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Internal Communication in Small and Medium Enterprises in Vietnam: Role and Influencing Factors

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the role of factors in the internal communication of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam. Data were collected through surveys of employees working in private and state-owned enterprises. Survey data were processed and analyzed using SPSS software to test the proposed model. The results indicate that certain factors significantly influence internal communication within enterprises. Among these, Internal Culture has the strongest impact, followed by Feedback and Leadership style. Information Characteristics were demonstrated to have the weakest influence on the relationship with Internal Communication. Some implications and limitations drawn from the research findings are also provided.

Keywords: Internal communication, Enterprises, Vietnam

1. Introduction

In recent times, the outbreak of COVID-19 has negatively impacted the business operations of many enterprises. The government has implemented timely and appropriate support policies that have helped many enterprises restore their activities. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, the number of temporarily suspended enterprises is 73.8 thousand, an increase of 34.3% compared to the previous year; nearly 50.8 thousand enterprises have ceased operations awaiting dissolution procedures, an increase of 5.5%; 18.6 thousand enterprises have completed dissolution procedures, up 11.2%. On average, 11.9 thousand enterprises withdraw from the market each month in 2022. This indicates that many enterprises are still facing difficulties, exacerbated by fierce competition from the integrated market as well as political instability in some countries affecting the costs of raw materials and management and transportation costs for companies. Additionally, consumer and governmental demands for higher standards of quality and environmental consciousness contribute to increasing challenges for enterprises. One factor seen as both an opportunity and a challenge in the modern era for enterprises is technology. Technology helps increase productivity, reduce labor time, and enhance the effectiveness of business marketing activities. However, it also poses significant challenges by shortening product lifecycles, making product information easily understandable to customers across all product types, and facilitating price and service comparisons between brands. Therefore, modern enterprises strive to attract and retain customers through various marketing tools. However, the first thing enterprises need to do is to maintain a loyal and efficient workforce, as employees are equally important customers. This compels enterprises to have many important strategies, among which internal communication is considered a fundamental factor in achieving long-term cohesion among company members as well as the success of the enterprise (FitzPatrick, 2018) [3].

Internal communication plays a crucial role in the business operations of enterprises worldwide. In the renowned study by Hola (2012) [9], the author suggests the need to enhance activities related to internal communication. According to the author, this will promote improvements in business processes, enhance employee morale, strengthen the organization's image, foster unity among employees, and lead to effective business outcomes. Similarly, Gondal & Shahbaz (2012) [4] propose that internal communication and human resource management practices are closely related to organizational performance enhancement. Through sharing successes, collective efforts, and recognition, internal communication fosters strong bonding among employees and departments (Kalla, 2005; Meng & Berger, 2008) [13, 18]. Govender (2015) [5] and Lachotzki & Noteboom (2005) [14] suggest that internal communication channels can be used to address conflicts and gather feedback from employees, thereby helping organizations find effective solutions. Furthermore, internal communication facilitates transparency within the

enterprise by disseminating news, policies, and objectives openly (Verčič, 2019; Ferdous, 2008) [22, 2]. It also contributes to shaping the core values of the enterprise by conveying trust and cultural values in today's dynamic work environment. Thus, individuals can confidently express their thoughts, feedback, and suggestions regarding the enterprise's operations. All these aspects demonstrate the role of internal communication in connecting employees, sharing information, providing feedback, and promoting transparency in the business operations of enterprises.

Therefore, while this topic has been studied early on, there remains inconsistency regarding concepts and factors, attributed to differences in research contexts. Hence, this study will review previous research to identify differences and experiment with them in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises in Vietnam to deepen understanding of this concept. Additionally, it will provide important implications for both enterprises and academic scholars interested in this topic.

2. Literature review

Internal communication has been studied in many fields as it is seen as an important management tool for business leaders (Lachotzki & Noteboom, 2005) [14]. Therefore, numerous concepts have been proposed. It is viewed as a motivational tool that helps build a strong workforce and encourages diligent work ethic as well as reinforces organizational pride to gain competitive advantage (Gregory, 2004). This aligns with the spirit of Zaumane (2018) [26], who argues that employees are most concerned about changes within the business as they are a part of it. And internal communication reflects part of the human values and organizational culture where they work. Echoing this perspective, Miller & Fyke (2020) [19] assert that understanding the influence of the business context on communication processes and distinguishing communication symbols between businesses is essential. Welch (2011) [23] presents a modern view of internal communication, encompassing "internal line manager communication, internal team peer communication, internal project peer communication, and internal corporate communication." Similarly, Men and Bowen (2016) [17] suggest that internal communication is the coordination between relevant parties in the organization, interdependent in identifying and building positive and beneficial relationships. Thus, according to these authors, internal communication involves communication between leadership levels, communication among individuals within the organization, and internal communication in the spirit of the communication department. Conversely, internal communication is conveyed in a more specific sense regarding methods and tools in the studies of Welch (2012) [24], Verčič (2019) [22], and Hargie (2016) [8]. According to these authors, internal communication includes factors such as communication through messages, through written channels, through feedback, through the goals of the business. These types can be direct or indirect through intermediaries, via mail, video, text, and it also operates according to the hierarchical system of each business (Welch, 2012; Verčič, 2019 & Hargie, 2016) [24, 22, 8]. Therefore, to achieve effectiveness in internal communication, factors such as the business goals, transparency, consistency, or timeliness of communication, leadership style, and employee feedback will impact the effectiveness of internal communication within the business. Men and Jiang (2016) [16] argue that internal culture is closely associated with internal communication, simultaneously reflecting the essence and characteristics of the organization, which helps unite people within the company. Yue *et al*. (2021) [25] suggest that factors such as emotional culture internally are characterized by elements like pride, gratitude, companionship, or joy, which serve as identifiers of their organization. This study proposes it as an intermediate factor between company and leadership communications and employee company identification. Conversely, Tkalac Verčič's research (2019) [22] emphasizes the differential effectiveness of organizational culture with internal communication. Men and Jiang (2016) [16] also demonstrate a similar finding that internal culture influences the internal communication system of an organization. Furthermore, this study discovers that internal communication serves as an intermediary between authentic leadership and supportive culture in shaping the relationship between employees and the organization. This indicates that internal culture has varied impacts on internal communication in different contexts. For instance, studies on internal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the particular importance of internal supportive culture in internal communication. Employees in enterprises need understanding and sharing through internal communication channels within the company. Therefore, in this study, hypotheses are suggested as follows.

H1: Internal culture have an impact on internal communication within enterprises

A highly influential factor that demonstrates its impact on the quality of internal communication is information characteristics, including transparency, consistency, and the timeliness of information delivery. According to Jiménez-Castillo (2016) [12] and Men and Bowen (2016) [17], the timeliness of information in work and organizational contexts is a crucial aspect affecting information quality. Information related to business strategies, visions, or missions also requires transparency and consistency in the communication process with employees (Hume & Leonard, 2014) [10]. This facilitates employees' understanding of the organization's values and enables them to develop plans to align themselves with the business's goals and vision. Additionally, the transparency and consistency of information are part of the organizational culture's value to enhance the internal communication system of the enterprise. It instills a sense of security and trust in internal communication information, thereby fostering cohesive relationships among members within the enterprise. The logic above illustrates that the characteristics of information influence the quality of internal communication within the enterprise.

H2: Information characteristics have an impact on internal communication within enterprises.

Understanding and empathy among members within an enterprise are demonstrated through their feedback. This type of dialogue promotes overall voice and builds an efficient working environment. Therefore, Park *et al*., (2014) [21] argue that promoting two-way feedback fosters innovation and builds internal morale within the enterprise.

Grunig (1992) also asserts that feedback is an important factor in promoting internal communication relationships. Additionally, the effectiveness of feedback lies in constructing a positive and efficient working environment within an organization's internal communication. This means that when feedback is carefully considered and evaluated, it promotes the effectiveness of internal communication, thereby enhancing employee cohesion and work efficiency. This feedback allows employees to understand more clearly what they need to do, what they need to learn to complete their tasks. It also confirms their importance within the organization because they are being cared for. In this sense, an open and creative working environment helps them understand the company's goals and core values, as well as the leadership's work ethos. Moreover, feedback will be an effective tool in resolving conflicts within the organization, thereby enhancing understanding and achieving the effectiveness of internal communication channels. From this logic, it can be observed that feedback impacts the effectiveness of internal communication.

H3: Feedback have an impact on internal communication within enterprises.

According to Northouse (2021) [20], leader styles are considered as the way leaders demonstrate leadership and interact with their employees. Meanwhile, Collins *et al.* (2014) [1] and Collins (2018) [11] argue that it is how leaders motivate individuals within and outside the organization to achieve personal and organizational goals. Therefore, the leader styles of a business leader reflect their own values and behaviors, which can influence the manner and effectiveness of internal communication within that organization. This has been demonstrated in the research of Men (2015) [15]. His study investigated 545 employees from various businesses in the United States. The research results indicate that the use of different communication channels influences the quality of internal communication. Additionally, the communication style of leadership also impacts the quality of internal communication. And all of these factors further affect the outcomes of internal business relationships. This illustrates that the behavior and attitude of the leader influence the effectiveness of internal communication within the business itself. Based on these previous findings and the logic above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Leadership style have an impact on internal communication within enterprises.

Based on the above discussion, the following proposed framework are proposed:
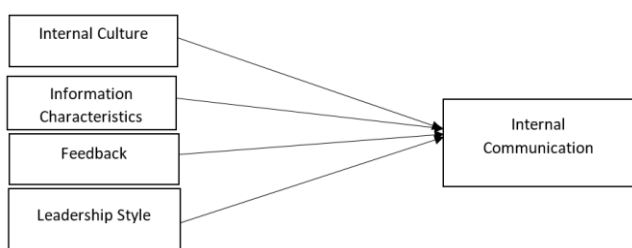
3. Methodology
The research underwent 2 phases to develop the proposed model. First, qualitative method was used to gather factors and observable variables of the study. A review of previous studies identified the importance of factors in the model as well as preliminarily identifying measurement items. After synthesizing the measurement items, some minor adjustments were made by 3 expert lecturers to review the items for suitability to the research context. Finally, quantitative research was conducted. In which, a questionnaire was sent to 300 customers in Danang via Google form. Convenience sampling method was used to send the survey. The sample size ensures a minimum of n=5*x, where x is the number of observable variables (Hair *et al.*, 1998). A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the level of customer agreement. Data collected will be encoded, filtered, and analyzed using SPSS software. Data collection took place from January to February 2024.

4. Results
4.1 Survey Sample
Out of the initial 358 questionnaires sent to customers, the team retrieved 327 valid responses, ensuring the validity of the sample size. Among these, there were 84 male respondents, accounting for 25.7%, and 74.3% were female. Regarding age distribution, individuals aged 25-35 accounted for 6.4%; 54.1% of the sample belonged to the age group of 36-45, while the remaining were in the age group of 45 to 60, totaling 129 individuals, representing 39.4%. The majority of respondents were from state-owned enterprises, comprising 68.8%, while the rest worked in private enterprises. Additionally, the research indicated that respondents had a high level of education, with 74% having a bachelor's degree, 10.7% holding a master's degree, and the remainder having secondary or vocational education. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Age				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
25-35	21	6.4	6.4	6.4
36-45	177	54.1	54.1	60.6
>45	129	39.4	39.4	100.0
Total	327	100.0	100.0	
Gender				
Male	84	25.7	25.7	25.7
Female	243	74.3	74.3	100.0
Total	327	100.0	100.0	
Jobs				
Private Com.	102	31.2	31.2	31.2
Public Com.	225	68.8	68.8	100
high school and college education level	50	15.3	15.3	15.3
master's degree	35	10.7	10.7	26.0
University degree	242	74.0	74.0	100.0
Total	327	100.0	100.0	

4.2 Results
Reliability test of scales
The results show that the factors internal culture, Information characteristic, Feedback and Leader style, and

Internal Communication all have observed variables that meet the requirements (item-total correlation >0.3, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (.884-.915) > 0.6 (Nunnally and Burnstein, 1994), and the Alpha coefficient if deleted item is smaller than the total Cronbach alpha. Only the Alpha coefficient if deleted item ICh3 of the Information characteristic factor > Cronbach alpha total, so this item is removed.

According to Hoang Trong & Chu Nguyen Mong Ngoc (2008), Cronbach's alpha from 0.8 to 1 indicates good measurement, while from 0.7 to 0.8 is acceptable. Comparing with the results above, the next step of factor analysis will be conducted.

Exploration Factor analysis
After cleaning the data with the study sample, exploratory factor analysis will be used to proceed to the next steps. The observed variables in the proposed model are entered to test convergence by factor.

The exploratory factor analysis of the proposed research model with 25 observed variables yielded the following results. Both the KMO coefficient and the significance level of Bartlett's test meet the requirements (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988), with a KMO coefficient of .886 ≥ 0.5 and a significance level of Bartlett's test of 0.00 ≤ 0.05; Additionally, the Eigenvalues are 1.281 and the factor loadings are all greater than 0.5. Factor analysis has extracted 4 factors from 16 observed variables, with a total variance explained of 73.360% (greater than 50%), meeting the requirements and consistent with the hypothesis of the scale components (Hair *et al*., 2006).

Table 2: Exploration Factor analysis

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	10.637	42.548	42.548	10.637	42.548	42.548	3.985	15.939	15.939
2	2.624	10.497	53.045	2.624	10.497	53.045	3.830	15.319	31.258
3	2.045	8.180	61.225	2.045	8.180	61.225	3.793	15.172	46.429
4	1.753	7.011	68.236	1.753	7.011	68.236	3.559	14.236	60.665
5	1.281	5.125	73.360	1.281	5.125	73.360	3.174	12.695	73.360
6	.707	2.829	76.190						

Testing the research model
Correlation

Table 3: Correlations

		ICu	ICh	ICo	Fb	LS
ICu	Pearson Correlation	1	.479**	.568**	.371**	.509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	327	327	327	327	327
ICh	Pearson Correlation	.479**	1	.583**	.445**	.413**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	327	327	327	327	327
ICo	Pearson Correlation	.568**	.583**	1	.549**	.559**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	327	327	327	327	327
Fb	Pearson Correlation	.371**	.445**	.549**	1	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	327	327	327	327	327
LS	Pearson Correlation	.509**	.413**	.559**	.376**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	327	327	327	327	327
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

Examining the correlation between independent variables with the dependent variable and between independent variables themselves needs to be conducted to initially test for multicollinearity. The results are shown in Table 4. In the research model, the independent variables have a relatively strong correlation with the dependent variable (Hair *et al*., 2006), with 4 independent variables having a positively correlated relationship with the dependent variable, with p-values of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 5% (0.000 ≤ 0.05). Thus, rejecting the null hypothesis means there is a correlation between the two variables. Moreover, there are no pairs of independent variables with a significance level less than 0.05 and an absolute value of the correlation coefficient greater than 0.7, indicating a low possibility of multicollinearity between them (Carsten F. Dormann *et al*., 2013). However, to ensure multicollinearity in these pairs of variables, regression analysis needs to be performed to examine the VIF coefficient (Hair *et al*., 2006).

Regression Analysis
The next step will conduct multivariate regression analysis with the variables in the proposed model, the results show:

Table 4: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.746[a]	.556	.551	.76634	1.922
a. Predictors: (Constant), LS, Fb, ICh, ICu					
b. Dependent Variable: ICo					

The results show that the adjusted R-squared value is 0.551, showing that the independent variables explain 55.1% of the variation of the dependent variable, and the remaining 44.9% is due to variables outside the model and random errors.

ANOVA
To check the fit of the regression model with the population, the study continues to perform an F-test to prove whether there is a fit or not (Hair *et al*., 2006). The results are displayed in table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	**Regression**	236.921	4	59.230	100.857	.000[b]
	Residual	189.101	322	.587		
	Total	426.022	326			
a. Dependent Variable: ICo						
b. Predictors: (Constant), LS, Fb, ICh, ICu						

Sig value. F-test equals 0.000 < 0.05, therefore, the regression model is appropriate.

▪ **Coeficients**
The final step is to test the hypothesis about the relationship between variables. The test results are displayed in table 6.

Table 6: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.072	.215		.334	.738		
	ICh	.222	.045	.226	4.879	.000	.644	1.552
	ICu	.285	.050	.261	5.751	.000	.670	1.494
	Fb	.248	.041	.259	6.034	.000	.746	1.340
	LS	.219	.041	.239	5.310	.000	.683	1.465
a. Dependent Variable:ICo								

The specific test results are as follows, the t-test sig of the regression coefficient of the independent variables Internal Culture, Information Characteristics, Feedback, and Leadership Style is less than 0.05, these independent variables have an impact on the dependent variable Internal Communication, so these independent variables all have explanatory significance for the dependent variable (Hair *et al.*, 2006).

In addition, the variance magnification factor VIF <2, so there is no possibility of multicollinearity between independent variables.

In addition, the regression coefficients are all greater than 0, showing a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The magnitude of the standardized regression coefficient Beta will help determine the level of impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable, the results are as follows: Internal Culture (0.261) > Feedback (0.259) > Leadership Style (0.239) > Information Characteristics (0.226).

So, the regression equation is written as follows:

$$SA = 0.261ICu + 0.259F + 0.239LD + 0.226ICh$$

Specifically, the level of impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable is as follows;

Internal Culture variable has the strongest impact on internal communication of these types of businesses.

Feedback variable has the second strongest impact on internal communications of these types of businesses.

Leadership Style variable has the third strongest impact on internal communications of these types of businesses.

Finally, Information Characteristics have the weakest impact on the efficiency and internal communication of these types of businesses.

5. Implication and recommendation

Reviewing previous studies by authors both within and outside of Vietnam and preliminarily evaluating the current situation of Vietnamese businesses has helped formulate a research model, in which the independent variables Internal Culture, Information Characteristics, Feedback, and Leadership Style are proposed to influence Internal Communication.

Therefore, in the context of Vietnamese culture, internal communication is a complex factor that depends on many elements. Among these, cultural factors contribute significantly, showing alignment with the traditional characteristics of Asian cultures. This result is consistent with the research of Tkalac Verčič (2019) [22], who also suggests that organizational culture differences affect the effectiveness of internal communication. It also supports the findings of Men and Jiang (2016) [16], reinforcing that a supportive culture will result in effective internal communication when building relationships within a

company. Thus, national culture, regional culture, or organizational culture factors will have certain impacts on the methods and effectiveness of a company's internal communication. This implies that every business, when operating in a region, country, or specific area, needs to assess the cultural factors there to make appropriate decisions, including those related to internal communication strategies. This also suggests that, while globalization may shorten cultural differences, core values of each nation are difficult to change completely. Therefore, researchers need to assess these factors in various contexts to specify their impact on a business's products or services, its effectiveness, and internal communication methods. This not only contributes to increasing employee loyalty to the company but also helps build the company's image in the minds of customers, thereby enhancing its competitive advantage.

The research results also confirm the relevance to studies by Jiménez-Castillo (2016) [12] and Men and Bowen (2017) [17], that there is a close relationship between information characteristics and the effectiveness of internal communication. Moreover, information characteristics contribute significantly to shaping the internal communication policies of the business. This not only demonstrates the importance of information content, its establishment, transmission, and control, but also illustrates the transmission methods to achieve the goals of the business. The crucial point here is that information characteristics will help the employees of the business understand and convey the company's policies to them and to external customers. Therefore, from the research results, a profound implication is displayed for future researchers that studying this topic needs to be conducted for different fields in an economy as well as different cultures. Secondly, business managers need to appreciate the role of information characteristics in the quality and effectiveness of internal communication. Understanding the importance of information characteristics for overall communication effectiveness and internal communication, in particular, will help businesses develop reasonable strategies related to content, reliability, transparency, consistency, and information updating. Especially, information content is becoming increasingly popular and important in the characteristics of information that every business needs to pay attention to today. This factor is now included in the marketing strategy of the business and has become an important concept for differentiation and attraction for customers, content marketing. Sometimes, there is a narrow-minded thought that content marketing is a strategy to attract external customers. But today, maintaining and retaining quality employees has become a pressing issue for many businesses, especially small businesses, so marketing is not only carried out for external customers but also for internal customers, employees. Therefore, building internal content marketing is also an indispensable factor in business

decisions, leading to information characteristics becoming extremely important for the effectiveness of internal communication. At the same time, it helps managers choose channels and content appropriate to the target audience.

Additionally, the results also demonstrate the power of feedback and leadership style in how businesses organize internal communication, as indicated by Park *et al.* (2014) [21]. This is related to the ubiquity of the internet and the expansion of commercial borders. Alongside providing many opportunities for easy and convenient communication, there are also some challenges in managing employees that need attention. As people have easy access to information from social media, their demands increase. Therefore, building a working environment within today's open market mechanism requires understanding and flexibility. Building a two-way relationship through feedback is an important factor in achieving internal communication strategies.

Firstly, businesses will understand the training and advancement needs of individuals within the organization through their feedback. Consequently, the business will propose appropriate solutions to maintain and develop the workforce, as well as convey business messages to them. More importantly, this feedback tool helps the internal communication channels of the business achieve effectiveness in controlling the quality of the business's products/services, as well as identifying weaknesses in internal procedures, thereby making more appropriate adjustments. This is deduced from the responses indicating that "I regularly express my views on the reward process as well as internal business procedures." With an attitude of accepting employee feedback for change, adaptation, and progress, sometimes their feedback will bring about innovations in business, with good effectiveness.

The research results demonstrate alignment with Men's (2015) [15] studies, indicating that leadership style significantly contributes to the effectiveness of internal communication. This is confirmed through employees' agreement with questions related to leadership style. Most employees agree that leadership style gives them confidence in conveying ideas. Working with democratic leaders provides employees with a comfortable environment, thereby promoting the effectiveness of internal communication. This implies that this leadership style nurtures autonomy, fosters innovation, creativity, and direction. Conversely, it can stifle creativity and demotivate employees. Furthermore, leadership style shapes the way internal messages are conveyed. The transparency of information from leaders becomes a concern for employees in internal communication content. Therefore, it implies to managers that their leadership style affects information transmission within the organization and conflict resolution. This fosters trust and cooperation within the company. Additionally, employees in the company also express satisfaction with how the company expresses its goals and acknowledges their individual efforts. Therefore, employees will strive for the company's goals and endeavor to maximize their value for the company.

In addition to the contributions of the research, some limitations need to be addressed to enhance the completeness of the study. It is essential to supplement the assessment that the effectiveness of internal communication will impact employee engagement and their behavioral intentions. Furthermore, situational factors or research contexts may also influence internal communication. Gender differences (Eagly, 2000) could also lead to variations in internal communication outcomes. Therefore, deeper research is needed to improve the research model.

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