

# Integration and Communication Management as Critical Higher Education Institution Merger Success Factors

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## Abstract

This study explored communication management as a factor influencing the integration of administrative systems and processes in a merged higher education institution. The integration of administrative systems and processes becomes daunting when the merged institution has multiple campuses in dispersed locations with different cultures. Mergers often focus on significant structural changes and overlook integration aspects such as administrative systems and processes leading to misalignments and operational chaos. This research pursued a single qualitative case study approach with data collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. conducted with a sample. The participants for this research were senior administrative employees selected through stratified purposive sampling.

The findings revealed that the lack of integration management is associated with neglecting multilevel managerial communication, as experienced by administrative staff. Therefore, the lack of communication management during the merger process is viewed as a major factor that negatively influences the post-merger integration. If communication is lacking or misaligned on all levels of management, it creates chaos and failure on multiple levels of administration with subsequent merger failure. This paper recommends that HEIs management must give special attention to integration management and communication management as critical merger success factors to ensure administrative systems and processes integration within the three merger phases, i.e., pre-merge, merger implementation, and post-merger.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background

Higher education institutions in the 21st century operate in a volatile, unpredictable, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environment that requires flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities and challenges (LeBlanc, 2018). This flexibility can help higher education institutions take a strong position and remain competitive in their respective operating environments. Higher education institutions must evolve to respond to pressures in a competitive environment by improving their administrative operations (Baltaru & Soysal, 2018). Korsakova (2020) stated that a college that cannot forge new organizational relationships tends to lose relevance indefinitely.

The type of change that affected most HEI is that of a merger. Universities are merged to improve their institutions, promote cross-disciplinary scholarly research, and in some situations, improve bureaucratic efficiency, and in other cases, serve a mix of purposes (Min, 2017). According to Visvizi et al. (2019), the management and governance of higher education institutions require the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders. They emphasize the importance of involving all stakeholders, from the lowest to the highest levels of an institution's staff component.

Harmonizing systems, processes, and most importantly people, are a significant undertaking according to Sternklar (2018). Higher education institutions operate within the same governance structure as any other organization. The goal of systems and process consolidation, such as standardization, is to create consistent operational processes within an institution across multiple departments or locations. Administrators often are at the forefront of operations and automatically become change implementers. Higher education administrators are at the centre of any organization's transformation. Amadi-Eric (2008) views administration as a process of systematically organizing and managing the human and material resources available to an organization with the primary goal of achieving the organization's stated objectives. While numerous studies have been on mergers in higher education, little attention has been paid to the administrative issues associated with integrating systems and processes (Min, 2017). According to Kivisto and Pekkola (2017), the main goal of higher education institution administration is to maintain, integrate, and coordinate, as well as support and monitor, the core missions of teaching and learning, research, and public service. These administrative activities include the application and admissions process, enrolment, scheduling, examinations, faculty governance, student records, student support system, and degree planning. Consolidating administrative functions allows for the elimination of redundant functions and the creation of new ones, resulting in benefits such as lower operating costs. When consolidating and harmonizing administrative functions, merging culturally diverse and geographically dispersed institutions presents a difficulty.

## 1.2. Problem Statement

A significant change such as a merger has severe implications for the merging organizations. The problem this study sought to address was that despite an initial higher education merger occurring more than a decade ago, the merged institutions were not fully integrated and needed more interventions to ensure the integration of functions especially the administrative systems and processes, which were neglected during the initial merger process. According to Warter (2019), universities unlike other organizations, are complex social organizations with certain peculiarities that need to be clearly understood as they shape the organizational culture of the academic institution. Communication is one crucial factor that can assist in speedy integration, which if not managed well becomes a barrier to change and can determine the success or failure of a merger (Leslie *et al.*, 2018).

Sułkowski, Fijałkowska & Dzimińska (2018) also identified communication and commitment of the merger stakeholders as one of the principles of effective management of a university merger. The lack of administrative integration exacerbates operational chaos among staff due to inconsistent implementation of processes, systems, and policies which are a result of lack of communication management. Continuous communication is necessary to alleviate the stress, anxiety, and fear that arises when staff are trying to navigate a merger. Organizational communication is critical and must be multi-directional. It is equally important for there to be communication from bottom to top as well as top to bottom. When communication channels are open, followers are exposed to the vision and are more likely to feel connected to the organization. Maison (2018). Griebmann (2021), a consultant at Cometis, an organization needs to take advantage of the variety of communication channels available to create trust and an interpersonal basis for successful joint work with personal meetings being the most important communication format. He further advised that work meetings, workshops, and one-on-one discussions should take place many times during the first phase of a post-merger integration. Furthermore, Griebmann emphasized that the more locations a company operates, the more difficult it is for the newly merged organization to offer all employees face-to-face meetings. Conversely, Gaur, Ma and Ge, (2018), opined that cultural differences and geographic separation affect the effectiveness of communication channels, which are critical for knowledge transfer. This means that when teams are located in faraway places, coordination becomes challenging, which in turn hinders the smooth flow of knowledge. Sajwani *et al.* (2020) suggested that collaboration for knowledge production had an impact on the merger's effectiveness which requires senior managers to stress clear and proactive communications that encourage knowledge exchange and dissemination for successful merger outcomes.

The inconsistencies are also evident in the uneven distribution or allocation of human, financial, and physical resources, such as facilities or infrastructure and resources that benefit people at some sites but are only available at some sites. Bodner and Capron (2018) state that in the post-merger

integration process, merging firms are reconfigured when their resources are added to be redeployed or divested within the new entity formed by the acquiring and target firms. Integration is critical in helping merged organizations manage change demands and realize merger synergies. It is known that merging institutions will each bring their own organizational cultures to the newly formed organization, and cultural incompatibilities also play an essential role in integration management. Mergers often focus more on structural than operational issues, neglecting other aspects, such as integrating administrative systems and processes. Structural change issues are among the practical challenges that arise after a merger (Vazirani, 2013). Vazirani also pointed out that changes in organizational structures after a merger can bring issues such as new designations/roles and changes in staffing and that the reporting relationships of the new structure with the right people become critical (Vazirani, 2013).

Communication management in integrating administrative systems and processes is crucial to post-merger integration and the success thereof. This aspect received little attention as a crucial component of merger integration success. Even though mergers have been extensively studied in the HE environment, there needs to be more literature on integrating administrative systems and processes in merged HEIs, which showed a knowledge gap in this area. In order to close this gap, the study focused on exploring the challenges affecting the integration of administrative systems and processes in a merged multi-campus HEI to build new knowledge in this domain, with communication management as a focus area for this research paper.

### **1.3. Research objective**

To explore communication management as a factor affecting the integration of administrative systems and processes in a merged higher education institution.

## **2. Literature Review**

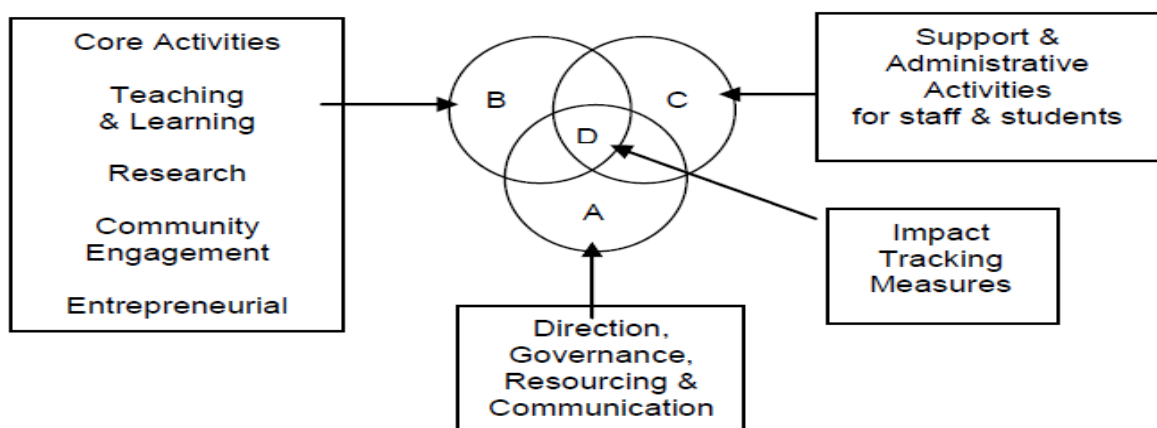
The literature review focuses on communication management in the post-merger integration phase in a HEI. The literature includes theories on HEI mergers, multi-campus universities, communication management, and the post-merger integration of administrative systems and processes.

The study of literature focuses on merger integration and communication management in HEI mergers. The literature includes theories on HEI change management, mergers, multi-campus universities, communication, and administrative systems and process integration.

### **2.1 Context of Change in Higher Education**

Higher education institutions usually merge to achieve benefits they cannot realize independently. The reasons for mergers differ for each institution and depend on what they hope to gain. Institutional change is influenced by external factors such as demographics, technology, market changes, social

and political pressures, and government reforms (Cai et al., 2016). Skodvin (2014) identifies four subgoals for merging universities: eliminating duplicative programs, strengthening research and teaching, increasing academic integration and collaboration, and diversifying academic profiles. He notes that the primary motivation for mergers is to achieve administrative, economic, and academic benefits, with larger units resulting in more vital academic institutions in quality, better management of administrative resources, and more efficient physical facilities. He also explained that economies of scale are achieved regarding the number of administrative staff, money is saved, and a more professional and efficient administration is in place. Scott (2004) developed the following model that shows how colleges operate and where change can occur.



**Figure 1: The activities of a university**  
**Source: Scott (2004)**

In addition to the university's core activities of teaching and learning, research, community engagement, and entrepreneurial activities, the diagram shows activities and roles related to overall direction setting, resources, governance, and communications, as well as providing related support, infrastructure, and administrative activities for students and staff. Universities that successfully manage change have A, B, and C components that function well and work together.

Based on the above figure, Scott (2004) believes many modifications can occur. The author opines that some people are concerned about changing the curriculum, utilizing new teaching and assessment techniques, and opening more flexible learning pathways. Others are concerned with facility modifications or innovative staff development strategies. The third group focuses on creating new administrative structures, decision-making procedures, and modifications to governance systems (Scott: 2004).

According to Reinholz et al. (2015), change initiatives mostly focused on training reflective faculty, disseminating curriculum, and implementing institutional rules. The authors contend that many

departmental change challenges require a holistic strategy that addresses change at all levels. Based on this justification, the authors created the below model, shown in Figure 2, for institutional change that addresses the university environment as a whole at various levels.



**Figure 2: Model for institutional change**

**Source: Reinholz et al. (2015)**

The model in Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the three levels of administration, faculty, and professors that works best when the two synergistic strategies are combined. The blue arrows in the model represent an outside-in strategy in which actions at higher levels of faculty and administration influence faculty. Administrative issues are essential factors in a transformation process. Offering outside support to faculty and management of the department is part of this strategy. It includes administrative and academic initiatives to change the culture of the department. Under this paradigm, the strategies are designed to impact all levels of the university because they are interconnected. The orange arrows indicate the second method, the Middle-Out strategy. This strategy impacts academia and administration and focuses on departmental restructuring (Reinholtz et al., 2015).

## **2.2. The Role of Higher Education Administrators in a Merger**

HEI administrators are faced with the challenge of keeping up with continual changes. The effectiveness and efficiency of an HEI's administration determine its mission, vision, philosophy, and accomplishment of specific goals, claim Ndubuisi and Jacob (2021). To develop administration, personnel management, technology management, and mission, universities need to research and enhance the quality of education, according to Puangyod et al. (2015). The core activities of HEIs, teaching and learning, and research can only occur with competent and dependable administrative support at the core of academic operations. According to Mishra (2014), an efficient administrator is beneficial to a company since they serve as the liaison between the many departments and facilitate the efficient transfer of information. He continued by stating that although an organization can only function well with one, many people prefer to dismiss the importance of an administrator's role within the organization. Furthermore, administration is crucial in all HEIs' departments and operations.

Due to their ongoing direct involvement in administrative duties, administrators are often better positioned to identify and address issues early as they arise. Organizations should prioritize enhancing administrative leadership training, claims Strikwerda (2015). He argued that most HEIs put competent academics in charge of multimillion-dollar businesses with little to no training (Strikwerda, 2015). According to the Trondheim Administrative Organization study (2016), standardising systems can facilitate the execution of job tasks regardless of physical location and greater mobility within and between campuses. Furthermore, the study points out how maintaining competency across all campuses can be facilitated by job assignments and maximising administrative capacity across the organisation.

The Money Edge (2016) reported that an efficient administrator is not just a benefit to the organization but also one of the most valuable responsibilities because they are the ones who get things done and ensure smooth information flow between the various departments. Talan (2016) mentioned that in order to develop and maintain an organization, administrative leadership requires coordinating tasks. Choices must be made and put into action to ensure that the organisation responds to challenges and environmental pressures most effectively (Talan, 2016).

### **2.3 Communication in Merger Integration**

A merger is an emotional event for employees whereby attitudes and behaviours at the post-merger stage are prompted by managerial communication, managerial support, and organizational culture differences, which are considered vital issues (De Leon, 2020). Moore (2023) indicated that when two companies have significantly different core values, priorities, methods of communication and other differences, it can be practically impossible to integrate them without creating hostility or losing employees. Steigenberger (2016) pointed out that successful integration in the mergers and acquisition context is a change management process, dependent on the context, structural and communication interventions that are undertaken by key stakeholders who are key role players in the integration process. The manner in which an organization communicates during a merger has a direct impact on the loyalty and trust of employees. Because employees are frequently caught off guard when a merger or acquisition is announced, company leaders and other internal communicators can mitigate the negative impact of a merger by developing a proactive communications strategy.

A comprehensive and well-developed communications plan addressing all stakeholders is essential to facilitate post-merger integration success and enable teams to swiftly address concerns as they arise (Voth, 2021). Communication needs to serve as a success factor assisting the organisation to realise integration speedily. According to Delport (2020), the communication process is hampered by the bureaucratic and academic nature of higher education institutions (HEIs), coupled with their complex organizational structures, extensive vertical hierarchies, and large numbers of staff in need of

communication. Delpont indicated that studies and research to improve internal communication at multi-campus universities are very limited, and a need exists among multi-campus universities to find means of communicating more effectively with their diverse audiences. He also encourages that the effectiveness of the communication process be continuously assessed (Delpont, 2020). On the contrary, Bansal (2020) emphasize the importance of clear, consistent, accurate and timely communication of useful information in the different stages of mergers and acquisitions to relieve the fears and anxieties of employees. Vosse and Aliyu (2018) believe that effective communication strategies, HRM initiatives, and cultural congruence can be utilized to achieve employee trust during the merger. When employees gain trust in management, it automatically eliminates resistance to change.

Azziz et al. (2017) also identified communication as a crucial factor contributing to a merger's success. According to Badau (2018), effective communication channels are crucial for successful universities because every administrative task and activity involves direct or indirect communication. Badau further orated that within an organization, communication patterns are influenced by organizational structure. He pointed out four directions in which communication can move: downward, upward, horizontally, and vertically. Policies, regulations, and practices that flow from upper administration to lower levels are called downward communication. The flow of performance reviews, complaints, and other information from lower to higher levels is known as upward communication. Coordinative in nature, horizontal communication occurs between divisions or departments on the same level. The university's vertical hierarchy might have a downward or upward flow of communication. External communication occurs between personnel inside the organisation and other stakeholders outside the organization (Badau, 2018).

According to Kansal and Chandani (2014), “the resistance to change can be attributed to the absence of communication, a lack of a clear vision, an inadequate reward system, confusion and frustration, the force of habit, a fear of the unknown, a fear of insecurity, a loss of competency, and a lack of support”. Providing employees with external information about the need for the change and the justification for it, according to Boohene and Williams (2012: 143), could be the first practical step. According to the authors, an environment that encourages dialogue and supports a bottom-up approach should be created. Without fear of retaliation, people can express their worries, disappointments, and wants, but not usually in a top-down manner. Participation and involvement is the third technique, and it comprises incorporating organization members directly in the planning and execution of change (Cumming & Worley: 2014). It can be argued that a comprehensive communication strategy enables effective communication across the entire organization.



## 4. Research Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory qualitative single-case study approach to comprehensively understand the phenomena under study (Yin, 2018). To estimate or predict the prevalence of an ambiguous data set, the researcher used stratified purposive sampling to select a sample from the population (Kumar, 2018). Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with a sample group of administrators from a merged HEI.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted online with Zoom, where the researcher asked questions on the merger and lack of administrative systems and process inclusion. According to Saunders et al. (2016) in conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher may omit some questions, and the order of questions may change depending on how the interview progresses between the researcher and the participant. Due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews, participants had the opportunity to speak openly and in detail about their experiences with and the current state of integration of administrative systems and processes during the merger.

Using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), Atlas ti. 9, data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. A data set is examined using various tools and methods that, when used in a particular order, reveal the messages, lessons, and solutions that the data has to offer, according to Bannan (2013). For backup, interviews were recorded with permission using Zoom online meeting recording software. Then, the researcher's fieldnotes notes from the interview sessions were used to aid the transcripts from the audio recordings into text, using otter.ai software. The transcribed text files were imported into ATLAS ti. 9 to assist with the analysis and in reaching the study's research objective. Text-based data analysis methods were used to create patterns and themes from the collected data.

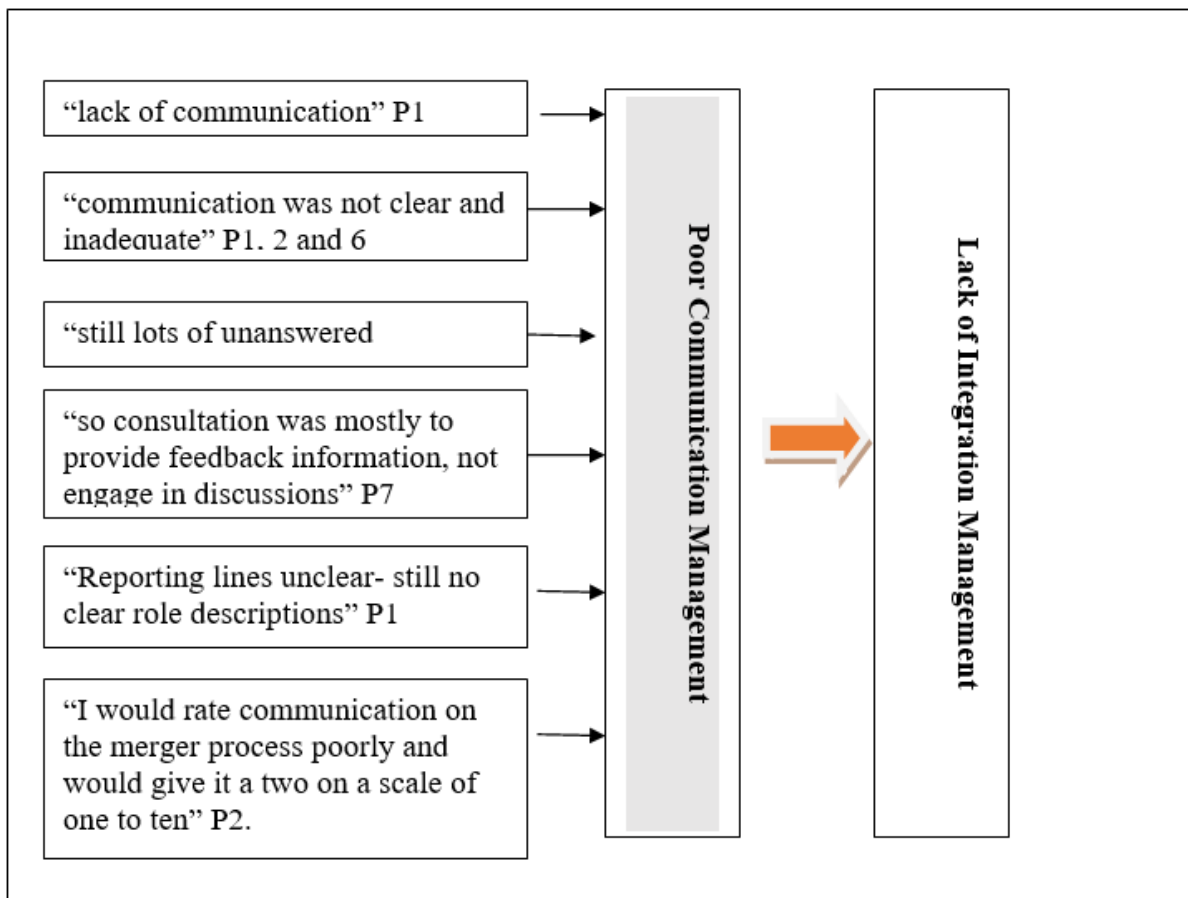
In adhering to and maintaining a high level of ethical standards, this study considered the following actions:

- Obtaining consent to conduct the study from the University Faculty Ethics Committee (EMS\_REC). NWU00684-19-A4
- Obtaining informed consent from all participants
- Conforming to ethical expectations throughout the study, including data collection and analysis, data presentation, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and why they were the chosen sample.

- The key ethical issues addressed included confidentiality, transparency, avoidance of discrimination, impartiality, and originality. The requirements of the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act were also observed.

## 5. Results and Findings

To identify patterns emerging from the collected data, text-based data were analyzed utilizing a coding technique. Figure 3 below is an illustration of participants' responses in identifying the major factor affecting integration management during the merger integration of administrative systems and processes.



**Figure 3: Illustration of data analysis highlighting communication as a major cause of lack of integration.**

### **Participants' responses on what causes a lack of integration:**

Participants 1, 2, and 8 confirmed that they had little knowledge of the post-merger integration process as communication was not clear and inadequate. "Communication could have been clearer employees are always lost and confused. There needs to be a proper communication plan that ensures everyone is included and understood. There are questions raised which remained unanswered."

However, Participants 3, 6, and Participant 7 confirmed that they understood the post-merger integration as they believed communication was effective. However, participant 1 thought that reporting lines were still blurred. Participant 1 reported in full as follows:

"I know what a merger is, as our university was not the first to go through it in South Africa, but I am not clear about the post-merger integration. My own understanding- is whether things are working or not, there are still lots of unanswered questions. No feedback on integration; we see things just coming and being done, but no one tells you why or how. No information sessions about integration. People are still fighting with one another, e.g., Reporting lines- still no clear role descriptions. This means we are still not integrated."

Participant 6 believed that "communication was insightful and that many different types of communication channels were used, including mass meetings".

Participant 7 believed that "communication about the merger was mostly via e-mail, and it was an implementation of a government decision, so consultation was mostly to provide feedback information, not engage in discussions".

Participant 3 also believed that "communication was effective and adequate from the beginning to the end of the merger process through e-mails, website. I understood what it entailed. There was communication even though there was also a lot of rumoured information".

Participant 2 also thought that the entire process was not clear at all. He provided details of his opinion on the communication, which was largely negative, as follows:

"Communication was not enough nor clear. I would rate communication on the merger process poorly and would give it a two on a scale of one to ten. We were just told or informed that we are merging without a thorough discussion with the support staff. It only started making sense when the merger was done [post-merger]."

## **6. Discussion of findings**

From the results, as mentioned by the participants during the interviews, communication is a challenge that can make or break the merger. It is seen as one of the critical barriers to the seamless and speedy integration of administrative systems and processes in a merger. Due to the complex and complicated nature of a change such as a merger, employees need to understand the reasons for the merger and be involved in the process through well-defined roles so that they can participate actively. Instead of providing less or no information, leaders should concentrate on responding to inquiries that staff members may have on matters that are significant to them (Min, 2017).

With employee involvement, change can easily happen and benefits realized earlier after change. When employees are involved in the process, dealing with resistance and creating a transparent work

environment based on trust is easier. From the interviewees' responses, it is crucial to view the merger as a change process and that involving employees as stakeholders can lead to successful change outcomes and integration.

Most participants indicated that they felt it was a two-way deal because the process was unclear and transparent enough to understand what was happening. They indicated that while there was some communication, it needed to be adequate and precise. Although the communication left many questions unanswered, the merger continued. Participants felt that more was needed to promote PMI to date. Communication was one of the most essential components from the beginning of the merger to the post-merger period.

According to Boyer (2016) of the *Chronicles of Higher Education*, when examining universities that consistently receive high ratings in the Great Colleges to Work For survey, it is clear that the quality of communication plays a role in creating an environment where faculty and staff enjoy working. Boyer also mentioned that different communication styles help foster positive engagement, teamwork, and productivity. Organizations must spark a debate rather than deliver a message for these strategies to be effective. A culture of communication is about using suitable approaches to target the right audience with the right issue at the best possible time.

A strategic alliance of communication channels enables institutions to create a transparent and genuine environment. Institutions with a good communication culture reap numerous benefits, such as increased employee engagement, greater clarity and consistency in shared governance, and greater community involvement (Boyer, 2016). Opara and Onyije (2014) identified information and communication technology (ICT) as a key player in effective governance in higher education institutions. The authors describe information and communication technology (ICT) as "facilities, tools, or resources that can be used to easily process, store, preserve, retrieve, and disseminate information." They believe using ICT, appropriate facilities, and skilled administrators are critical for achieving organisational goals for higher education administration (Opara & Onyije, 2014).

According to the South African Higher Education restructuring and transformation guidelines for mergers and incorporations (DHE, 2003), a related and critical component of the merger context is developing a communication strategy that keeps all stakeholders informed at every stage of the process. Successful integration requires communicating with staff, educating them as much as possible, and empowering them. When companies consolidate, employees are often left in the dark and at a loss. Fear and confusion arise when rumours spread because they do not know or understand why the merger is necessary.

Employees may lose confidence in management and become demoralized as a result. It is always better to over-communicate than to communicate inadequately or not at all. Instead of a top-down strategy, communication should be encouraged in an open environment to ensure a bottom-up approach where individuals can voice their problems, frustrations, and desires without fear of retaliation (Boohene & Williams, 2012). Keeping staff informed about the progress of the merger or integration is critical. One participant stated that "things seemed unclear at first, and there was no clear communication plan to make sure everyone was involved and understood the process." Although most participants noted some unfavourable aspects of the merger, some expressed a more positive view, especially when comparing the past to the current situation.

Numerous faculties, schools, and departments led to duplication and inconsistency in administration as two or more people did the same task differently. By consolidating faculties, schools, and departments across the institution, the restructuring process made a clear statement to address the issues of redundancy and inconsistency. As a result, staff at all sites were forced to network and collaborate. Malek and Yazdanifard (2012) noted that communication could help engage employees in the change process and make them aware of the vision and goals of the change. It can help employers convince employees that the status quo is no longer acceptable and motivate them to support the new situation (Malek & Yazdanifard, 2012). Communication is more effective when used throughout the merger process, according to Angwin et al. (2016), and its richness can also help develop employee commitment to the organization.

According to Boohene and Williams (2012), communication should also be encouraged in an open environment that ensures a bottom-up approach where individuals can voice their problems, frustrations, and demands without fear of retribution, but not always the top-down approach. According to Varizani and Mohapatra (2012), choosing the right communication channel contributes to integrating two organisational cultures. Participants believe that the institution communicates more effectively today than in the past. Although some individuals are not considerate in their interactions with others, considerable progress has been made in addressing the problem.

According to participants, employees must be adequately informed and trained about proposed changes to new systems and procedures. Some employees need clarification and feel challenged by the need for change and the implementation of new systems and procedures. Employees resist changes when they lack understanding as to why it must be introduced. Resistance causes employees to become restless, unhappy, or dissatisfied with their work, leading to many conflicts. Lack of motivation, poor communication channels, and information sharing are all variables that contribute to resistance, according to Boohene and Williams (2012). According to the authors, individual participation in the change process is an essential requirement for successful transformation. "Anxieties are properly resolved only when people feel valued by their organization, when their

problems are effectively addressed by other members of the organization, regardless of culture," according to Bergquist and Pawlak (2013).

Language problems in mergers are often related to communication and can lead to cultural conflicts, especially when employees of the merged company speak different languages (Bjursell, 2015). In our institution, the problem of language barriers, when certain colleagues speak Afrikaans, is still an issue. Cultural differences can be exacerbated by language barriers and different communication patterns (Cheng & Seeger, 2012). Bjursell (2015) considers culture a language, arguing that a culture change requires a language change. It brings us back to embracing, accepting, and making allowances as individuals with diverse origins. We

must embrace diversity and ensure that our differences do not hinder progress. Instead, we should see them as opportunities to discover new things about each other. To address the language issue, the institution has developed a language policy that ensures that staff is accommodated in English. The discussion of communication in the merger literature is referred to in broad terms, such as 'open communication' and 'effective communication', and the rule of thumb is that more communication is better (Weber, Rachman-Moore & Tarba, 2012). This leaves us with the question: *"If communication is the backbone to effective change such as a merger, why are managers failing to practice good communication?"*

## **7. Managerial Implications**

This study provides managers in higher education institutions insight into what might happen if employees do not receive adequate communication or are not actively involved in the merger process. Managers must communicate and involve employees in the process because they are the implementers at the ground level during times of change.

A lack of communication management can have significant negative effects on post-merger integration. Here are some of the ways a lack of communication management can impact integration management:

- **Misalignment of Goals:** Without clear communication between managers from both organizations, there may be a lack of alignment in terms of the overall goals and objectives of the merged entity. Conflicting priorities can lead to confusion, inefficiencies, and difficulties in coordinating efforts.
- **Cultural Clash:** Mergers often involve bringing together different organizational cultures. Failure to communicate effectively about cultural differences and how to integrate them can result in clashes between employees, leading to decreased morale, resistance to change, and even employee turnover.

- **Duplication of Efforts:** When managers are not communicating adequately and explicitly, they may unintentionally duplicate efforts and tasks. This wastes valuable time and resources leading to a less efficient and longer integration process.
- **Information Silos:** A lack of communication can create information silos where different departments or teams hoard vital information, hindering collaboration and making it difficult to share knowledge and best practices across the merged organization.
- **Inconsistent decision-making:** Without open and transparent communication, decisions may be made in isolation, resulting in inconsistent or conflicting choices being implemented in different parts of the organization. This can lead to confusion among employees and weaken the organization's overall strategic direction.
- **Employee Uncertainty:** Mergers can create a sense of uncertainty and anxiety among employees about their roles, job security, and the future of the organization. Insufficient communication from managers can exacerbate these feelings, leading to decreased productivity and engagement.
- **Slow Integration Process:** Effective communication is essential for quickly addressing challenges and making timely decisions during the integration process. A lack of communication can cause delays in resolving issues, prolonging the integration process and potentially increasing costs.
- **Loss of Talent:** If employees perceive a lack of communication and transparency during the merger, they may be more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere, leading to a loss of valuable talent from the organization.

To address these challenges, it is essential for managers to prioritize effective communication throughout all stages of the merger integration process. Regular updates, meetings, and open forums for employees to express concerns can help foster a positive communication culture that supports a successful merger. Additionally, involving employees in the integration planning and decision-making process can promote a sense of ownership and commitment to the merged organisation's success.

## **8. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Research**

Due to structural, strategic and operational changes as a result of a merger, integration typically causes uncertainty among employees requiring more strategic communication to aid the post-merger integration. It is essential that all employees have the same understanding of the process and actively participate to avoid ambiguity. The findings of this study are based on the participants' experiences and were generated from research interviews with administrative staff of the merged organization. Participants highlighted communication management as one of the barriers hindering the successful

integration of administrative systems and processes. In the administrators' eyes, the smooth and quick integration of administrative systems and processes could be improved by being proactive in communicating. Without a clear understanding of the merger and buy-in of employees, change will take time to happen or might never happen at all. When employees receive clear and timely communication and actively participate in the process, it becomes easy to manage other challenges such as resistance to change and culture incompatibilities.

The results of the interviews indicate that it is crucial to understand the merger as a change management process and that involving employees as active participants in the process can lead to successful change and speedy integration. This study was derived from a qualitative research method using interviews and company documents as data sources. The use of a quantitative research method to conduct a similar study may be explored in the future. The study emphasizes the importance and role of communication for successful post-merger integration at all levels of the organization. Although the study focuses on communication management during mergers, other themes such as culture and resistance are highlighted due to their strong connection to the merger and communication concepts. By exploring communication management as a factor contributing to the success or failure of a merger, this research contributes to the existing literature on communication management in the post-merger integration of administrative systems and processes. According to the findings of this study, greater focus should be made on managing communication in order to accelerate the integration process and realize merger success earlier.

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