EVALUATION OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION TOOLS IN A BANK

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Purpose: The purpose of the article was to identify and analyse internal communication tools used at the Bank and to learn employees' opinions regarding their effectiveness in providing information.

Design/methodology/approach: The article uses literature on communication and results of a survey conducted among the Bank's employees.

Findings: Based on an analysis of research results, e-mail can be indicated as the dominant tool in the effective transmission of information at the Bank. In the opinion of employees, the Newsletter was deemed the least effective electronic tool.

Research limitations/implications: In the presented literature review, the author used selected databases (Ebsco, CeON). The articles contained there do not exhaust the subject. Analyses were performed on a limited sample, using one diagnostic tool. It should be noted that for internal communication to be effective, the forms and tools existing in organisations need to be examined not so much with the aim of replacing them with others, but to verify the scope, legitimacy and frequency of their use by employees. Considering the growing importance of internal communication in the organisation and the evolution of tools available to organisations, the field for further research is limitless.

Originality/value This article contributes to the scientific discussion on the effectiveness of providing information by traditional and electronic means, and verifies their usefulness in financial institutions.

Keywords: internal communication, internal communication tools, effectiveness of information transfer, Bank.

1. Introduction

As a management function, internal communication has been under development for over twenty years. Its main task is to integrate employees around the company's strategy, create an organisational culture based on trust, shape positive relations between employees and management, and through that shape a positive image of the company (Wawer, 2014; Białas, and Litwin, 2016; Walasek, 2016; Winkler, 2018; Jaska, 2018b). Communication tools and

means play an important role in the communication process. In an era of development of new technologies, traditional forms of communication are slowly becoming obsolete, as digital solutions offer great opportunities, providing access from anywhere and at any time.

Internal communication is an interesting issue, because the process plays out in a different way and using distinct tools in every organisation. Effective internal communication unites the company, allowing people and teams to function properly and with maximum effectiveness, increases the sense of belonging within the company and provides work motivation (Selwant-Różycka, 2016). Meanwhile, one of the conditions for effective communication is efficient conveying of information – developing the most effective communication system (Kozula, 2016). The purpose of the article was to identify and analyse internal communication tools used at the Bank and to learn employees' opinions regarding their effectiveness in providing information.

The first stage of considerations in this article was based on a review of literature on the subject within the scope of research on the role of communication and the tools used in organisations. Next, a critical assessment of the communication solutions used at the Bank was performed. Finally, in the last part of the article, the results of the research assessing the said solutions' effectiveness in conveying information were discussed and conclusions drawn on that basis.

2. Role and tools of internal communication – review of selected studies

Communication and the process of conveying information are subjects of scientific research that constantly intertwine and relate to each other, and are also explained by various researchers. In numerous cases, it is assumed that communication and information processes are either identical or inextricably linked. However, the significant number and variety of communication activities do not allow their interpretation to be reduced to just one function, e.g. the informative function (Wendland, 2012).

That is why it has been assumed in the study that conveying information is one of the elements of the communication process that determines its effectiveness. Effective communication requires: the right skills, knowledge of communication forms, understanding the barriers to information flow, determinants of communication processes and, above all, tools enabling the exchange of messages (Smoląg, and Ślusarczyk, 2018; Jaska, 2018a).

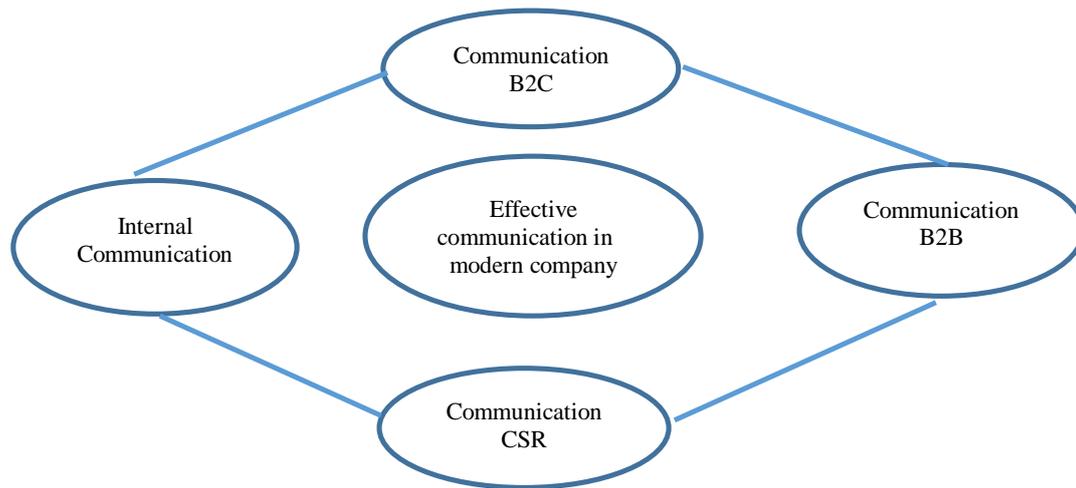Four types of communication shown in Figure 1 can be observed in modern organisations.

Figure 1. Strategic groups in company communication. Source: own study.

B2C (Business to Customer) communication relates to the integrated relationship of a company with its individual customers. The company uses this channel to provide the recipient with information on products and services available for purchase. Orders, deliveries and payments for purchases are processed electronically.

B2B (Business to Business) communication is a relationship between enterprises. Inter-company contracts relate to product and service transactions, exchange of trade information and building co-operation networks.

CSR (corporate social responsibility) is communication based on corporate social responsibility. Companies take responsibility for the impact their activities have on the environment. They undertake various initiatives, for example related to environmental protection, human rights, etc.

Internal communication, which borders marketing, Public Relations, Human Resource and employer branding. It gains particular importance as the organisation grows, when traditional communication channels become insufficient. The primary strategic goals of internal communication are identical in each company and include (www.brandnewportal.pl):

- Providing information on the strategy and development of the company and product;
- Communicating key issues related to legal and personnel changes;
- Communicating ongoing HR activities;
- Informing of current marketing activities;
- Streamlining communication channels between employees;
- Providing a knowledge base and training tools;
- Building employee engagement;
- Collecting comments and suggestions;
- Efficient onboarding, i.e. facilitating adaptation and induction of new employees;
- Greater independence of employees, their better motivation;
- Retaining valuable employees in the company.

Internal communication is an organisation's everyday business activity and includes e-mails, newsletters, messages on the Intranet, but also meetings with superiors, status of project groups or presentations during which management speaks (Verghese, 2012). Internal communication applies to all relations between employees within the company. It strengthens employee bonds, builds mutual respect and trust, and ensures proper information flow necessary for the company's appropriate functioning (Hamilton, 2011; Gatehouse, 2017).

It can be defined in various ways depending on the adopted scientific perspective and its role in the information flow process. In a narrow sense, internal communication pertains only to the transfer of knowledge and messages within an organisation. However, due to its role in the management process, many authors do not limit it to the technical aspect exclusively (Gryfin, 2006; Wendland, 2012; Jaworowicz, M., and Jaworowicz, P., 2017; Smoląg, and Ślusarczyk, 2018). The article takes a broader perspective and recognises that internal communication consists of establishing and maintaining relationships between the organisation, supervisory bodies and employees in order to develop a sense of community (Johnston et al., 2015). Providing information and assuring communication between members of the organisation builds relationships between stakeholders (Grabosz, 2014; Sypniewska, 2015).

Research on internal communication covers two of its key aspects. The first refers to the impact of internal communication on the organisation's functioning, the second to the use of communication tools, including social media.

The impact of internal communication on an organisation's functioning is presented in the report: "Efficiency begins with internal communication. Report for managers based on an employee survey", which contains the results of a survey conducted in May 2017 on a group of over 500 respondents working in companies employing over 50 people. Research has shown that communication based on partnership and an open approach between all employees, the managers' responsibility for efficient information flow, as well as the use of on-line tools are all extremely important. These tools are social media – their use leads to increased employee involvement in performing tasks and achieving goals (Emplo, 2017).

Research by Korzyński and Mazurek (2016) was conducted between 2013 and 2015 among 190 leaders of Fortune 500 companies. Their goal was to determine factors influencing the effective use of social platforms in internal communication. As a result, the following were included among the aforementioned factors: open communication, an existing code for using platforms and a participative leadership style.

Sievert and Scholz (2017) conducted a study on the impact of internal social media on employee engagement. The research has shown that social media are a significant tool for stimulating activity among employees.

Efficient internal communication occurs through to the use of appropriate communication tools. Their selection and use determine the development of IT and communication technologies, especially within the scope of social media. Organisations require a variety of communication channels, each of which used to convey a different type of information

(Juchnowicz, 2014). However, the use of social media in internal communication is crucial for modern organisations (Emplo, 2017). Social media is a heterogeneous group of Internet and mobile technologies, which allows users to remain in contact, as well as create and distribute user-generated content (Kaplan, and Haenlein, 2010). Social media is included among modern forms of social contact, thanks to which open, multidirectional and democratic communication is possible, reflecting company social networks. The key benefit of their use is the possibility to accumulate the organisation's know-how in one place, which is of paramount importance in knowledge-based organisations (Wojtaś-Jakubowska, 2017).

The biggest advantage of such a tool is the possibility of extensive dialogue between users. In addition, social media is characterised by its scope, availability, intuitive operation and expanding usability. Organisations use their potential to increase efficiency in internal communication, as well as to stimulate employee commitment (Badea, 2014). Additionally, social media use can bring specific benefits in leadership, building organisational culture or as a motivational tool (Sievert, and Scholz, 2017). It is also used in advertising, marketing, recruitment and educational activities (Chomiak-Orsa, and Buryn, 2017).

In addition to social media, the most popular internal communication tool, there are other proven tools, such as: meetings with superiors, inter-departmental meetings, training sessions, e-mail, intranet, blogs and employee brochures (Grabowska-Pantol, 2015). Social media is an area seeing strong development and even newer trends in internal communication can be observed in organisations. Management video blogs have been gaining prominence for a long time, offering an innovative way of communicating with employees (Tajchman, 2018). Given the recent increase in the number of live video broadcasts on social media, from Facebook to Instagram, a whole new dimension of communication is being discovered – video.

The growing popularity of social media has not eliminated traditional, well-known forms of information exchange and creating interpersonal relationships, but it has an impact on users' behaviour and their widespread acceptance. According to M. Badea (Badea, 2014), classic communication through traditional channels (bulletin boards, newsletters, company newsletters) does not fulfil employee needs or create a sense of belonging to a group.

3. Methodology

The article uses literature on communication and results of a survey conducted among the Bank's employees. The literature review included books and articles published in 2013-2020, with the EBSCO and CeON databases referenced. Searches for articles were based on the following keywords: internal communication, internal communication tools.

The Bank specialises in providing services to investment funds and settlements of securities transactions, and in addition provides custodian services for brokerage companies, global custodian banks, investment banks and insurance companies. It operates in thirty-four countries on five continents and is one of the five largest custodian banks in the world. Its headquarters are in Paris and one of the branches has been operating in Warsaw since 2008. About 10,000 employees are employed there, of which over 15% are foreigners. There are two types of employee positions at the Bank – Functional and Professional (Figure 2).

Position level	Managerial	Expert	Analytical	Trainer	Project	Client
Level III	Manager	Senior Expert	Senior Analyst	Senior Business Trainer	Senior Project Manager	Senior Client Account Manager
Level II	Team Leader	Expert	Analyst	Business Trainer	Project Manager	Client Account Manager
Level I	Deputy Team Leader	Senior Specialist	Junior Analyst	Business Training Coordinator	Junior Project Manager	Junior Client Account Manager

PROFESSIONAL

FUNCTIONAL

Specialist Level	Specialists
Junior Specialist Level	Junior Specialists
Entry Level	Interns / Assistants

Figure 2. Types of positions in the Bank. Source: Own study based on data from the Bank.

The careers of most recruited employees start at lower-level positions, i.e. functional. These include: trainees, assistants, junior specialists and specialists. Then, selected employees are promoted to senior positions, i.e. professional. These include managerial, expert, analytical, coaching, design and customer service positions. Each of these positions is divided into three levels with level 1 being the lowest and level 3 the highest.

The empirical studies used the diagnostic survey method. The diagnostic survey was conducted among employees in the Warsaw branch, was voluntary and anonymous. The research material was collected in March 2019 on a sample of 60 people. Sampling was random. Due to the unrepresentative research group, the results of the study cannot be generalised. The conducted survey has been used to select communication tools that are – according to employees – the most effective.

The respondents included employees at various levels and positions. The majority of respondents (80%) were women, with the share of men being only 20%. They were divided into three age groups. The largest was made up of respondents under the age of 30 (67%). The study featured 29% of people aged 30-40 and only 4% were over 40 years of age.

Most of the people (33%) have worked for 1 to 2 years. The second group have been employed for less than 1 year (29%) and 3-5 years (27%). The lowest number of answers was obtained from employees working for more than 6 years (11%). The biggest group in the study held the position of specialist (38%) or junior specialist (20%).

4. Opinions of employees on the effectiveness of conveying information using various tools – research results

Technology is gaining increasing importance in modern enterprises. Digitisation includes the use of internal social media, intranet, mobile applications and even artificial intelligence. Mobile applications are used not only for communication, but also solve many complicated tasks more effectively and faster than traditional forms (Biesaga-Słomczewska, 2015). Digitisation is a strategy aimed at assuring the best use of IT solutions for optimal use of the potential of the organisation's digital resources.

Activities in the banking sector and a developed enterprise organisational structure induce employees to communicate using various communication tools. At the Bank, communication occurs mainly through electronic tools, but traditional tools and face-to-face meetings remain widely used.

The research was used to look for answers to questions about the volume of information provided via internal communication tools used at the Bank. Respondents were asked which methods of communication provide employees with the most information. The vast majority (89%) of respondents said that most information reaches employees through electronic tools, with only 11% indicating direct meetings and no one mentioning traditional tools. The survey also included questions aimed at assessing the effectiveness of information transmission via the following tools: electronic, traditional and direct meetings. A rating scale with the range of effectiveness, according to employees, from 1 (least) to 5 (most) was adopted. The respondents' answers to this question are presented in the following charts.

Efficient exchange of acquired information is an effective element of the communication process (Potocki, 2016; Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2017). Modern electronic communication tools used at the Bank proved to be supportive (Grębosz, and Mikulska, 2013; Werenowska, 2014, Wiśniewska, 2015). In addition to face-to-face meetings, employees had many electronic tools at their disposal, including: e-mail, intranet, discussion forum, bulletin boards, etc. Figure 3 shows the results of the assessment of information transfer effectiveness via electronic tools.
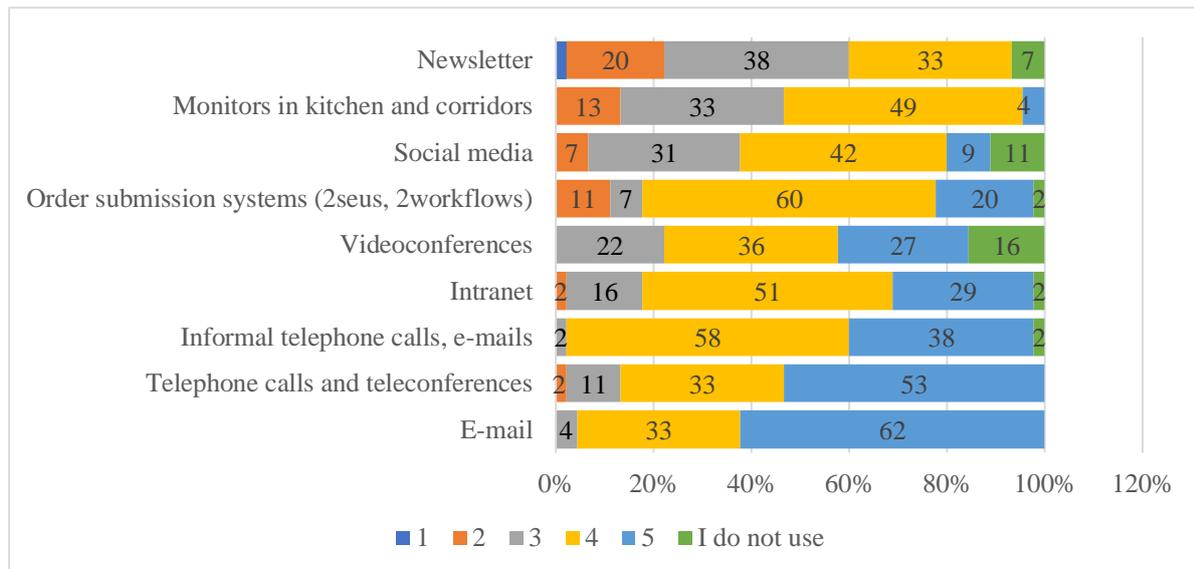
Figure 3. Assessment of information transfer effectiveness via electronic tools. Source: own study.

The respondents perceive e-mail as the most effective communication tool (62% of respondents rated it as very good and 33% as good). Telephone calls and teleconferences were second - (53% of respondents rated them as very good and 33% as good). The newsletter was deemed the least effective tool for providing information (20% of respondents rated it poorly and 7% do not use information provided this way). It is surprising that many respondents do not use videoconferencing (16%) and social media (11%).

Figure 4 shows the results of the assessment of information transfer effectiveness via traditional tools.
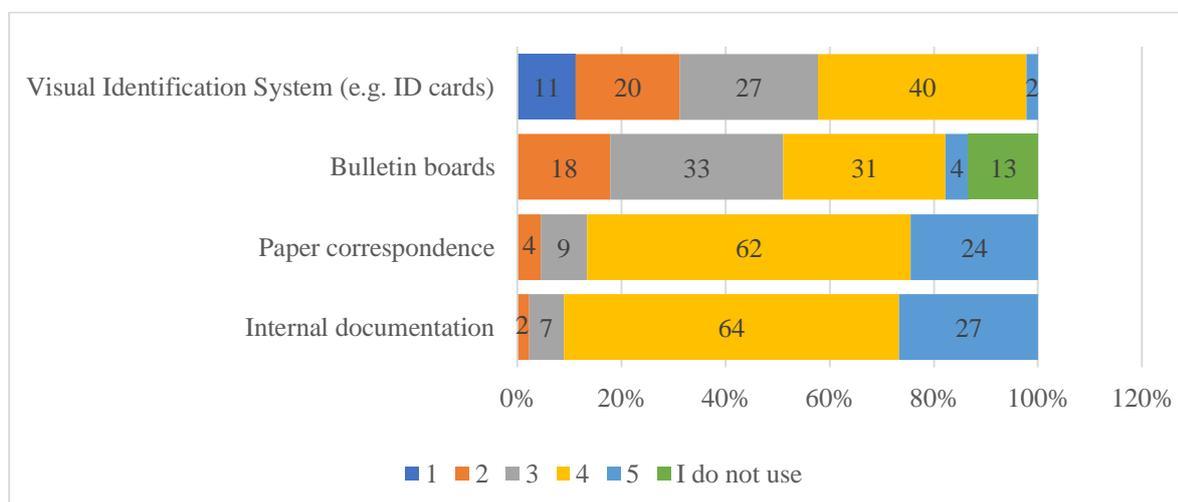

Figure 4. Assessment of information transfer effectiveness via traditional tools. Source: own study.

The most effective tool among the traditional methods of providing information turned out to be internal documentation – (64% of respondents rated it as good and 27% as very good). Paper correspondence came second (62% of respondents rated it good and 24% very good), the Visual Identification System third – 40% of respondents rated it good, only a few (2%) as very good and 11% as very bad. Bulletin boards proved to be the least effective, with as many as 13% of respondents not using information provided this way.

Performance of tasks entrusted to each employee requires circulation of information and communication with other members of the unit. Creating conditions conducive to open communication brings many benefits to the organisation. A. Żur (2013) believes that the degree of openness in information flows shapes the conditions for involving people in the organisational process of seeking opportunities and solving problems. An analysis of the effectiveness of direct information transfer – "face-to-face" is presented in figure 5.
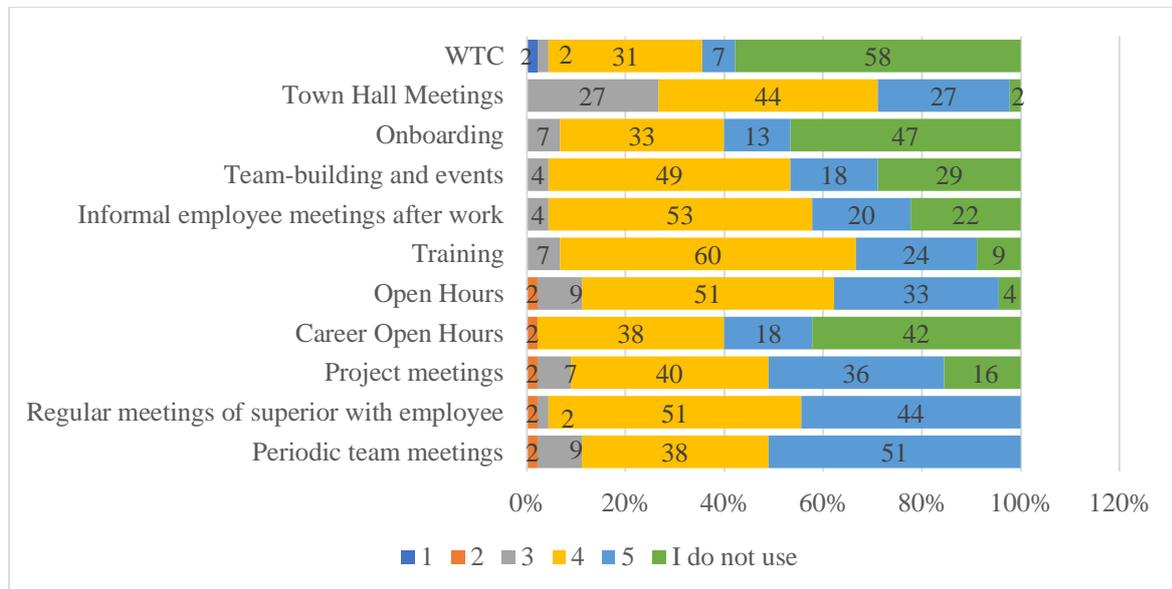

Figure 5. Assessment of information transfer effectiveness in direct communication1. Source: own study.

According to respondents, the most effective method of providing information among direct communication tools are periodic department meetings (89% rated them as very good and good). Employees also positively assessed periodic meetings between superiors and employees (95% of respondents rated them as very good and good). From among the surveyed employees, more than half (58%) do not take advantage of the WTC, less than half (47%) of Onboarding and (42%) of Career Open Hours.

Electronic tools are the main source from which employees want to receive information (71% of respondents). Almost one in three respondents (29%) wants to obtain information directly from their superior in the form of messages or during meetings with the management board. None of the respondents indicated traditional means – documentation and paper correspondence.

5. Limitations of test results

This study is not devoid of limitations. The shortcomings of this chapter include the research method adopted by the author. In the presented literature review, the author used selected databases (Ebsco, CeON). The articles contained there do not exhaust the subject.

The research conducted by the author confirms many areas for improvement of internal communication tools exist. It should be remembered that the above analyses were performed on a limited sample, using one diagnostic tool. Therefore, the obtained results may not constitute the basis for general assumptions, but could contribute to the creation of a database of appropriate diagnostic questions and the development of universal principles in internal communication.

6. Suggestions for future research

Theoretical considerations and literature review-based empirical research indicates that internal communication plays a growing role in managing organisations. Conducted research, the number of scientific studies and many scientific conferences devoted to the issue confirm this. Considering the growing importance of internal communication in the organisation and the evolution of tools available to organisations, the field for further research is limitless.

It should be noted that for internal communication to be effective, the forms and tools existing in organisations need to be examined not so much with the aim of replacing them with others, but to verify the scope, legitimacy and frequency of their use by employees. Research shows that each of the solutions has its reason for existence in the communication processes in the organisation. The only issue is the legitimacy of their use from the point of view of the message sender's goal.

7. Summary and conclusions

Although internal communication has now become one of the important elements of an organisation's proper functioning, the selection of forms and tools is still the subject of many academic discussions. Currently, digital (electronic) tools that improve communication and the transmission of valuable content are becoming increasingly more popular.

Based on an analysis of research results, e-mail can be indicated as the dominant tool in the effective transmission of information at the Bank. In the opinion of employees, the Newsletter was deemed the least effective electronic tool. It is surprising that many respondents do not use social media. Despite the rapid development of electronic communication tools and the steady increase in their usage, employees rated videoconferencing very low.

Among traditional methods of providing information, internal documentation and paper correspondence were seen as the most effective. Bulletin boards have been shown to be the least effective, as it turned out that many employees do not use the information provided in this

manner at all. Research shows that meetings with the management board, team-building trips or team meetings are still an important form of communication. Meanwhile, Onbording and Career Open Hours were rated very low.

Research has confirmed (71% of respondents) that electronic tools are the main source from which employees want to receive information.

The selection of tools used in internal communication depends on the size of the enterprise, its business operations and financial capabilities. They should be chosen according to the information meant to be conveyed and tailored to specific recipient groups. This article contributes to the scientific discussion on the effectiveness of providing information by traditional and electronic means, and verifies their usefulness in financial institutions.

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