

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON EMPLOYEE PUBLICATIONS

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I. IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

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Abstract

Employee publications are used extensively in organizations. The purpose of this research project was to explore the nature and the effects of employee publications. A 28 item questionnaire was developed and sent to the editor of 300 publications. Respondents were also asked to include a copy of their house publication and 53 editors did so. The basic analysis consisted of examining the survey responses and critically analyzing the actual publications. A theoretical orientation to the unique dynamics faced by the editor is developed in the paper and five basic conclusions were reached in the study.

- 1) The results of this survey concerning the basic characteristics of employee publications were generally congruent with past research in the field.
- 2) There appears to be some congruency between the stated purpose of the publication and the types of articles actually contained in the publication.
- 3) There was little evidence of formal evaluation of the publication's effectiveness.
- 4) The purpose and focus of employee publications appears to be employee recognition.
- 5) The evidence suggests that many editors appear to be leaning towards the trivialization strategy in dealing with the conflicting demands of employees and management.

Employee publications make their way into 75 million American homes. American industry spends well over \$100 million a year on company publications as one of their major information channels (CPA Journal, December, 1980). A study conducted by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) revealed that both regular employee publications and regular local employee publications ranked in the top ten of employee preferred sources for information (IABC, 1981). The survey also found that its members in the United States and Canada have a combined circulation of 228,000,000. This figure is three times more than the daily newspaper circulation of both countries combined (IABC, 1981). Thus, employee publications are an essential dimension of internal communication programs.

The purpose of this paper is to present the results from exploratory research on employee publications. The discussion is divided into six sections: theoretical perspective; review of relevant literature; methods; results; limitations of the survey; and conclusions.

II. THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

In order to develop a theoretical perspective on employee publications, a number of preliminary observations need to be presented.

What is an employee publication?

First, employee publications are a form of written communication. As such, employee publications possess all the normal constraints of other written channels, and lack the timeliness, cost effectiveness, and feedback properties of face-to-face channels. Yet, the published media can also be beneficial because of its permanence; which allows the

readers to consume the information at their leisure as opposed to the sender's predilections and the luxury of referring back to the information.

Employee publications assume one of four basic forms: newspapers, newsletters, magazines, and magapapers (Reuss & Sinis, 1981). The newsletter is smaller and is more flexible than the newspaper format which is similar to a small city newspaper. In fact, some employee newspapers have greater circulations than some small city newspapers. Magazines are more elaborate and generously use photographs and graphics. Magapaper is a hybrid of the newspaper and magazine. Many scholars have grouped these basic types of publications under the rubric of "house organs." However, professionals in the field prefer the term "employee publications."

Second, employee publications are funded and supported by management. Journalists often pride themselves on their objectivity and impartiality. To the editor of the company newspaper these values, while important, may be compromised by the fact that management holds the purse strings. D'Aprix (1982) characterizes the dilemma this way:

Those of us in organizations always carry this burden, whether we pose as independent journalists or as company spokesmen. Our various audiences invariably filter our messages, words, and claims through their belief that we are paid to say these things. The truth is that we are. But it is true also that the most believable propaganda is the truth. Ergo the good communicators among us rely on truth rather than lies to influence opinions and attitudes. More to the point, the ethical communicator will decline to lie for anyone, since this is prostitution. (p. 63).

Despite D'Aprix's caveats, the point is clear, employee publications are paid for by management and certain implications flow from this fact.

Third, the purpose of an employee publication has to be consistent with organizational objectives. The inevitable by product of the financial realities is that management to some extent controls the goals and aims of the publications. D'Aprix states the point succinctly: "The responsibility is to the well-being of the organization first, the audience second, and society at large third." Indeed, Axley's (1983) analysis of "house

organs" from two organizations with distinctly different management philosophies revealed that the publications were "consistent with and serve to promote the respective organization's expressed philosophy of management" (p. 1). The harsh fact is that if a publication operates at wide variance to organizational objectives the editor will be fired or the purse strings cut.

Fourth, employee publications have a distinct and limited range of "relevant" issues. Editorial decisions are necessarily predicated on the basic objectives of the organization. Thus, the content of the house magazine is restricted to events, happenings, and information that directly or indirectly involves the organization or the employees. Kampe and Christenson (1981) put it this way:

Whatever the format, organizational publications shared a common goal: to focus on key issues of the organization, interpreting and humanizing significant policies and activities and putting them into perspective for employees, members, and others. Often, too, individuals are singled out for helping the organization achieve its objectives (p. 113).

For the most part, the stories will contain information that is positive or neutral about the organization and the employees. Companies that are less restrictive of the editorial policy may allow certain "negative" information, but the thrust of the publication is upbeat and pro-company. Few controversial issues are addressed. Most confidential information is not reported because of the fear that competitors will get access to the information or that union officials will use data against management in negotiations. Employee publication editors and writers focus on positive, upbeat, and non-controversial stories seeking to present the best possible image of the organization. Their journalistic counterparts in the public sector appear to savor precisely the opposite kinds of news.

Fifth, the audience for employee publications is limited. Employee newsletters, newspapers, magazines, and magapapers are designed for specific audiences. The organization's employees are the central audience, but employee families and clients may

also be part of the intended readership. Multiple audiences may create potential problems because they may have different information needs. Indeed, editors are often faced with the challenging task of serving the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands of their various target audiences. The problem can be compounded by publications that seek to serve the needs of employees located in different parts of the country. Yet, the audience is more homogeneous than the readership of a city newspaper because of the common link of employees to the organization.

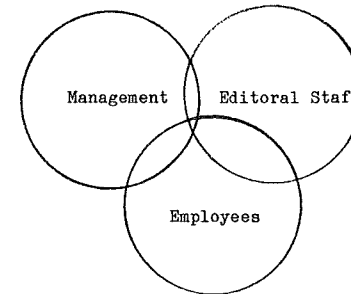
Sixth, the employee publication is only one of a multitude of other sources of relevant information about the organization. Clearly, employees get information about the company and their peers through a variety of other sources including face-to-face interactions, group meetings, and training manuals to just mention a few. These are two possibilities when multiple channels exist. The information from the sources can either be conflicting or reinforcing. Thus, the editor faces a dual challenge. On one hand, the editor must avoid conflicting information so as to preserve the credibility of the publication. On the other hand, the employee publication cannot be too redundant with the other sources or it will not be read. Thus, the editor has to present timely and accurate information. Unfortunately, confirming the accuracy of the information, writing, editing, and publishing all take time. Editors constantly work under this constraint.

Theoretical Perspective

The six attributes of employee publications described above, provide a background for the development of a theoretical perspective.

Employee publications can most appropriately be viewed from three distinct perspectives: management, editor and editorial staff, and employees (see Figure 1). Each of these groups uniquely assess the house publications in light of their distinct needs, standards and goals. One of the critical issues is the degree of congruity between the perspectives. For instance, management could be satisfied with a publication that always presents the company line, but employees may be less than satisfied with such an approach. An editor has to play off these sometimes conflicting desires.

Figure 1



Employees desire for information seems insatiable. A significant portion of the communication audit instrument originally developed by the ICA examines the discrepancy between the information received on a wide variety of topics versus the information desired on these topics. Experiences with the audit have revealed in almost every case that employees desired more information than they receive. One noteworthy exception was that employees desired less information from the grapevine. Perhaps, they want more reliable, dependable, or formal communication. Obviously, a house magazine or newsletter can meet these demands.

Although generally employees appear to desire more information, certain topics appear to have higher values. A survey conducted by the IABC and Towers, Perrin, Forster, and Crosby (1981) revealed that employees were most interested in the organizations' future plans (95%) and least interested in personal news (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.). For the reasons articulated above, management may be reluctant to reveal information about the organization's future plans. Other items ranked as interesting to employees were personnel policies (90.3%), productivity improvement (89.7%), job-related information (89.4%) and job advancement opportunities (88.4%). Note that all these types of information are almost exclusively under the control of management and in many cases the sole control of select members of top management. Indeed, perusal of the 17 topics

assessed in this study reveals that the top 15 ranked items deal with information over which management has almost exclusive control. Only the two lowest ranked items, stories about other employees (72.2%) and personal news (57.4%) deal with information that is potentially available from other sources. Employees can view the company newsletter as a potential source of this information. The value of the publication from the employee's perspective can be judged on the basis of the degree to which it provides relevant and useful information.

Managements' view of the purpose and value may be quite different. Expressing company philosophy, revealing selected information, promoting company values are just a few of the potential objectives of the "house organ" from managements vantage point. Information is power and revealing certain kinds of information can be potentially harmful to the company. Numerous studies have indicated that types of information management thinks is important to communicate to employees varies dramatically with the information employees actually desire (Wofford et.al, 1977). The word "desire" is key, because management often feels that employees do not need certain types of information to do their job. Management's concern over the potentially inappropriate use of information may seem legitimate and reasonable in some cases. Yet, so are the desires and needs of the employees.

The third perspective on the employee publication comes from the editorial staff which must seek to reconcile the often conflicting goals and desires of the employees and management. In addition, the editorial staff has to uphold their own journalistic standards. An employee newsletter that is heavily slanted to management's perspective may be viewed successfully by management for awhile. Yet, when leadership is down management may react by lowering allocations for publication. Correspondingly, a newsletter too heavily slanted to employee concerns may be viewed negatively by management because it does not reflect company policy. Such is the dilemma of the editorial staff.

The employee publication by definition can not be independent of the company, it must be beholden to the ownerships' objectives and perceptions. This does not necessarily mean

that the employee publication must ultimately degenerate into a propaganda oracle for management. In fact, skillful editors coordinate the desires of management and the employees with journalistic standards so as to make the employee publication a vital and valuable communication tool. However, this reconciliation of often conflicting desires is not easy.

Three basic coordination strategies appear likely. The first strategy, collaboration, involves providing as much useful information to employees as management will allow by seeking to involve management in the communication process. The editor seeks to develop a commitment to open and candid information sharing. A company clearly committed to a philosophy that values communication is imperative if this strategy is to be successful. Such an approach in the long run would appear to be beneficial to the company, employees, and the editorial staff.

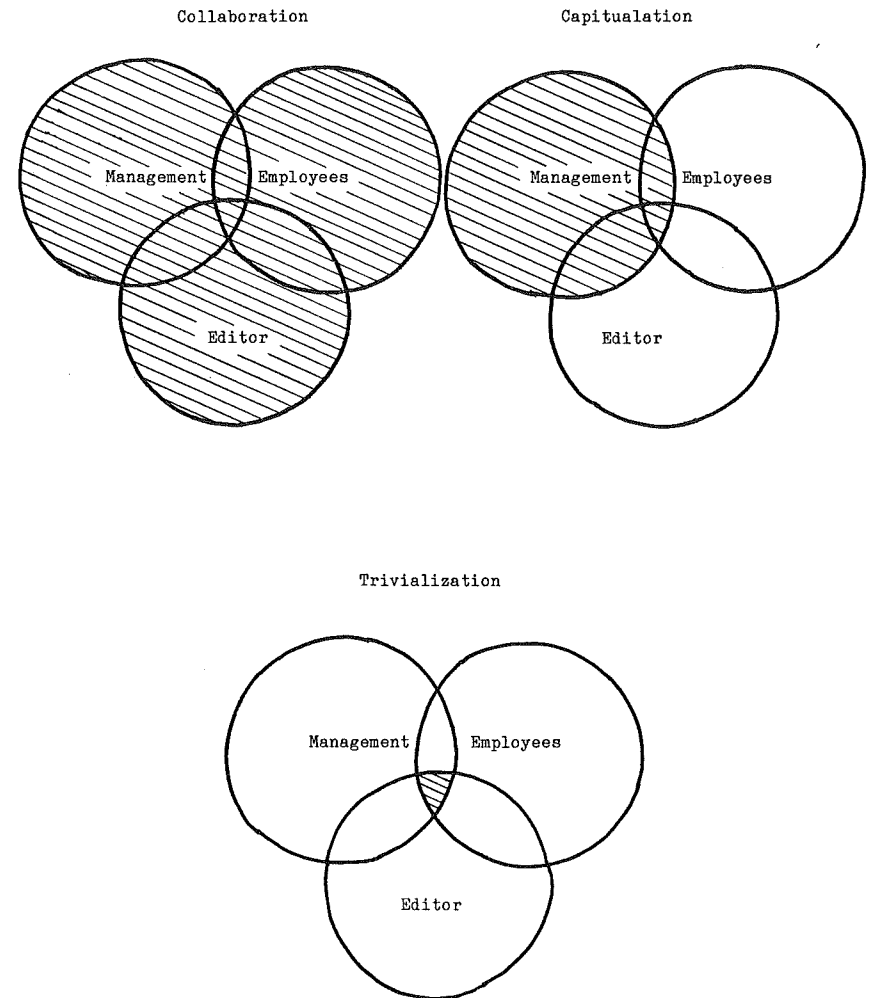
A second strategy, capitulation, essentially involves the editor buckling under to management's perspective. The employee publication actually becomes the "house organ" and publishes stories that run the company line and sing the praises of the organization. Most employees will probably ignore the "house oracle", but some may complain. In all likelihood a management philosophy that dictates such an editorial policy will not be too open to employee feedback anyway. Management will certainly value the articles that present such a strong company image. The editor may be less than satisfied with such an approach but rationalize their role with logic like: "They paid for it, they should get what they paid for." Of course, management does pay for the "employee publication" but unfortunately they are the only ones who might pay attention to the contents. Parenthetically, a related strategy is capitulation to the desires of employees, but this approach is doomed for the very reason that capitulation to management's desires succeeds.

A third strategy, which might be called trivialization resolves the conflicting demands of management and employees by publishing information that is essentially

innocuous. Bowling scores, babies, and birthdays may not be the compelling reading but they are mildly interesting to management and employees. Management can at least claim they are attempting to communicate with employees and meet their needs. Employees may even feel good about the recognition they receive from such an approach. So the publication neither takes a hard company line or actively seeks to meet the informational needs of the employees. The key point is that the trivialization approach allows management to argue that they are sensitive employee needs and at the same time reveal harmless information. The illusion of open and honest communication between management and employees can be maintained by both parties. Of course, people are interested in others activities and for this very reason the trivialization approach is viable.

The three strategies for coordinating the perspectives of management, employees, and editors are obviously archetypes (see Figure 2). Most publications no doubt share elements of all three approaches. Nevertheless, the role of the employee publication in an organization's communication program can be determined by the strategy chosen by the editorial staff as negotiated within the constraints of management philosophy.

Figure 2



II. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The bulk of the literature deals with suggestions on how to make the employee publication more effective. The suggestions varied greatly. Some were narrow and specific, while others were more inclusive of the entire process and more generalized.

To one company, the most important factors simply included a proper mailing list and readability (Barrus, 1979). Another article stressed setting goals and presented the publication as a vehicle to "(a) explain new plans and programs (with a bit of salesmanship); (b) answer complaints and criticisms; and (c) defend the status quo and the wisdom of those responsible for it" (CPA Journal, December 1980). It went on to discuss the staff need: "Only people with good communication skills, including the ability to write clearly and in an appropriate style, a feeling for graphics and an ability to meet deadlines." The importance of a proposed budget and the development of a mock-up of the publications was also stressed (CPA Journal, December, 1980).

A consistent theme of a large part of the literature was the importance of choosing the correct contents for the publication. Most authors suggested that the contents should be selected to achieve the goals of the publication (CPA Journal, December 1980). The literature was fairly consistent in advocating the very limited use of personal news (birthdays, want ads, etc.) (D'Aprix, 1982). Articles dealing with employee recognition are one of the least read type of stories. In fact, D'Aprix says, "One of the worst uses of the employee publication is for employee recognition." (D'Aprix, 1982, p. 104). On the other hand, Lewis (1980) suggests that this type of article is effective if used correctly. Lewis adds, "one solution is to sandwich the mind-expanding information between pictures, names and faces of the readers' friends and acquaintances."

A number of sources like to quote statistics on the "average" employee publications. The most widely used characteristics were frequency of publication and format of the publication. Approximately one-half of employee publications are published monthly (CPA

Journal, December, 1980; Paule, 1977). Paule rated weekly or bi-weekly and monthly or quarterly as second and third, respectively, while the CPA Journal rated quarterly second and weekly/bi-weekly/other third. The magazine format was found to be the most popular (IABC, 1981; Paule, 1977). Paule went on to state that 8 1/2" x 11" was the size utilized by 40% of the companies with employee publications. The next most popular format used is the newspaper, and these tend to be tabloid size, 11" x 15 1/2" (IABC, 1981). Other characteristics such as number of pages, use of color pictures and purpose differ greatly (IABC, 1981).

Axley's (1983) in-depth study of two "house organs" is one notable exception to the general trend in the literature of focusing on prescription or description. His qualitative analysis involved analyzing the feature or stories in employee publications from two different organizations by categorizing the stories into three categories: 1) information-giving news; 2) status-conferring news; 3) managerial philosophy. He found that the System 2 company's (more paternalistic) publication used more column inches on status-conferring news (50%) than on information giving (43%) and managerial philosophy (7%). While, the System 4 (more humanistic) company's publication focused more on information-giving news (69%) than status-conferring news (20%) and managerial philosophy (11/5). The low percentage of column inches devoted to the managerial philosophy in both companies seems reasonable in that the philosophy is more static and unchanging when compared to the more dynamic nature of attempts to confer status and give information. Axley's basic conclusion was that each organization's publication reflected both in content and emphasis the respective management philosophies of each company.

There are several observations that can be made about the literature. To begin with, there appears to be a lack of scholarly research. Almost all of the articles are written from a journalistic standpoint. These articles focus more on "how to" create a publication rather than what the actual publications are like. Part of this is due to the fact that there has been little examination of the actual publications, with the notable exception of Axley's work.

The literature does not examine the relationship of the employee publication to the organizational outcomes. This is especially true of relating the publication to the organization's goal. For instance, few of the articles discuss the impact of the publications on productivity. There is some discussion of what the purpose should be, again from the "how to" viewpoint, but few authors discuss the purposes from the perspective of actual organizations. Finally, the literature does not examine the degree of effectiveness of the publication or how it is judged.

III. METHODS

This section of the report will detail the research methods utilized. The research process consisted of three phases:

- Review of relevant literature
- Interviews with editors of employee publications
- A nationwide survey

Initially an extensive search for any literature regarding employee publications was conducted. The purpose of this search was twofold: 1) to determine the extensiveness of previous research; and 2) to determine the critical issues involving employee publications. Very little relevant material was uncovered.

From the review of literature, a few critical issues emerged. An interviewers' guide, addressing these issues, was developed. It was then pretested and the final draft written up. The interviewers' guide used in Phase Two of the research project contained twenty questions (Appendix 1) and consisted of two sections: 1) basic information about the employee publication; and 2) the conceptual ideas behind the publication.

Contact was made with twelve editors of company publications. The interviews lasted from thirty minutes to an hour and were conducted in the privacy of the editor's office.

An analysis of the interviewees' responses was conducted, and a questionnaire was developed. The categories utilized in the questionnaire were the most frequent responses in the interview. The open-ended questions were strategically chosen due to the importance of the question and the scope of response that was desired. The questionnaire was then pretested, and final adjustments were made. The questionnaire, which was mailed out, consisted of twenty-two questions, pertaining to the publication and underlying philosophy. Also, six open-ended demographical questions were asked. A copy of the questionnaire is located in Appendix 2.

A random sampling of companies with operations in the United States was selected. The companies varied in the number of employees and net income and industries. Who's Who in American Society for Personnel Administration/1981 and The Working Press of the Nation, Volume 5: Internal Publications Directory, 1981 Edition, were used to select the companies.

At this time a cover letter (Appendix 3) was drafted and mailed out with the questionnaire. The cover letter explained the purpose of the research project and asked for the editor's cooperation. In addition, the cover letter also asked for a copy of the employee publication so additional analysis could be conducted. To increase the return rate, a self-addressed stamped envelope was also enclosed. Responses were accepted for six weeks, and, at the end of that period, 135 of the 300 questionnaires were received, 45% return rate. Seven companies included information about more than one employee publication. In addition, 53 companies included samples of their employee publication.

Three basic analyses were made in this study. First, the BMDP Statistical Package was utilized to analyze the survey responses. Second, the open-ended questions were also analyzed by the three researchers. Categories were developed and each researcher analyzed the responses separately. Reliability was checked utilizing Holsti's (1967) formula. Reliability levels ranged from 91% to 100%. (See Note 1.). Donald Johanson, the famous anthropologist, once said: "The only way a scientist can start to understand something is to describe it, to measure it, and name it." Thus, the third type of analysis consisted of analyzing 53 employee publications sent in by the organizations. The main analysis consisted of a story analysis along with a picture analysis. We also measured the actual size of the publication, number of pages, number of pictures and the color element of the publication. All of this information, along with the results from the questionnaire, are presented in the following section.

IV. RESULTS

Demographics

The companies responding to the questionnaire covered a wide spectrum with regard to demographic data. Specific questions dealt with number of employees, type of industry, and net income of company. The number of employees in the surveyed companies ranged from 44 to 200,000 (see Table 1). Companies representing nine industries responded to the questionnaire. The bulk of the respondents fell into either manufacturing (light and heavy) or service industries. A full listing of the industries is found in Table 2. Net income showed the widest variance of the demographic questions. The answers ranged from \$61,000 up to \$4,000,000,000. Table 3 contains the range of net incomes reported.

The final demographic question asked whether the company was union or non-union. Over half (51.3%) were reported as being non-union. More than one quarter (27.0%) of the companies stated they were both union and non-union and 20.0% were union.

The Typical Employee Publication

The typical employee publication was a monthly publication, mailed to the employee homes and the editor was the primary writer. The publication was aimed at the employees of the company. The editors were most likely to have some formal training for the position. The typical publication began between 1961 and 1980, with the median being 1967. Three thousand (3,000) copies were printed, and they cost forty cents per copy.

The most widely used frequency of publication is monthly (41.2%). The next most popular frequency was quarterly (21.0%). Table 4 outlines the other frequencies utilized. An overwhelming majority of companies distributed their employee publications by either mailing them to the employees' homes or handing them out at work. The percentages were 41.2% and 40.3%, respectively. Other methods utilized include left at exits, included in paycheck, and passed around each department.

We found that 66.4% of the respondents named the editor as the writer of the majority of articles for the publication. There was no evidence of a clear-cut category of secondary contributors. Table 5 shows the distribution of the primary writer.

The audience for the publication was perceived as being the employees (97.5%). Respondents could choose more than one category, and, as shown in Table 6, employees' families were also regarded as important part of the audience.

A large majority of editors of these publications have had some training for their job. Only 6.9% have not had any training. Table 7 shows a breakdown of the extent of training.

The oldest publication we found began in 1887, and the most recent began in 1982. The average year for beginning a publication was 1941. Table 8 represents the frequency of first publications in several categories.

One of the widest ranges we found was in the number of copies printed per issue. The smallest amount printed was 100 and the largest was 267,000. The mean number was 13,764; but a more representative figure was the median at 3,000 copies. Table 9 shows the distribution.

Most of the publications had printing costs of less than \$1.00 per copy per issue. The least expensive were one or two page photocopies, while the most expensive, \$4.37 per copy, were full color magazines. The variance in costs is outlined in Table 10.

Another issue addressed was that of employee involvement. When asked to what extent employees were encouraged to make contributions to the employee publication, the respondents felt that the employees were encouraged to some degree. On a scale from one to seven, highly encouraged to not encouraged, the mean was 3.21. The actual breakdown is as follows:

Highly Encouraged	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Not Encouraged
Percentage	3.64	11.0	8.5	15.3	7.6	4.2	16.1	Encouraged

The respondents, however, indicated that they received contributions to a lesser extent. The mean for this question was 4.49 on a scale from one to seven. The following chart provides a complete breakdown.

Great Extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Little Extent
Percentage	4.3	13.7	12.8	16.2	14.5	21.4	16.2	

Apparently the contributions received from employees were used to some degree, with a mean of 3.46. The breakdown of the actual percentages is as follows:

Great Extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Little Extent
Percentage	28.4	14.7	11.2	11.2	7.8	9.5	16.4	

Thus, the companies responding felt that they are strongly encouraging their employees to contribute, were receiving them and were using the contributions to a greater degree.

The following information was obtained from our analysis of the publications we received with the questionnaire. According to this information, the typical publication was an 8 1/2" x 11" newspaper with 1 - 10 pages, with from 0 - 10 pictures and makes some use of color.

The most popular size, by a wide margin, was 8 1/2" x 11". This is probably because of its standard in the printing industry. As shown in Table 11, there were a variety of other sizes also used. The second most popular size was 11" x 17".

Table 12 shows that almost all publications were either a newspaper or magazine. Only 14.8% used any other format. The number of pages of the publications ranged from 1 to 36. Again, the shortest was a photocopy and the longest a magazine. Table 13 illustrates the range.

Of the publications we received, only four did not contain any pictures at all. Table 14 shows the breakdown. Although the largest category was 0 - 10, the average number of pictures was 29.

Slightly over half (52.8%) of the publications were printed in only one color. In addition, 17.0% were printed in full color. Black and white publications constituted 30.2% of the sample.

Purpose

One of the most critical issues surrounding employee publications deals with the purpose. Two open-ended questions on the survey were concerned with the purpose of starting the publication and its present purpose.

The reasons given for starting the publication are given in Table 15. Over half of the respondents stated the purpose of beginning their publication was to use it as an internal communication source (57.6%). This category included communication with other offices and divisions, improved communication, communication between employees and management, and to cover expansion and growth.

Table 16 shows the present purpose of the publication. Note that internal communication source falls to third with only 29.7%. The most cited purposes were a motivational tool and an information source. The information source category included keeping employees informed, providing company information and educational materials.

Content

The questionnaire contained two questions regarding what types of articles were published in the employee publication. The first question asked what articles were actually published. Articles pertaining to employee recognition and company awards were published by most of the organizations. Since respondents could choose more than one category, other categories also had high percentages. Table 17 provides a breakdown of the articles most frequently published.

The second question regarding articles deals with those thought to be most important. Evidently the articles pertaining to employee recognition were most important, followed by future plans. Benefits and policy/policy changes were ranked third and fourth, respectively. Table 18 provides a complete breakdown of those articles which the respondents thought were most important to include.

Actual Story Analysis

Fifty-three publications were received from the 135 respondents. The actual stories published were analyzed and categorized into 58 different types of articles. Two researchers analyzed the articles separately, and reliability was checked.

Table 19 lists the top six types of articles that were actually published. Thus, 56.9% of the companies included articles on employee recognition; 53.8% published personnel changes/promotions articles and 51% of the companies had an article and company business projects. These percentages reflect the number of actual employee publications that published that type of article, not the actual number of articles. The following breakdowns detail the actual number of articles found in the publications on the top three types of stories:

<u>Employee Recognition (#1)</u>		
Number of Articles	Number of Companies	Percentage of Companies
0	22	43.1
1	18	35.3
2	10	19.6
3	1	2.0

Personnel Changes/Promotions (#2)

Number of Articles	Number of Companies	Percentage of Companies
0	24	46.2
1	11	21.2
2	9	17.3
3	7	13.5
4	1	1.9

Company Business Projects (#3)

Number of Articles	Number of Companies	Percentage of Companies
0	25	49.0
1	14	27.5
2	5	9.8
3	3	5.9
5	3	5.9
7	1	2.0

Comparison of the articles that were actually published to what the editors surveyed said they published showed considerable agreement. Articles pertaining to employee recognition were said to be published and the analysis of actual publications shows this to be the case. A comparison of the top six types of articles is revealed below:

Rank	Survey Indication of What Is Most Frequently Published	Rank	Analysis of Publications On What Is Most Frequently Published
1	Employee Recognition	1	Employee Recognition
2	Company Awards	2	Personnel Changes-Promotions
3	Personnel Changes/Promotions	3	Company Business Projects
4	Recognition of Other Departments/Divisions	4	Recognition of Other Departments/Divisions
5	Company Policies	5	Organization's Community Involvement
6	Organization's Community Involvement	6	Employee Anniversaries

Thus, editors say they publish articles regarding recognition of employees, while keeping them informed on a variety of topics and the analysis of actual publications confirms this perception.

Picture Analysis

A picture analysis was conducted on the publications that were received. The pictures were categorized into 31 different types. Two researchers analyzed the pictures, separately, and reliability was checked. Table 20 lists the most frequent types of photographs included in the publication. Employee recognition, personnel changes/promotions, and miscellaneous (charts, graphs, drawings, etc.) respectively were the top three type of pictures most frequently published.

The percentages reflect the number of actual publications, in which at least one picture of the type was found, not the actual number of pictures. A breakdown of the

frequency for pictures pertaining to employee recognition is as follows:

<u>Number of Employee Recognition Pictures</u>	<u>Number of Publications</u>	<u>Percentage of Publications</u>
0	19	35.8
1	9	17.0
2	6	11.3
3	6	11.3
4	2	3.8
5	3	5.7
6	1	1.9
7	1	1.9
9	1	1.9
10	2	3.8
14	1	1.9
20	1	1.9
58	1	

The average number of photos regarding employee recognition was 3.70. Note the wide range of employee-recognition pictures, 0 to 58, in this sample.

Effectiveness

The methods in which companies judge the effectiveness of their employee publications is a critical question. The respondents indicated that verbal feedback from employees was the most frequently used method when judging effectiveness. Over one-third of the respondents indicated that a survey conducted on a formal basis was utilized. Table 21 provides a rank ordering of the most frequently used methods.

The respondents felt that their employee publications had some impact on the workers' productivity. On a scale from one to seven, great impact to little impact, the average was 4.76. The actual breakdown was as follows:

Great Impact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Little Impact
Percentage	3.5	10.6	2.4	28.2	14.1	18.8	21.2	

In contrast to the productivity, most respondents believe that their employee publications reflect management's philosophy, with the average 1.97 on a scale from one to seven. The following chart provides a complete breakdown:

To a Great Extent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	To a Little Extent
Percentage	48.7	27.4	12.8	6.8	.9	0	3.4	

Thus, from the editor's viewpoint, the effectiveness of the employee publication appears to be high regarding management's philosophy, but somewhat lower in regards to workers' productivity.

V. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Limitations are inherent in any exploratory research project. Very little substantial research has been done in the past. There are limitations within the questionnaire itself. On a few occasions, restrictions should have been placed on the number of responses allowed. For instance, the question regarding the distribution of the employee publication could have been a bit more specific. The phrase "the most predominant method" could have been added. The questionnaire also failed to address the employee's or managements' perception of the publication. The editor of the publication was responsible for completing the questionnaire, thus reflecting his/her attitude. The employees attitude is not necessarily reflected or even the same for that matter. We utilized the phrase "house organ" in the questionnaire. Ten organizations brought this to our attention and informed us of the fact that this phrase was no longer accepted. Rather, employee publication, company publication, or in-house publications are now preferred. However, much of the recent literature still utilizes the phrase "house organ."

Some of our results and conclusions were based on the analysis of the actual publications that we received. Receiving only 53 publications may have biased the survey. Also, the fact that we received one issue of the employee publication may have affected the results. Analyzing the publications on the basis of the story type instead of the number of column inches, or paragraphs devoted to a certain story may have produced some inequities.

Despite these concerns as an exploratory research project, significant conclusions can be drawn from the research. These conclusions will be outlined in the following section.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Examination of the data revealed five basic conclusions that are reviewed below.

First, the results of this survey concerning the basic characteristics of employee publications were generally congruent with past research in the field. In terms of the general format, frequency of publication, costs, number of pages, and circulation this exploratory research mirrored the findings of past researchers (IABC, 1979; Paule, 1977). The typical publication is published on a monthly basis, costs 40¢ to produce, has from 1 to 10 pages, and circulation of 3,000 which is distributed to employee homes via the mail.

Second, there appears to be some congruency between the purpose of the publication and the types of articles actually contained in the publication. The most widely stated purpose by the editors was for motivation/recognition which included fellow employee recognition, employee achievement, motivation, teamwork/unity and morale. When editors were asked about the actual articles they publish, 93.3% of them responded that employee recognition articles were published. This was overwhelmingly the category of most agreement. Furthermore, the analysis of the actual publications showed that 56.7% contained at least one recognition article.

The second ranked purpose was informational, which included company goals, changes, company information, and education. The evidence from this survey once again supports a link between purpose and story content. Survey responses indicated that many types of informational articles were high on the list of those published. These items include benefit programs (76.3%), company policies (69.7%) and organizational community involvement (68.1%). Analysis of the actual publications revealed that 51% of the publications had at least one story on company business projects. Thus, in general some strong evidence exists that the purpose of employee publications linked to the actual types of articles printed.

Third, there was little evidence of formal evaluation of the publication's effectiveness. Traditionally journalists have judged the effectiveness of their publications through circulation and advertising revenues. The inherent dynamics of employee publications preclude these types of measures. Only 36.4% of the respondents to this survey evaluated the publication on a formal basis. The vast majority (65.3%) relied on verbal feedback from employees and management. The unique position of the editor as a mediator between employee needs and management needs may inhibit clear, accurate, and unbiased feedback about the publication. When relying on verbal feedback, the editor can purposefully screen at certain types of information.

Fourth, the purpose and focus of employee publications appears to be employee recognition. One of the more striking findings of this research was the apparent shift in the purpose of the publication from conception to present usage. Table 15 shows that 57.6% of the editors felt that the original purpose of the "house organ" was as an internal communication service. Only 14.4% felt the original purpose was motivation, while 10.2% noted sharing social news and activities as the initial objective. When asked about the present day purpose 35.6% noted the purpose was motivational and providing employee recognition. Only 29.7% noted that the employee publication served as an internal communication source, but 33.9% felt the "house organ" also served as a source of information. The really dramatic result was that only 14.4% of editors felt that the original purpose was employee recognition or motivation, while 35.6% of the editors reported the current purpose to be recognition and motivation.

Examination of survey results and the actual publications suggests that the most frequently published articles deal with employee recognition. For example, 93.3% of the editors reported that they published employee recognition articles and furthermore 22.2% of the editors (ranked 1st) felt this type of article was the most important type to publish. The analysis of the actual publications showed that 56.9% of the "house organs" (ranked 1st) contained at least one article on employee recognition. Even more telling was the finding that 64.2% of pictures in the publication dealt with employee recognition.

The evidence is abundantly clear that employee recognition is a major purpose and indeed a substantial component of employee publications. This finding greatly contrasts with the prescriptions suggested by many authors. D'Aprix for instance said that "one of the worst uses of the employee publication is for employee recognition." Every company needs to provide employee recognition but the important question is whether using the employee publication is the most effective way to meet this need. Salary increases, bonuses, time off, additional support are just a few of the other alternatives. In sum, the ultimate effectiveness of employee publications in meeting recognition needs has to be questioned.

Fifth, the evidence suggests that many editors appear to be leaning towards the trivialization strategy. The theoretical perspective developed in this paper suggested that because of the unique attributes of employee publications, editors had three basic types of responses in balancing the needs of employees and management: collaboration, capitulation, and trivialization. Focusing on harmless, trivial, or noncontroversial news is the trademark of the trivialization approach. No one is offended, management retains strict control of information, and employees are made aware of certain mildly interesting information.

As suggested above, the focus and content of most publications appear to be on employee recognition (ranked 1st). Examination of Table 17 reveals that 86.35 (ranked 2nd) of the editors published stories on company awards, and 78.2% (ranked 3rd) printed information on personnel changes and promotions. This type of story while moderately informative can hardly be construed as a reporting format that stresses an aggressive communication program that focuses on key organizational issues.

The most revealing evidence came from the analysis of the actual publications. Six main categories emerged from the content analysis: employee recognition (56.9%); personnel changes (53.8%); company business projects (51.0%); recognition of departments (48.1%); organization's community involvement (44.2%); and employee anniversaries (41.2%).

Note that every major story type can be seen as information that would be indicative of the trivialization orientation. Stories about the organizations' future plans, question/answer columns, and comments from the CEO are examples of the types of articles that would indicate a more collaborative strategy. The employee publications analyzed in this study were conspicuously void of such articles.

Briefly, the data from the survey as well as the analysis of actual publications revealed that there was a tendency for in-house publications to focus on rather commonplace and mundane information. There is obviously a need to share some of this information but these stories are strangely reminiscent of the much distained three B's (birthdays, bowling scores, and babies). Indeed, some of the publications examined almost exclusively reported on the three B's. Such findings suggest that many editors have a tendency to resolve the inherent conflict between management and employees by adopting a strategy that appears to be along the lines of trivialization. Thus, many editors of employee publications have the complex and challenging task of turning their publications into vital communication force that deals with relevant issues in a manner that is useful to both employees and management.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

<u>Number of Employees</u>	<u>Percentage of Total</u>
1 - 5,000	62.4%
5,001-10,000	12.0%
10,001-15,000	5.1%
15,001-20,000	2.6%
20,001-25,000	5.9%
25,001-30,000	1.7%
30,001-35,000	0.9%
35,001-40,000	3.4%
40,001-45,000	5.1%

TABLE 2
INDUSTRIES

<u>Industry</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Manufacturing (Light & Heavy)	29.7%
Service	25.7%
High Technology & Computers	11.5%
Retail	9.9%
Utility Company	8.3%
Energy	5.0%
Food Processing	4.1%
Pharmaceuticals	2.5%
Construction	0.08%
No Answer	2.5%

TABLE 3
NET INCOME

<u>Amount of Net Income</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
\$ 1-\$ 1,000,000	7.5%
\$ 1,000,001-\$ 20,000,000	14.9%
\$ 20,000,001-\$ 40,000,000	10.4%
\$ 40,000,001-\$ 60,000,000	13.5%
\$ 60,000,001-\$ 80,000,000	3.0%
\$ 80,000,001-\$100,000,000	7.4%
\$100,000,001-\$200,000,000	14.9%
\$200,000,001-\$300,000,000	6.0%
\$300,000,001-\$400,000,000	1.5%
\$400,000,001-\$500,000,000	-
\$500,000,001-\$600,000,000	1.5%
\$600,000,001-\$700,000,000	-
\$700,000,001-\$800,000,000	3.0%
Over \$800,000,000	16.4%

TABLE 4
FREQUENCY OF PUBLICATION

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	Monthly	41.2%
2	Quarterly	21.0%
3	Bimonthly	14.3%
4	Weekly	9.2%
5	Biweekly	6.7%
6	Other	4.2%
7	Semi-Annually	3.4%

TABLE 5
PRIMARY WRITERS FOR PUBLICATION

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Primary Writer</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	Editor	66.4%
2	Editorial Staff	33.6%
3	Outside Contributors	8.4%
4	Department Heads	7.6%
5	Employees	6.7%
6	Management	5.9%
7	Other	5.9%

TABLE 6
AUDIENCES

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Audience</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	Employees	97.5%
2	Employees' Family	67.2%
3	Management	54.6%
4	Retired Employees	54.6%
5	Board of Directors	24.4%
6	Others	18.5%
7	Customers/Clients	10.9%
8	Community	9.2%

TABLE 7

EXTENT OF EDITOR'S TRAINING

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Extent of Training</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	Formal Training	64.4%
2	Informal Training	19.7%
3	Some Formal Trainin	14.4%
4	No Training	6.9%

TABLE 8

BEGINNING YEARS OF PUBLICATIONS

<u>Year of Beginning Publication</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Before 1900	3.5%
1900-1920	6.1%
1921-1940	11.5%
1941-1960	24.5%
1961-1980	40.4%
After 1980	14.0%

TABLE 9

NUMBER OF COPIES PRINTED PER ISSUE

<u>Number of Copies</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1-10,000	75.4%
10,001-20,000	9.3%
20,001-30,000	4.3%
30,001-40,000	3.4%
40,001-50,000	1.7%
50,001-60,000	-
60,001-70,000	3.4%
Over 70,000	2.5%

TABLE 10

PRICE PER COPY PER ISSUE

<u>Price Per Copy</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
\$0.01-\$0.50	60.9%
\$0.51-\$1.00	24.2%
\$1.01-\$1.50	9.2%
\$1.51-\$2.00	2.3%
Over \$2.00	3.4%

TABLE 11
PUBLICATION SIZES

<u>Actual Sizes</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
8 1/2" x 11"	72.2%
11" x 17	9.3%
11 1/2" x 14"	5.6%
9 1/2" x 14"	3.7%
8 1/2" x 10 1/2"	1.9%
9 1/2" x 12 1/2"	1.9%
11" x 12"	1.9%
11" x 15"	1.9%
11" x 16"	1.9%

TABLE 12
FORMATS UTILIZED

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Format</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	Newspaper	53.7%
2	Magazine	29.6%
3	Xerox	7.4%
4	Stapled	3.7%
5	Foldout	3.7%

TABLE 13
NUMBER OF PAGES

<u>Number of Pages</u>	<u>Percentages</u>
1-10	53.7%
11-20	33.3%
21-30	7.4%
31-40	5.6%

TABLE 14
NUMBER OF PICTURES

<u>Number of Pictures</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
0-10	24.1%
11-20	18.5%
21-30	22.2%
31-40	13.0%
41-50	5.5%
51-60	3.7%
61-70	1.9%
71-80	3.7%
81-90	1.8%
91-100	5.6%

TABLE 15

PURPOSES FOR BEGINNING PUBLICATION

<u>Purposes</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Internal Communication Source	57.6%
Motivational	14.4%
Social News & Activities	10.2%
Benefits & Policies	7.6%
Personnel News	6.8%
Others	5.9%
Community Awareness	1.7%

TABLE 16

PRESENT DAY PURPOSES FOR PUBLICATIONS

<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Motivational/Recognition	35.6%
Informational	33.9%
Internal Communication Source	29.7%
Benefits & Policies	13.6%
Social News & Activities	13.6%
Sales & Products	5.1%
Entertainment	5.1%
Others	4.2%
No Comment	2.5%

TABLE 17

MOST FREQUENTLY PUBLISHED ARTICLES

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Type of Article</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
1	Employee Recognition	93.3%
2	Company Awards	86.3%
3	Personnel Changes/Promotions	78.2%
4	Benefit Programs	76.3%
5	Recognition of Other Departments/ Divisions	73.9%
6	Company Policies	69.7%
7	Organizations Community Involvement	68.1%
8	Company Social Functions	65.5%
9	Company Sponsored Sport Activities	64.7%
10	Organizations Future Plans	63.9%
11	Safety	63.9%
12	Promoting Goodwill Between Management & Employees	63.0%
13	Effect of External Events on Company	58.0%
14	Motivational	54.6%
15	Financial Results	51.3%
16	Personal News (Birthdays, Anniversaries, etc.)	51.3%
17	Questions and Answers	42.0%
18	Others	21.8%

TABLE 18

ARTICLES THOUGHT TO BE MOST IMPORTANT TO PUBLISH

Rank	Type of Article	Percentage
1	Employee Recognition	22.2%
2	Future Plans	15.3%
3	Benefits	12.2%
4	Policy/Policy Changes	10.2%
5	Company Business	9.2%
6	No Comment	7.0%
7	Department Division News	6.9%
8	Informational	6.1%
9	Team Involvement	6.0%
9	Products	6.0%
10	Personnel News	5.2%
10	"All of the Above" **	5.2%
11	Employee Involvement	4.3%
12	Financial Results	4.2%
12	Company Activities	4.2%
13	Human Interest	3.5%
13	Motivational	3.5%
14	Performance of Company	3.4%
15	Improve Productivity	2.6%
15	Others	2.6%
15	Sports/Social Events	2.6%
15	Success Stories	2.6%
16	Philosophy/Goals	2.5%
17	Employee Contributions	1.7%
17	Goodwill	1.7%
17	Safety	1.7%

**"All of the Above" refers to the list of articles in Table 17.

TABLE 19

MOST FREQUENTLY ARTICLES ACTUALLY PUBLISHED

Rank	Type of Article	% of companies with at least one article of that Type
1	Employee Recognition	56.9%
2	Personnel Changes/Promotions	53.8%
3	Company Business Projects	51.0%
4	Recognition of Departments/Divisions	48.1%
5	Organization's Community Involvement	44.2%
6	Employee Anniversaries	41.2%

TABLE 20

MOST FREQUENTLY PHOTOGRAPHS ACTUALLY PUBLISHED

Rank	Type of Picture	% of Companies with at least one picture of that type
1	Employee Recognition	64.2%
2	People from Different Department/Divisions	39.6%
3	Miscellaneous (charts, graphs, drawings, etc.)	37.7%
4	Transfers/Promotions	35.8%
5	Projects	28.3%
5	Retirements	28.3%
5	Organization's Community Involvement	28.3%

TABLE 21

METHODS FOR JUDGING EFFECTIVENESS

<u>Rank</u>		<u>Percentage</u>
1	Verbal Feedback from Employees	65.3%
2	Survey Conducted on a Formal Basis	36.4%
3	No Formal System	32.2%
4	Written Feedback from Employees	31.4%
5	Survey conducted on an Informal Basis	14.4%
6	Others	10.2%

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEWER'S GUIDE

Part 1 (Basic information about your house organ)

1. When did you begin publishing the house organ? Why did it begin?
2. How often do you publish your house organ?
3. Why do you publish it this number of times?
4. Why do you publish it at this frequency? Have you changed the frequency?
5. How do you distribute your company publication?
6. Who do you perceive as your audience? Do you have more than one audience for it? Do any of them conflict?
7. What format(s) have you used for your company publication in the past?
8. If you have changed format, why did you chose to do so?
9. What type of articles are published in your house organ?
10. Why are these types of articles chosen?
11. Who determines what articles are covered in the publication and how are they chosen?
12. Who actually writes the articles used in the publication?
13. Do employees have input into what goes into the publication?
14. Do they have a chance to voice their ideas and opinion in the publication? (writing articles, editorials, etc.).
15. How much per copy does it cost to publish?

Part II (Conceptual)

16. What is the purpose of your company publication?
17. Do you think the purpose is more to recognize employee's needs or more to management's philosophy?
18. How does your house organ complement your overall communication policy?
19. Is it coordinated with other media? If so, how?
20. How do you judge the effectiveness of the publication?

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How often do you publish your house organ?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> weekly | <input type="checkbox"/> quarterly |
| <input type="checkbox"/> biweekly | <input type="checkbox"/> semi-annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> monthly | <input type="checkbox"/> annually |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bimonthly | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

2. How do you distribute your house organ?

- handed out at work
- included with paycheck
- left at exits
- mailed to employee's home
- passed around each department
- other (specify)

3. When did your company begin publishing a house organ? _____

4. Why did your company begin publishing a house organ? _____

5. What is the purpose of the house organ? _____

6. Who do you perceive as your audience?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> board of directors | <input type="checkbox"/> employee's families |
| <input type="checkbox"/> community | <input type="checkbox"/> management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> customers/clients | <input type="checkbox"/> retired employees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> employees | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |

7. If more than one audience, do you see any potential conflicts? If so, what?

8. What types of articles are actually published in your house organ?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> benefit programs | <input type="checkbox"/> organizations community involvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> company awards | <input type="checkbox"/> organizations future plans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> company policies | <input type="checkbox"/> personal news (birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> company social functions | <input type="checkbox"/> personnel changes/promotions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> company sponsored sport activities | <input type="checkbox"/> promoting goodwill between management and employees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> effect of external events on company | <input type="checkbox"/> recognition of other departments/division |
| <input type="checkbox"/> employee recognition | <input type="checkbox"/> safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> financial results | <input type="checkbox"/> questions and answers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> motivational | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) | |

9. What types of articles do you feel are most important to include? _____

10. Who writes the majority of articles?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> department heads | <input type="checkbox"/> management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> editor | <input type="checkbox"/> outside contributors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> editorial staff | <input type="checkbox"/> others (specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> employees | |

11. Who are the secondary contributors on a regular basis? _____

12. To what extent are employees encouraged to make contributions to the house organ?

Highly Encouraged 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Not Encouraged

13. To what extent do you receive contributions from employees?

To a Great Extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 To a Little Extent

14. To what extent are employee contributions used in the house organ?

To a Great Extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 To a Little Extent

15. To what extent does the house organ reflect management's philosophy?

To a Great Extent 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 To a Little Extent

Explain _____

16. How do you judge the effectiveness of the house organ?

no formal system verbal feedback from employees
survey conducted on a formal basis written feedback from employees
survey conducted on an informal basis other (specify)

17. What is most effective in the house organ? _____

18. What could make the house organ more effective? _____

19. How much impact does the house organ have on worker's productivity?

Great Impact 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Little Impact

Explain _____

20. How many copies are printed per issue? _____

21. How much per copy does it cost to publish excluding administration costs? _____

22. Does the editor have training in editing such a publication?

formal training informal training
some formal training no training

For statistical purposes, would you please complete the following demographical questions? Once again, this data will be used for classification reasons only.

1. What is the number of employees, including management, employed by the company? _____
2. What type of industry is the company involved in? _____

3. What type of product or service does the company produce? _____

4. Is the company union or non-union? _____
5. What is the geographical region of the company? _____

6. What is the amount net income of the company? _____

APPENDIX 3

November 10, 1982

<n>

Dear <s>:

We are seniors at the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay and we are conducting a research project on in-house publications.

As part of this project we are asking a select number of companies to fill out the enclosed questionnaire. We also ask that you send along a copy of your house organ. Your name was randomly chosen from Who's Who in ASPA, 1981.

We would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire and send it back in the self-addressed stamped envelope. If you are not the editor, please forward this correspondence to that person.

All of the information we receive will be kept strictly confidential. If you would like a summary of our findings please enclose your business card with the questionnaire. We will be sending the summary out in 2-3 months.

Thank you very much for your time. Your reply will be very helpful to our research.

Sincerely,

Jean Crevoeure

Robin Hansen

Phillip Clampitt
Assistant Professor of
Organizational Communication

JC/RH/PC/tm
Enclosures

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Note #1

The reliability scores reported below were attained for the following questions:

Question	Reliability	Number of Categories
Why began Publishing employee publication	91%	18
Present purpose of employee publication	91%	26
Potential conflicts with audiences	100%	10
Articles most important to publish	99%	30
Secondary contributors	100%	19
Actual story analysis	99%	58
Picture analysis	100%	31
Dimensions of actual publications	100%	20

Note #2

The authors would like to thank Dr. Timothy Meyer of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay for his helpful comments on the theoretical section of this paper.