work is characterised by extensive coordination cycles and approval processes, which this type accepts without criticism. This also contributes to the fact
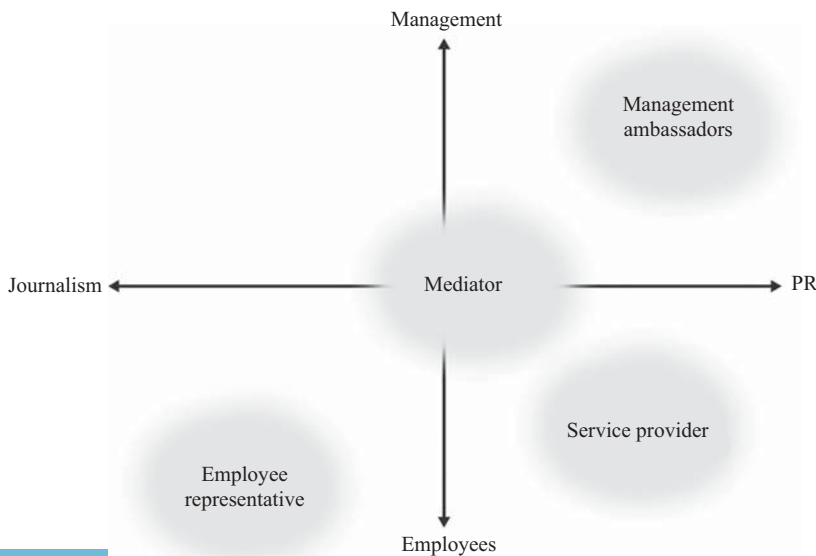

Figure 1.
Typology of editors of
employee magazines

that editors of this type distinctly feel part of the PR profession and distance themselves from journalism. For example, they explicitly emphasise the strategic side of communication and see their main goal as "putting the image of the company in a positive light" (Participant B). This is difficult to reconcile with a journalistic view of the job: "If I approached it as a journalist, I would approach it more objectively" (Participant O). However, the editors do not see themselves merely as management puppets, not least thanks to their fear that employees would no longer read "purely a voice of the management" (Participant E). They therefore make efforts to appeal to the employees target group through professional and creative text work and base their choice of topics on the employees' interests.

Another five of those surveyed can be classified as employee representatives (A, C, D, F, I). All editors of this type position themselves "very clearly on the side of the readers" (Participant F). When choosing topics, they are guided by the interests of the employees, aiming to reflect their problems and concerns in easy-to-understand language: "We want to cover topics that really concern the employees; […] to put the employees […] at the heart of our reporting" (Participant A). For example, "not only the upper levels, but especially the lower levels" should be depicted (Participant I). This positioning cannot always be reconciled with the expectations of the management. "That sometimes means that you really have to fight […] to write from the point of view of and for the readers and to make clear that this is fundamentally different from writing from the sender's point of view" (Participant A). This fight for independence can also be seen in the fact that this type of editor sees her/his work as journalism; some even describe themselves as journalists (e.g. Participant C: "I am a journalist"). Working in a journalistic way is "the standard we have here, in the knowledge that we cannot always meet this standard" (Participant A). This standard is reflected in the reports, for example, through "critical scrutiny of topics" (Participant I). In contrast to management ambassadors, this type of editor aims not to highlight the positive, but "to report on topics neutrally" at least, if not critically (Participant C).

Between the management ambassador and the employee representative is the mediator type, as which three of those surveyed are classified (H, L, N). This type makes very nuanced statements in the interview, wanting to meet the expectations of both the management and employees and making efforts to accommodate both sides: "It is definitely important to find the balance; to write not just for the management, but also for employees" (Participant L). In order to cater to the employee target group, the mediator makes efforts to achieve objective reporting. "We also make sure that what we write is not too PR-heavy. Employees can smell PR; they need authentic texts" (Participant H). It must also always be possible to reconcile journalistic standards with the assignment from management, this group says: "Ideally it is a consensus, usually it is a compromise between the demands of the target group, journalistic standards, and the specifications and conditions set by the company management, which you cannot simply ignore" (Participant H). This halfway house position is also seen in the position on the comparative dimension between PR and journalism. In his/her everyday work, the mediator fluctuates between journalism and PR-specific standards; although they "have journalistic standards, [they] are practicing applied PR" (Participant H). The mediator sees this tension as part of her/his job and accepts it: "It is like this throughout corporate communication, you have to live with it. It is why you are not a journalist" (Participant L).

Two of those surveyed can be assigned to the service provider type (J and K). Like the employee representative, she/he sees himself as on the side of the readers. The service provider's editing work is guided predominantly by the target group, and she/he tries to "always see things from the reader's point of view" (Participant K). She/he therefore focusses on stories about people and divisions within the company, written accordingly with "different writing styles, good photographs, good storytelling" (Participant J). The service provider's

stated aim is for people to enjoy reading the employee magazine and to find interesting and varied texts within it. This type feels more part of the PR profession. As an employee of the company, she/he is ultimately obligated to fulfil the assignment from management to pass their messages on to the employees. However, as a service provider for the employees, she/he sees her/his core role as preparing these topics and texts in an attractive and entertaining way. This type emphasises the necessity of designing the layout creatively, especially using imagery in the form of appropriate photographs and charts.

The small sample does not allow generalisations on the distribution of editors across the four editor types. However, we checked if there could be any possible relations between the editor type and specific sociodemographic variables. As can be seen in Table I, the four types do not differ regarding gender, age, years working for the company, position or circulation rates of the respective magazine.

Discussion
The present study focussed on editors of employee magazines. We were able to confirm that they are subject to contradictory expectations yielded by two groups. On the one hand, management demands that certain messages are conveyed appropriately to the readers and that the company is depicted in a rather benign light. On the other hand, employees, in their role as readers of the magazine, expect transparent, reliable, and even critical reporting. Our study shows that the editors are aware of these different expectations and make efforts to accommodate both sides. They, thus find themselves in an intermediate position between management and employees, increasing the potential for conflict in editorial coordination and approval processes, in particular.

When asked about specific conflicts in their everyday work, most of the participants did not perceive them as serious disturbances. However, tension appears to be a constant companion in their profession, as all the editors describe situations in which conflicts arise. Many of them avoid conflicts, often implicitly, using prevention strategies such as mitigating texts, avoiding certain formulations or discussing with those affected in advance. Where conflict arises despite these efforts, most of the editors try to mediate the situation by looking for a compromise between the affected stakeholders.

In their work, the editors pursue some goals that are similar to journalistic aims and others that include classic PR functions. The latter is seen in the efforts to increase the employees' identification with the company, enhance their motivation and present the company in a positive light. The more journalistic side of their work, however, becomes apparent when they mention goals, such as reporting objectively, independently and critically and providing information on unpleasant or controversial developments. These divergent goals also indicate that there is no such thing as a typical editor of an employee magazine, but that a distinction needs to be made between different types.

We did this by taking two dimensions into account – orientation on the expectations of the management or employees on the one hand and classification in the journalistic or PR profession on the other hand. This resulted in four main types. Management ambassadors is our name for those editors who are guided by the expectations of management and whose view of their profession tends towards PR. This type sees himself as especially obligated to cover the topics specified by management and to present the company in a positive light. The employee representative holds the opposite view of both these aspects. She/he sees himself as a kind of journalist within the company, conducting critical research and offering employees the chance to have their say. In between these two types is the mediator. She/he makes efforts to cater to the expectations of the management and the employees equally and sees her/his role as halfway between journalism and PR. The fourth type to emerge is the service provider. She/he sees himself as providing a service to employees by preparing company-related topics in an interesting and entertaining way.

The study provides several practical implications. First, companies should try to employ different types of editors working for their employee magazines. This may ensure that both stakeholder groups, management and employees, would have a contact person they can reach out to and both sides would see their interests represented. Moreover, this mix in the editorial team could also help to cover stories from different viewpoints and thus achieve a balance between competing, sometimes opposing perspectives (i.e. management's view vs employees' view).

This recommendation closely connects to a second implication of our study: our data suggest that a more open dialogue within the company could reduce internal conflicts. Editors of employee magazines should openly address the sometimes-divergent expectations towards colleagues and management during everyday business and also make them explicitly salient in the magazines. By doing so, editors show their readership that they are aware of their conflictual role and that they seek to find a balance between the different stakeholders.

A final implication of our study is that management as well as editors should be aware of editors' potential role conflicts and take them seriously, as role conflicts can lead to severe consequences: editors could experience role ambiguity and role stress because they would not know which expectations they should meet. This, in turn, can negatively impact their job satisfaction (McFarland, 2003; Obermaier and Koch, 2015; Örtqvist and Wincent, 2006), resulting in low working efficiency, increased staff turnover, workplace deviance or reduced commitment (Saari and Judge, 2004; Wegge *et al.*, 2007).

Our study holds certain limitations that should be acknowledged. As regards with methodology, the study pursued transferability and extrapolations rather than generalisability of the findings (Patton, 2002) and therefore used a qualitative approach. Consequently, the typology presented in this paper has been developed inductively from the interview material. Therefore, we do not claim completeness of the types potentially existing next to our main types. As ours is a classification based on two dimensions representing a continuum with answers from each participant ranked in comparison to others, the four main types are mutually exclusive. However, this does not mean that every single editor of an employee magazine can be unambiguously classified into one of these types. It might be that future studies come across editors with a cluster of traits that does not match with one of our types. Moreover, editors might also shift between different types throughout different stages of their careers. Hence, future studies should try to refine the typology. Nevertheless, we see our study as a starting point for further exploration.

Furthermore, limitations also apply to our sample that does not represent all kinds of editors who work for an employee magazine. For instance, we only included companies in our sample and did not analyse other organisations such as NGOs or political. The aim was, however, to recruit a most diverse set of editors representing different voices and experiences; our interviewees thus differ in age and length of time they have worked for employee magazines. Widening the sample also provides room for future research. Closely linked to this limitation, we acknowledge that the data might also be biased due to the use of self-report measures: Our interview partners may have assessed their own behaviour more positively than the behaviour of others (illusory superiority; see Alicke 1985; Hoorens and Harris 1998). The latter may also stem from participants answering along a perception of social desirability, as face-to-face interviews are particularly conducive to socially demanded responses and self-serving biases.

In addition to these potential improvements, the study may provide for further inspiration. First, quantitative data would offer the opportunity to validate the typology, for example, by using cluster analyses. Representative surveys of employee magazines' editors could help determine which types prevail. Second, surveys among management and readers of employee magazines may provide insight into the actual expectations these two

stakeholder groups opposite to editors. Finally, researchers could combine content analyses and survey data to investigate how certain types of editors differ in the construal of the actual content provided to their various, yet differently valued readerships.

References

Alicke, M.D. (1985), "Global self-evaluation as determined by the desirability and controllability of trait adjectives", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 49 No. 6, pp. 1621-1630.

Argenti, P.A. (2009), *Corporate Communication*, McGraw-Hill, Boston, MA.

Belz, A., Talbott, A.D. and Starck, K. (1989), "Using role theory to study cross perceptions of journalists and public relations practitioners", *Public Relations Research Annual*, Vol. 1 Nos 1-4, pp. 125-139.

Biddle, B.J. (1979), *Role Theory. Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors*, Academic Press, New York, NY, San Francisco, CA and London.

Burns, R.B. (1979), *The Self-Concept: Theory, Measurement, Development and Behaviour*, Longman, London.

Clampitt, P.G., Crevcoure, J.M. and Hartel, R.L. (1986), "Exploratory research on employee publications", *Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 5-17.

Click, J.W. (1967), "Employee magazines in the public relations program", *Public Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 43-52.

D'Aprix, R.M. (1979), "The believable house organ", *Management Review*, Vol. 68 No. 2, pp. 23-28.

De Ridder, J. (2003), "Organisational communication and supportive employees", *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 20-30.

Dolphin, R.R. (2005), "Internal communications: today's strategic imperative", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 171-190.

Elving, W.J.L. (2005), "The role of communication in organisational change", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 129-138.

Frese, M. (1982), "Occupational socialization and psychological development: an underemphasized research perspective in industrial psychology", *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, Vol. 55 No. 3, pp. 209-224.

Friedl, J. and Tkalac Verčič, A. (2011), "Media preferences of digital natives' internal communication: a pilot study", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 37 No. 1, pp. 84-86.

Fröhlich, R., Koch, T. and Obermaier, M. (2013), "What's the harm in moonlighting? A qualitative survey on the role conflicts of free-lance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR", *Media Culture and Society*, Vol. 35 No. 7, pp. 809-829.

Goode, W.T. (1960), "A theory of role strain", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 483-496.

Grabuschnig, M. and Vizgirdaitė, J. (2015), "The role of employee magazines as an internal communication tool in international organisations (case of automotive industry in Germany and South Africa)", *Informacijos Mokslai*, Vol. 72 No. 1, pp. 33-55.

Hallin, D.C. and Mancini, P. (2004), *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hanitzsch, T. (2007), "Deconstructing journalism culture: towards a universal theory", *Communication Theory*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 367-385.

Hanitzsch, T. (2011), "Populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents and opportunist facilitators: professional milieus, the journalistic field and autonomy in 18 countries", *The International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 73 No. 6, pp. 477-494.

Hayes, E. (1922), "The employees' publication", *University Journal of Business*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 81-94.

Hoorens, V. and Harris, P. (1998), "Distortions in reports of health behaviors: the time span effect and illusory superiority", *Psychology and Health*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 451-466.

Kitchen, P.J. and Daly, F. (2002), "Internal communication during change management", *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 46-53.

McFarland, R.G. (2003), "Crisis of conscience: the use of coercive sales tactics and resultant felt stress in the sales person", *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 311-325.

Markus, H. and Wurf, E. (1987), "The dynamic self-concept: a social psychological perspective", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 299-337.

Marsh, H.W. and Shavelson, R. (1985), "Self-concept: its multifaceted, hierarchical structure", *Educational Psychologist*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 107-123.

Miles, R.H. (1976), "A comparison of the relative impacts of role perceptions of ambiguity and conflict by role", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 25-35.

Mishra, K., Boynton, L. and Mishra, A. (2014), "Driving employee engagement: the expanded role of internal communication", *International Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 51 No. 2, pp. 183-202.

Neijens, P. and Smit, E. (2006), "Dutch public relations practitioners and journalists: antagonists no more", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 232-240.

Obermaier, M. and Koch, T. (2015), "Mind the gap: consequences of inter-role conflicts of freelance journalists with secondary employment in the field of PR", *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 615-629.

Örtqvist, D. and Wincent, J. (2006), "Prominent consequences of role stress: a meta-analytic review", *International Journal of Stress Management*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 399-422.

Patton, M.Q. (2002), *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Pavlik, J.V., Nwosu, I.E. and Ettel, D.G. (1982), "Why employees read company newsletters", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 23-33.

Quirke, B. (2008), *Making the Connections: Using Internal Communication to Turn Strategy into Action*, Gower, Burlington, VT.

Raney, E.T. (1959), "How readable is your employee publication?", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 437-459.

Reich, Z. (2010), "Measuring the impact of PR on published news in increasingly fragmented news environments. A multifaceted approach", *Journalism Studies*, Vol. 11 No. 6, pp. 799-816.

Ruck, K. and Welch, W. (2011), "Valuing internal communication; management and employee perspectives", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 294-302.

Saari, L.M. and Judge, T.A. (2004), "Employee attitudes and job satisfaction", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 395-407.

Smith, B. (1961), "Professional status for the industrial editor?", *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 193-198.

Smith, L. and Mounter, P. (2008), *Effective Internal Communications*, Kogan Page, London.

Sparks, S.D. (1997), "Employee newsletter readability for a large public utility", *Public Relations Quarterly*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 37-40.

Tkalac Verčič, A., Verčič, D. and Sriramesh, K. (2012), "Internal communication: definition, parameters, and the future", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 223-230.

Weaver, D.H. and Wilhoit, G.C. (1986), *The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and their Work*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN.

Weaver, D.H. and Wilhoit, G.C. (1996), *The American Journalist in the 1990s: U.S. News People at the End of an Era*, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.

Wegge, J., Schmidt, K.-H., Parkes, C. and Van Dick, R. (2007), "Taking a sickie: job satisfaction and job involvement as interactive predictors of absenteeism in a public organization", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 80 No. 1, pp. 77-89.

Welch, M. (2012), "Appropriateness and acceptability: employee perspectives of internal communication", *Public Relations Review*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 246-254.

Welch, M. (2015), "Dimensions of internal communication and implications for employee engagement", in Ruck, K. (Ed.), *Exploring Internal Communication: Towards Informed Employee Voice*, Gower, Franham, pp. 25-36.

Welch, M. and Jackson, P.R. (2007), "Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach", *Corporate Communications: An Internal Journal*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 177-198.

White, C., Vanc, A. and Stafford, G. (2010), "Internal communication, information satisfaction, and sense of community: the effect of personal influence", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 65-84.

Willnat, L. and Weaver, D.H. (2014), "The American journalist in the digital age: key findings", School of Journalism, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN.

Willnat, L., Weaver, D.H. and Choi, J. (2013), "The global journalist in the twenty-first century. A cross-national study of journalistic competencies", *Journalism Practice*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 163-183.

Yaxley, H. and Ruck, K. (2015), "Tracking the rise and rise of internal communication", in Ruck, K. (Ed.), *Exploring Internal Communication: Towards Informed Employee Voice*, Gower, Franham, pp. 3-14.

Yeomans, L. (2009), "Internal communication", in Tench, R. and Yeomans, L. (Eds), *Exploring Public Relations*, Pearson Education, Harlow, pp. 316-337.

Corresponding author
Thomas Koch can be contacted at: Thomas.Koch@uni-mainz.de

www.