Aalto University
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The role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety. Case: SSAB

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Master's thesis

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ABSTRACT

Objective of the study: The objective of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of the role of communication in supporting management's work in improving workplace safety in the case organization, a Nordic and US-based steel company. The overall purpose was to find out what the role of internal corporate communication is in supporting workplace safety in practical terms and whether the role is wider than that shown in previous studies on workplace safety. To be able to understand the issue of workplace safety in this context, this study utilized a theoretical framework built on corporate communication as a management function (Cornelissen, 2011), an internal corporate communication concept (Welch & Jackson, 2006), a typology of the roles of communication professionals (Broom & Smith, 1979), management practices in safety work (Vredenburgh, 2002) and safety climate as part of organizational climate (Neal & al., 2000).

Research method. Research method was a single-case study using multiple sources. The primary data source was qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the management, safety experts and communication professionals of the case company. Altogether 12 interviews were conducted in April and May 2015. Other data sources included archival records and administrative documents.

Findings and conclusions: The findings of this study suggest that communication can have a wider role in supporting workplace safety than that suggested in previous studies. Three roles for communication were recognized based on the study: informative role, consultative role and influential role. Communication can also have an umbrella role, which means overall integrated communication. The roles were interconnected and thus any one role alone is not able to adequately support workplace safety. The roles seemed to be also linked to the safety climate, i.e. how the importance of workplace safety is perceived and made sense of at the organization. Based on this study, communication can have different roles based on the current state of safety climate.

Managerial implications: Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that the case organization broadens the role of the internal corporate communication function from the currently dominant informative role to consultative and informational roles. For further studies, ascertaining the perceptions and views of the employees is recommended, since involving employees is an important part of safety management. To help the case organization to evaluate and plan internal workplace safety communication, two practical tools are being offered: 1) a general tool in analyzing and planning goals, roles of communication in connection to roles of management and content and channels of communication 2) a detailed tool linking the safety climate and roles of communication to the suggested communication activities.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Talk to any communication professional working in a large industrial organization, and you will find there is one topic in internal corporate communication that involves everyone: workplace safety. Workplace safety (meaning prevention of work-related diseases and injuries as defined by WHO, 2015a) is a critical issue for organizations, especially for organizations with large manufacturing sites and is also of strategic importance: organizations want to keep their workforce safe for many reasons. Employee wellbeing is, of course, the most important reason for safety work, but other reasons include being a partner of good reputation for customers, keeping production running, fulfilling shareholder expectations and being a good corporate citizen. Also legislation (such as the Finnish Occupational Health and Safety Act, 738/2002, see Finlex, 2002) requires employers to e.g. arrange a safe working environment, provide training, offer appropriate protective equipment and assess and eliminate work-related risks.

Since workplace safety is obviously a critical issue for organizations, it is also a top priority communication issue for the management of an organization. It is of high importance to communicate proactively about workplace safety, first of all to internal stakeholders, but also to external ones, for example, in connection to quarterly or annual financial reporting or in the social responsibility section of the sustainability report. Communication about safety issues has many objectives. Firstly, communication is important in supporting safe working by increasing awareness and understanding of as well as commitment to safety issues (Welch & Jackson, 2006). Secondly, communicating safety issues helps in building and maintaining the reputation of the organization as safe operator towards internal and external stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2011).

Safety as an internal communication topic can also be a rather sensitive one, and the tone of voice in communication can be discussed. Is humor acceptable in communication if it relates to safety? How can employee attitudes and behavior be impacted and made more safety oriented? How can all employees in a large organization even be reached to ensure their voice is also heard?

Figure 1. The main causes of injury in the steel industry (World Steel Association, 2015)

While working at a steel company myself, I have faced the fact that manufacturing site employees are exposed to several serious risks in their daily work. Figure 1 above illustrates these risks, which require integrating safety to all management systems of companies operating in the industry. Figure 1 cited is created by World Steel Association, which represents 170 steel producers worldwide (about 85% of the world's steel production capacity). The association organizes a global, annual Steel Safety Day to promote four goals: 1) Nothing is more important than the safety and health of employees, 2) All injuries and work-related illnesses can and must be prevented, 3) Management is responsible and accountable for safety and health performance and 4) Excellence in safety & health supports excellent business results (World Steel Association, 2015).

These goals put workplace safety in a very strategic position in the operations of the organizations concerned and my aim is to show the role of communication practices in this picture: communication is seen as having a supportive role in achieving these goals,

but what kind of supportive role does communication have in increasing awareness and commitment to safety?

1.1 Background of the thesis

This thesis looks at the role and practices of workplace safety communication as an internal corporate communication and management function within organizations. In this introductory chapter, I discuss the background of this research paper by introducing the context I have chosen to look at workplace safety communication: I look at workplace safety communication within corporate communication discipline, in the framework of integrated, strategic communication, and as part of internal corporate communication. The aim is to examine the role of the internal corporate communication function in supporting better workplace safety. I use empirical case research to achieve my research objectives.

Safety is a huge issue, especially at workplaces where there is even a minimum risk of accident, such as industrial organizations with large manufacturing sites, construction sites, sites handling dangerous substances or in chemical and nuclear power plants that Hofmann & al. (1995) call high reliability process industries. Within these industries, safety is very often part of corporate strategy, if not explicitly, at least an important part of the social responsibility theme in corporate responsibility strategy – an area which is increasingly higher on the corporate strategy agenda, too (see e.g. Porter & Kramer, 2006). Top management's strong commitment to safety issues is a key factor for successfully implementing health and safety actions (Hofmann & al., 1995, 138). The strategic importance of safety can be justified also based on the fact that it involves several key stakeholders, including employees, constructor employees, partners, customers, community members and shareholders. Building and maintaining relationships with these stakeholders is one of the most important objectives of the corporate communication function (Cornelissen, 2011).

On this basis, I set out to look at workplace safety as a strategic topic within the field of corporate communication discipline. Strategic communication issues, such as workplace safety, need an integrated approach for communication (Argenti & al., 2005). Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005) emphasize long-term relationships with key constituents and

claim that an integrated, strategic approach to communications (with messages aligned with strategy) is to be seen as even being critical to success.

According to Cornelissen, corporate communication can be defined as follows:

> Corporate communication is a management function that is responsible for coordinating internal and external communication with the purpose of establishing and maintaining relationships with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent. (Cornelissen, 2011, 5.)

The role corporate communication has in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholder groups is thus essential when considering it as a strategic management function. Engaging with stakeholders includes managing and protecting the company's reputation toward internal and external stakeholders that is critical and one of the most important strategic objectives of a company in general and its communication practitioners in particular (Cornelissen, 2011, 3). Olkkonen (2014, 20) underscores expectation management, meaning that an organization should rather examine the expectations of its stakeholders than concentrate on its reputation. This is because expectations are more future oriented than reputation and describe the results that the organization is seeking. Thus the most important task of the organization is listening to the environment and stakeholders operating within it (Olkkonen, 2014, 20). By listening to its stakeholders, the organization shows interest in them and their wellbeing, which in turn allows building trust and empowering people to be committed to what they do (Proctor and Dukakis, 2003). Examining expectations, listening to stakeholders and in this way building trust and commitment are essential when thinking about workplace safety since they are key factors of a positive organizational climate and safety climate as part of it (Neal & al., 2000). Previous research has shown that a positive organizational and safety climate is linked to the safety performance of the organization (see e.g. Neal & al., 2000, Cooper & Phillips, 2004).

The above definition of corporate communication also states that corporate communication involves internal and external elements meaning the stakeholder groups can be found inside or outside the organization. Usually, internal stakeholders, i.e.

employees, are regarded as the most important stakeholders, because they are fundamental for the survival of the organization and act as mediators toward other stakeholder groups (e.g. Cornelissen, 2011, 164). Internal communication is traditionally defined as communication with employees internally within the organization (Cornelissen 2011, 164). Internal communication has several objectives including engaging employees (Welch & Jackson, 2007, 177), committing them to the organization (Cornelissen, 2011) and building trust between actors and empowering people to be committed to what they do (Proctor & Dukakis, 2003).

Internal stakeholders cannot, be seen as a uni-dimensional single public (Welch & Jackson, 2007, 177) and internal communication is not only about fulfilling the organization's objectives, but includes a strong employee perspective too. Cornelissen (2011) emphasizes the role of participative actions to be able to fulfill the objectives of internal communication. Getting employees to participate in safety work is essential, since employees commit better to the organization and its objectives if they have at least some control over their work conditions (Cornelissen, 2011). This has been shown also in safety related research (Vredenburgh, 2002).

Workplace health and safety (or occupational health and safety, later referred to as workplace safety) deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace, and has a strong focus on the primary prevention of hazards (WHO, 2015b). Internal safety communication is closely linked to workplace safety work and, by using the model of internal corporate communication by Welch and Jackson (2006), its goals can be seen in increasing awareness and understanding of workplace safety and commitment and belonging to the organization and safe working. Within an organization, safety communication is done at different levels that are also intertwined and cannot be separated. The practical and the most important work is done in everyday work situations between employees and teams and their supervisors (called line management communication by Welch & Jackson, 2006), and a lot of research has been done around this type of communication. Safety communication at the corporate level between top managers and all employees (called internal corporate communication by Welch & Jackson, 2006) can be seen to have a supportive role for practical level work and

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communication. Since corporate level communication has not been studied as much as line management communication, I see a need to look more closely at what elements the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety consists of.

Due to its importance for organization and the wellbeing of the employees, there are extensive studies on individual, micro and macro organizational influences on safety performance (see e.g. Hofmann & al., 1995, Neal & al., 2000, Parker & al., 2001, Vredenburgh, 2002, Cooper & Phillips, 2004). Even though these studies, at least to some extent, acknowledge communication as being an important element in safety performance, it is usually referred to at a general level and shown as one element that affects safe working and is thus not seen in an integrated manner as referred to by Argenti & al. (2005). In many cases, it is only mentioned that effective communication is needed (e.g. Neal & al., 2000), but no definition is given as to what is regarded as an effective communication. In addition, workplace safety research usually concentrates on very practical issues of communication between supervisors and their subordinates or teams (e.g. following safety procedures and guidelines or using safety equipment). In other words, the topic has been studied from line management point of view, not from the corporate communication point of view when using the terms of Welch and Jackson (2006).

This is why I see it important to take a closer look at the role of internal corporate communication in supporting workplace safety, and also how internal corporate communication as management function can support involving, committing and motivating employees to act safely in their everyday work. This is the key topic of this master's thesis. I will now turn to defining the purpose of this study and introduce the research questions.

1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions

This study has two purposes. The first is to contribute to a better understanding of the general role of internal corporate communication in supporting workplace safety. The second is to recognize the roles of communication professionals in particular, and to suggest new roles to enable a strategic, integrated approach to safety communication,

which is regarded as a strategic issue. The study is based on an empirical case study focusing on safety work and communication at SSAB, a Nordic and US-based steel company, which has commissioned this research project. This study is of more practical than theoretical value: the findings of the study are meant to help in improving workplace safety communication at the case company, and the results as such are not applicable to other organizations.

I look into workplace safety analyzing it as a communication and management function. Workplace safety is a communicative issue and theme, but also a managerial, expert and communication function that has various tasks, objectives, techniques and practices. The theoretical framework is mostly drawn from the internal corporate communication model and internal communication matrix (Welch & Jackson, 2006), roles of communication professionals (Broom & Smith, 1979), management practices in safety work (Vredenburgh, 2002), model for stakeholder communication strategies (Cornelissen, 2011) and research on safety climate in contributing to workplace safety (Neal & al., 2000).

This study seeks to answer one research question with the help of 5 empirical questions. The main research question is:

> 1) What is the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety?

To be able to answer the research question, I use five empirical questions related to my case study:

> 1) How is workplace safety perceived and made sense of at the case company?

> 2) How is communication linked to workplace safety?

> 3) What is the role of management in promoting workplace safety?

> 4) What is perceived as effective safety communication at the case company?

5) What sort of communication activities does the management use to promote and enable workplace safety, and what challenges does the organization see related to them?

The empirical data collected for the case study consist mainly of 12 qualitative interviews with safety experts, management and communication professionals of the case company during April and May 2015. In addition, other data sources were used to support the findings (see Appendix 1). The interviewees were chosen so as to include employee groups that are mostly involved in corporate safety communication. Since the purpose was to look at workplace safety communication as a management and communication function, the employee perspective was not included in this study. It is recommended that a separate study be conducted to learn more about employees' perceptions of workplace safety since this is of high importance for the company.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. In this introductory chapter, I have described the background of the thesis, purpose of the study and the research questions. In Chapter 2, I present the relevant literature and concepts related to workplace safety and safety communication, internal corporate communication and the roles of communication professionals regarding the research topic, and I define the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 includes the data and methods of the empirical study and the introduction of the case that I used in collecting the empirical data.

In Chapter 4, I analyze the findings of the empirical data at hand. In Chapter 5, the final chapter, I return to the purpose and research questions of the study, summarize and discuss the main findings and their significance, and conclude the findings to be able to present managerial implications for the case company.

2 WORKPLACE SAFETY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF INTERNAL CORPORATE COMMUNICTION

In this study, I set out to look into workplace safety, analyzing it as a communication and management function and practice. The focus is on large manufacturing organizations, and thus in section 2.1, I first define what is meant by workplace safety in this context, what elements are related to safe working, what is management's role and how the organizational and safety climate of the organization is linked to it. To be able to control and improve workplace safety performance, organizations can certify their operations by using occupational health and safety management systems (such as OHSAS 18001 certification in the case company). This thesis, however, concentrates on the communicative role of safety management, e.g. building trust and commitment, and thus this paper does not cover management systems.

To be able to understand how communication can support safety work, in section 2.2, I look at the bigger picture of corporate communication as a strategic management function, define its objectives and roles and strategic purpose in stakeholder communication. Since internal stakeholders are the most salient stakeholder group regarding workplace safety, section 2.3 is devoted to looking more closely into communicating with them, and the concept of workplace safety communication is defined. Finally, in section 2.4, I set out the theoretical framework used in this master's thesis.

2.1 Workplace safety in large industrial organizations

In addition to the moral aspect, employers are also required by law to arrange a safe working environment for their employees. This includes, for instance, designing safe working facilities and processes, providing safety training, offering appropriate protective equipment and instructions on how to use it, and assessing and eliminating work-related risks (for the Finnish law, see the Finnish Occupational Health and Safety Act, 738/2002see Finlex, 2002). Even though improving workplace safety is relevant for all employers, for large organizations safety work poses greater challenges, since they usually have a large workforce that is geographically situated in distant locations. In large organizations, it is first of all hard to reach everyone (especially if they are

doing different jobs ranging from office work to maintenance and factory floor work) and secondly, it is difficult to create unified safety processes across the organization. Especially employees working in large industrial organizations (e.g. in manufacturing, construction, nuclear power, chemical, mining or steel industries) face serious work-related risks. Figure 1 in the introductory chapter (Chapter 1) illustrated the most severe risks of injury in steel industry, which is in focus of this study.

In this study, workplace safety is looked at in the context of managing it in large industrial organizations with the support of a corporate communication function. Workplace safety includes many important social, societal, moral, legal and financial aspects that cannot be fully covered in this paper. An enormous amount of academic research on workplace safety can be found, and I have included some of this that is relevant to my research objective. This means I have included research on the elements related to safe working (covered in subsection 2.1.2), the importance of management practices (covered in subsection 2.1.3) and safety climate (covered in subsection 2.1.4). Communication is naturally linked both to management practices and safety climate, but safety communication in particular, is covered more closely later, in subsection 2.3.4.

2.1.1 Definition of workplace safety

Workplace safety (also referred to as occupational health and safety, but in this paper I use the term workplace safety) deals with all aspects of health and safety in the workplace, and has a strong focus on primary prevention of hazards (WHO, 2015b). The overall objective is primary prevention of work-related diseases and injuries and developing healthy workplaces (WHO, 2015a, 3), thus proactive work is encouraged.

WHO (World Health Organization) is implementing a Global Plan of Action on Workers' Health 2008-2017 (WHO, 2015b) with the following five objectives:

1. devising and implementing policy instruments on workers' health;
2. protecting and promoting health at the workplace
3. improving the performance of and access to occupational health services
4. providing and communicating evidence for action and practice

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5. incorporating workers' health into other policies

It is important to notice that workers in different parts of the world are in very uneven situation with regards to workplace safety. There are major gaps between and within countries in the exposure of workers and local communities to occupational hazards and in their access to occupational health services (WHO, 2015a, 3). According to WHO (2015b), currently only 15% of workers worldwide have access to specialized occupational health services carrying out prevention of occupational risks, health surveillance, training in safe working methods, first aid and advising employers in occupational health and safety. It also needs to be acknowledged that the health of workers is determined not only by occupational hazards, but also by social and individual factors, and access to health services (WHO, 2015a, 3). Given these circumstances, WHO's global action plan includes objectives that aim to improve this overall situation and increase knowledge. However, the objectives can and should guide actions also in areas and organizations, where workplace safety practices and procedures already exist, but still need improvement.

As can be seen from the objectives described above, communication has a major role in the action plan (objectives 2, 4 and 5). For example, with regard to objective 2 from a communication point of view, the action plan clarifies that at least training for employees should be arranged to introduce healthy work practices and work organization and support health-promoting culture at the workplace (WHO, 2015a). Employee participation in these communication actions is being emphasized. WHO also states that strategies and tools need to be elaborated, with the involvement of all stakeholders, for improving communication and raising awareness about workers' health (WHO, 2015a, 6). Communication can have a huge supporting role in advancing these goals.

World Steel Association has announced that a safe and healthy, accident-free workplace is the number one priority for all its members nothing being more important than that (World Steel Association, 2015). The association represents approximately 170 steel producers representing around 85% of world steel production. World Steel Association has published LTIF (the number of lost time injuries i.e. fatalities and lost work day

cases per million work hours) statistics of the industry since 2006 and reports that until 2013 the LTIF rate has gone down by 64%. However, the goal is zero accidents and the association strongly believes that all work-related accidents can be avoided.

2.1.2 Elements related to safe working

Safety efforts have traditionally, focused on the so-called engineering or technical aspects of safety (i.e. unsafe mechanical or physical conditions), but relatively few accidents (10%) are actually related to these (Vredenburgh 2002, 260). More recently, the focus has been on safety behavior linked to safety beliefs and employee attitudes, which are seen as affecting safety performance (Vredenburgh 2002, 260). It is thought beliefs and attitudes are socially transmitted within an organization (Vredenburgh, 2002). While it is impossible within the scope of this research to give a thorough description of things that affect safety behavior, beliefs and attitudes, this subsection covers some relevant elements (other than technical elements) related to a safe working environment. Safety beliefs and attitudes can be recognized in the safety culture or climate of the organization, which is covered in more detail in subsection 2.1.4.

Parker, Axtell, and Turner, (2001) defined work characteristics related to a safe working environment at workplaces based on previous research in the field. They concluded that job autonomy, role demands of the employees (including role overload and role conflict) and supportive work context (including supportive supervision, training adequacy, job security and communication quality) were among the most important factors related to organizational commitment and safe working. Based on their own research, Parker & al. concluded that three work characteristics were shown to be of most importance: supportive supervision, job autonomy and communication quality.

These elements are shown in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 2, Parker & al. show the elements related to safe working more as causal effects and their own actual research was designed in a way that allowed control of measuring the effect of these variables. However, this model can be interpreted also as a framework that summarizes some of the things related to organizational commitment and safe working, even though causal effects are not assumed. Parker & al. see communication quality as one element

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of this, but communication can also be seen as creating a bigger picture, as it is also included in the other elements, such as supportive supervision and training adequacy.
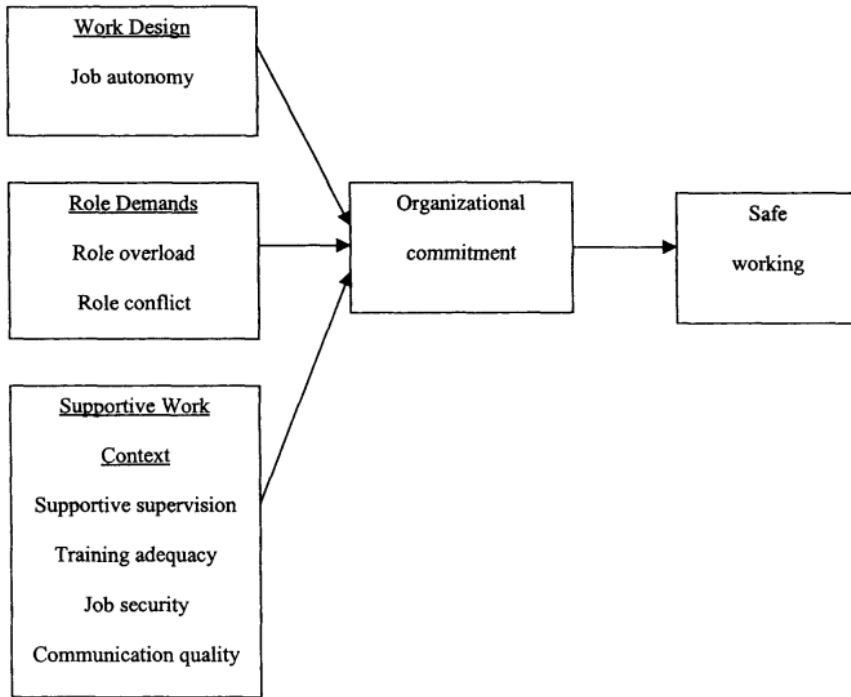
Figure 2. Antecedents (elements) of safe working (Parker & al., 2001, 213)

Job autonomy refers to the degree of discretion employees have over important decisions in their work, such as the timing and methods of their tasks, and it has been showed to affect job satisfaction and motivation (Parker & al., 2001, 212). Also Cornelissen (2011, 167-168) mentions "employees' control over working life" as an important factor for organizational identification that in part increases job satisfaction and cooperation between management and employees. According to Parker & al. (2001, 212-213), previous research has shown a positive association between job autonomy and safety outcomes, such as actively caring for safety, a decrease in lost time injury frequency, effective responses to safety critical situations, and lower accident rates at an organizational level.

Role demands, such as role overload (excessive work demands) and role conflict (congruent expectations between and within job roles), have been shown to have

negative associations with safe working (Parker & al., 2001, 213-214). One interesting aspect mentioned by Parker & al. (2001, 213) is that under difficult economic conditions, changing work organization, and increased workloads, employees could become more complacent and take greater risks. Under strained conditions like these, one could anticipate both decreased organizational commitment and less attention to the aspects of work that are designed to protect safety.

The supportive work context has a strong communicative focus and Parker & al. (2001, 214) refer to supportive supervision, training adequacy, job security and communication quality as part of it. Supportive supervision consists of the quality of the exchange relationship that exists between employees and their superiors (called leader-member exchange, see also Michael & al., 2006, 470) and it has strong communicative focus. Training adequacy refers in part to the content of the training as imparting the correct way to do things, and additionally it sends a message to employees that their well-being is important to the management, since investments in safety training are being made (Parker & al., 2001).

Parker & al. emphasize the important role that communication has in promoting safer working and conclude that communication allows employees to behave safely by providing them with the information they need in their daily work, for example, in how to follow specific safety procedures. Parker & al. do not, however define the quality of communication specifically, but only refer to its role in providing information for daily work. In addition, Parker & al. suggest that a culture of open and honest communication might result in employees' feeling safe to raise and discuss safety concerns.

Organizational commitment or the degree of identification and emotional attachment to an employing organization is seen as having a mediating role in the relationship between work factors and safe working, and has been studied quite thoroughly within organizational behavior research (Parker & al 2001). Employees who feel they are benefitting from employment with their organization will engage in behaviors that align with these goals (Parker & al., 2001). Thus organizational commitment plays an important role in promoting workplace safety. Building trust between the organization and its employees is important in this sense, too (see also Proctor and Dukakis, 2003).

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Hofmann, Jacobs and Landy (1995) studied process industries (e.g. chemical and nuclear power plants) with regards to safety, but their findings are useful when thinking about other industries with high accidents risks, too. They state that in many cases accidents are investigated from the individual point of view and often referred to as human errors (e.g. performing procedures automatically "without even thinking about it). This individual level includes, however, also the safety motivation and attitudes of employees and is linked to micro and macro organizational levels, too. Hofmann & al. stress the importance of management's expressed concern (or observable activity) for employees' safety motivation and attitudes (i.e. their motivation to think about safety and to act in safe ways at work). Thus safety needs to be seen in what management say and do (Hofmann & al. 1995, 133). I will next look more closely at the role of management in workplace safety.

2.1.3 Management's role in workplace safety

Management's role in safety work can be examined from two viewpoints: the role of supervisors and the role of top management. However, it should be pointed out that supervisors are also seen as having a key role in communication between management and hourly employees (Michael & al., 2006, 469).

Vredenburgh (2002) emphasizes that management practices are important components of safety programs. She studied six management practices that are frequently included in safety programs: 1) management commitment, 2) rewards, 3) communication and feedback, 4) selection (hiring), 5) training and 6) participation (Vredenburgh, 2002, 259). I have summarized the management practices and their key characteristics in Table 1. Vredenburgh's research environment was hospital employees.

**Table 1. Safety management practices and their key characteristics (summary
made based on Vredenburgh, 2002, 261-265)**

Safety management practice	Characteristics in safety context	Practicalities/outcomes
1) Management commitment	• Observable activity on the part of management: demonstrated in behavior and words	• Major factor affecting the success of the organization's safety programs • Should be manifested in all actions of the management
2) Rewards	• Safety-incentive programs reinforcing the reporting of a hazard or an unsafe act or bonuses for fewer lost-time accidents • Is at best in parallel to safety education and training and with good understanding what the program tries to accomplish and how employee performance is measured	• Can facilitate safety culture, needs high visibility in the organization • Must be directed at the prevention, not punishment • Informational, social, tangible, or nonmonetary reinforces can be used
3) Communication and feedback	Consistent and forthright communication culture where employees are given possibilities to influence their work and get feedback on success	Helps in building trust between management and employees
4) Selection (hiring)	Including safety-conscious attitude to recruitment criteria	Can facilitate the development of safety culture and safety-conscious image and attract applicants with compatible attitudes
5) Training	Systematic and comprehensive way to get employees to recognize hazards and hazardous actions and understand the consequences	Level of perceived danger increases compliance with warnings and instructions, thus it is critical to train all employees to identify workplace hazards
6) Participation	• Involves individuals or groups in the upward communication flow and decision-making. • Employees are recognized as the most qualified to suggest improvements	Key role, if real participation is offered (e.g. safety committees consisting of employees)

Vredenburgh found that management practices reliably predicted injury rates, but what particularly differentiated the hospitals with low injury rates was that they employed proactive measures to prevent accidents (separated from the approach of fixing problems once they have occurred, thus reactive practices).

All management practices can be seen as proactive if used correctly, so the practices studied by Vredenburgh offer a useful and comprehensive lens through which to look at the role of management in safety work. The role of management commitment or engagement to safety work is highlighted also by researchers other than Vredenburgh. Hofmann & al. (1995, 138) point out that it is not enough that only supervisors and line managers devote time to safety but also top management in the factory and headquarters need to show commitment to and responsibility for safety issues.

Michael & al. (2005, 469) draw attention to the importance of supervisors in manufacturing organizations, and to their increasingly critical role in delegating tasks, managing subordinate performance, and juggling competing demands for productivity, quality, and safety. According to Michael & al. (2005, 469), it is a known fact that supervisors' relations and communication with their subordinates is important in influencing subordinates' behavior, but little is known about how. In their own investigation of leader-member exchange (LMX) and safety communication on production supervisor impacts on subordinates safety outcomes, they concluded that the influence of LMX is greater that of safety communication. From an internal communication point of view, this supports the generally recognized fact that employees appreciate their direct supervisors as a source of information.

Hofmann & al. remark that in addition to managers devoting time and attention to safety issues, also workers need to be allowed to shape safety interventions to improve their sense of ownership and acceptance of procedures, and thus increase motivation and commitment (195, 135). This is what Vredenburgh (2002, 265) referred to as participation as a management practice and stresses that people should have the authority to change their own actions to improve their work conditions to be able to behave in a safety-conscious manner; the motivation to act safely needs to be supported by tools, skills, training, counseling and leadership, and offer employees possibilities to

impact safety procedures. As mentioned earlier, this was also emphasized by Parker & al. (2001) and Cornelissen (2011).

With regards to this study, the role of internal corporate communication in building organizational commitment and trust is at focus. Parker & al. emphasize the role good-quality communication and training (providing details about their work, but also about the wider work environment) and supportive management have in showing organizational support for employees that is reflected in employees' efforts toward meeting organizational goals (Parker & al. 2001, 2015). Vredenburgh (2002) adds rewards, selection and participation to complete the picture. Welch and Jackson (2006) suggest that internal corporate communication can contribute to building employee engagement across the organization. Thus, corporate internal communication can play a big role in supporting the need to show supervisors and top management's commitment to safety, and link it to the most important safety work being done on the factory floor by promoting participative communication. One way to illustrate this role is communication's role in facilitating the general organizational climate and safety climate as part of it that is discussed next.

2.1.4 Organizational and safety climate

According to research (Neal & al., 2000, 99), the general organizational climate impacts on the safety climate, which in turn is related to the individual behavior of employees. On the other hand, organizational identification can be linked to organizational climate (Neal & al., 2000, 100), and thus it is valuable to look at organizational identification before moving on to the organizational and safety climate. Vredenburgh (2000) uses the term safety culture, whereas Cooper and Phillips (2004) note that safety climate is a sub-component of safety culture, but the terms can be seen as interchangeable in this context, even though some scholars might see differences between them.

Organizational identification can be defined as belongingness to an organization and the relationship between organization and its members (Bartels, 2006, 1). Organizational identification is an important factor in corporate communication and it has strong effects; when employees strongly identify with their employer, they are generally more content with their work, cooperation is better and their behavior is helpful for the

organization (Cornelissen 2011, 167). Strong identification can be seen in showing support for the organization against outsiders or defending ones employer if someone criticizes it (Bartels, 2006, 1).

In his doctoral dissertation, Bartels (2006, 2) refers to research over the past thirty years that has shown that employees who identify strongly with their organization demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviors toward the organization they work for. Communication is strongly linked to organizational identification and particularly internal communication has a significant impact on it (Cornelissen, 2011, 167). Cornelissen (2011, 167-168) mentions that at least these communicative issues are shown to be important for organizational identification:

- significant and sufficient information is provided about what is expected from the employees
- information coming from management is perceived as being reliable
- employees feel that they are genuinely being listened to and are involved by managers when decisions are made
- employees have at least some control over their working life.

Organizational identification can be linked also to organizational climate, which in turn encompasses a wide range of individual evaluations of the work environment (Neal & al., 2000, 100). According to Neal & al., these evaluations refer e.g. to general dimensions of the work environment such as leadership, roles and communication or to specific dimensions such as climate for customer service or climate for safety. Organizational climate is thought to have strong impact on individual motivation to achieve work outcomes (Neal & al, 2000).

Safety climate refers to a specific form of organizational climate which describes individual and shared perceptions of the value of safety in the work environment (Neal & al., 2000, 100) and degree to which employees believe true priority is given to organizational safety performance (Cooper & Phillips, 2004, 497). Various factors have been proved to be of importance for safety climate; management values (e.g. concern

for employees' well-being), management and organizational practices, communication and employee involvement in workplace health and safety (Neal & al., 2000, 100).

As is evident when looking at the concepts of organizational identification and organizational and safety climate, the important elements affecting them consist of very similar factors, namely management practices and commitment, communication and employee participation. Neal & al. point out that there has in fact been a shift away from individual level factors toward organizational factors in recent safety-related research (Neal & al., 2000, 99). They noticed that the organizational and safety climate are mediating elements when looking at employee safety behavior in organizations, even though to date it has been researched relatively little (Neal & al. 2000, 99). In their own research, Neal & al. created a model to explain the influence of organizational and safety climate on individual behavior and showed that these are related (see Figure 3).
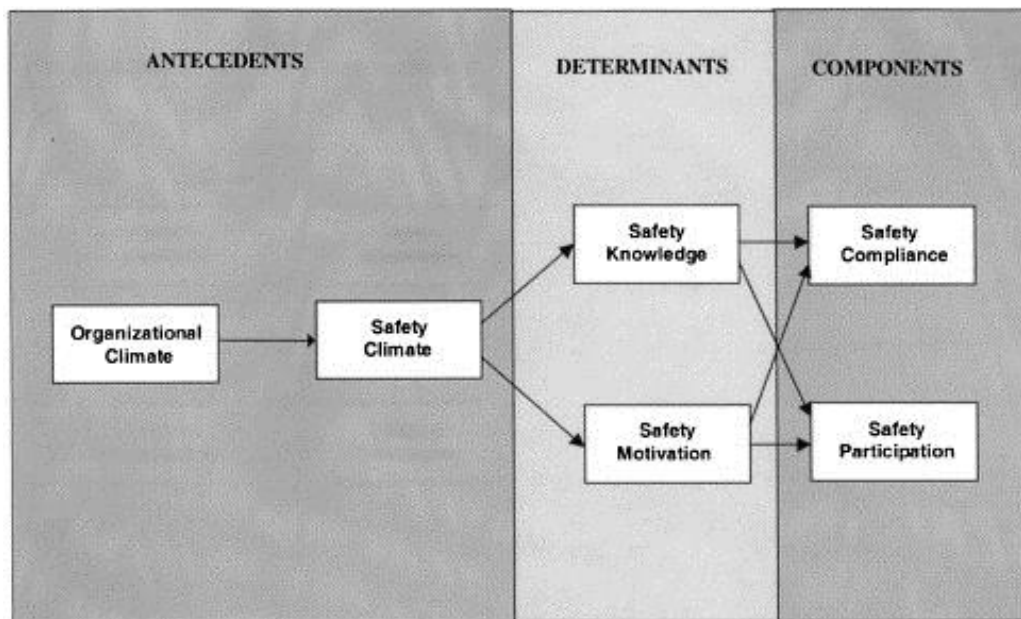
Figure 3. Hypothesized model of relationships between organizational climate, safety climate, safety knowledge, safety motivation, safety compliance and safety participation (Neal & al., 2000, 103)

Their research supported hypotheses that the organizational climate would predict safety climate, safety climate would influence both safety knowledge and motivation, and knowledge and motivation would predict safety compliance and participation. Neal & al. concluded that safety climate evaluations should be made within the context of general organizational climate and interventions designed to improve the general organizational climate may impact positively ion the safety climate (Neal & al. 106).

2.2 Corporate communication as a strategic management function

The purpose of this section is to introduce corporate communication as a management function since I have chosen that as a framework from which to examine my research topic, workplace safety. Firstly, a definition of corporate communication and the ways to organize it as a function are introduced to be able to better understand the corporate communication function's significance in organizations. Subsection 2.2.1 goes more deeply into the objectives and roles of corporate communication and communication professionals. The rest of the section is devoted to stakeholder communication (the focus being on internal stakeholders) that can be regarded as being the most important task of corporate communication and the main interest of my own research project.

Corporate communication is a fairly new discipline within the communication field and has its roots in public relations, which traditionally means communication with external stakeholders, usually the media (Cornelissen 2011, Argenti 1996). According to Argenti (1996, 87), the fact that the first book called "Corporate communication" was published by himself in 1994 is an indication that the field of research (at least with this name) is fresh. Despite the lack of research, corporate communication has been developed within businesses even before the 1990s (Cornelissen 2011, 4).

Corporate communication is usually separated from other communication disciplines, namely from business communication, which focuses on skills and writing, and organizational communication, which is interested in organizational behavior (Argenti 1996, 83, 85) or even sees communication as a constitutive element of the organization itself (e.g. Cooren & al. 2011). Christensen and Cornelissen (2011) suggest building a link between corporate communication and organizational communication by stating that these disciplines are actually two sides of the same coin. Based on their review of

previous research, they claim that these two disciplines, corporate communication as a management function and organizational communication as a constitutive power of organizations concentrating on collective sense making and social coordination, could benefit each other (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011, 17). They refer to scaling up communication between individuals (micro) to the organization (macro) (Christensen & Cornelissen 2011), which is one way to link these two disciplines and can be seen in practice in organizations as corporate level communication (managed communication) and local level communication (both managed and informal communication). These levels with regards to internal communication will be discussed in section 2.3.

Argenti (1996, 83) claims that the closest link to corporate communication can be seen in management communication that is interested in communication strategy, processes, the global environment and communication as a function. Seeing communication as a function separates corporate communication clearly from the other disciplines. In this thesis, I see corporate communication as a management function as I am interested in how corporate communication can support advancing strategic issues, namely workplace safety, across the organization.

Joep Cornelissen defines corporate communication as follows: Corporate communication can be defined as a management function that is responsible for coordinating internal and external communication with the purpose of establishing and maintaining relationships with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent (Cornelissen 2011, 5.)

According to Cornelissen's definition, corporate communication is regarded as a function that is strategic as defined by Argenti & al. (2005) – it is fundamental for the survival of the organization as it cherishes the long-term relationships with key stakeholders. I look at corporate communication's role in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholder groups as the most important element of the function. This is also why corporate communication as a function can be seen as strategic: building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders is in fact protecting reputation which is critical and one of the most important strategic objectives of a company in general and its communication practitioners in particular (Cornelissen 2011, 3).

Argenti (1996, 78) separates different sub-functions within the discipline of corporate communication and these can be seen at least in large organizations. The sub-functions according to Argenti (1996, 78) include image and identity, corporate advertising and advocacy, media relations, financial communications, employee relations, community relations and corporate philanthropy, government relations and crisis communications. Even though this list may not be all-encompassing, it is clearly evident that reputation and stakeholder relationships are the key elements of these sub-functions.

In recent years, scholars have adopted an increasingly integrated, or sometimes called strategic approach to corporate communication. Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005) emphasize long-term relationships with key constituents and claim that an integrated, strategic approach (with messages aligned with strategy) to communications is to be seen even as being critical to success. Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič and Sriramesh (2007) see strategic communication as a purposeful use of communication by an organization to achieve its mission meaning the same thing – the purpose of communication, messages and corporate functions working to achieve the mission need to work in an integrated way. They draw attention to the fact that at least management, marketing, public relations, technical and political communication and information/social marketing campaigns integrate their messages when talking to all more fragmented audiences. Safety communication cuts across these different functions and increases the need for integrated messaging.

The organizing and organizational status of corporate communication has been widely debated and there are several different models showing how the communication function should be positioned with regards to management and marketing (see e.g. Welch & Jackson, 2007, 179-183). Positioning of the function intrigues academic interest and there are several possibilities to do it – both in theory and in practice. Usually organizations pick the way that best suits them according to the preferences of their top management (Cornelissen, 2011). With regards to the interest of this paper, it is noteworthy that large organizations usually organize their communication function in a way that internal communication is separated from external communication.

When looking at the everyday practices of organizations, there are also indicators of the strategic importance of corporate communication. The corporate communication function these days is hierarchically situated close to top management and the head of corporate communication is usually a member of the corporate management team (Cornelissen, 2011). This seems to be true at least in large organizations (over 250 employees) and multi-national enterprises.

Hallahan (as cited in Hallahan & al. 2007) separates six communication specialty areas usually found in organizations. These areas typically have shared purposes and objectives, and the strategies for achieving those objectives are similar, but tactics vary (Hallahan & al., 2007, 5). Also resources are shared and people across different functions in the organization work to achieve the goals. These specialty areas according to Hallahan (as cited in Hallahan & al. 2007) are management communication, marketing communication, public relations (in this case meaning building and maintaining relationships with key constituents, thus defined similarly to the definition of corporate communication given above), technical communication, political communication and information/social marketing campaigns. Hallahan & al. (2007, 5) emphasize strategic communication meaning that these communication specialty areas should be managed in coordination with the focus on how the organization itself presents and promotes itself through the intentional activities of its leaders, employees, and communication practitioners.

If we think about internal communication regarding safety issues, it cuts across many of the specialty areas defined by Hallahan (2007). It is management communication as it provides information needed in day-to-day operations. It is also technical communication as it involves educative material to avoid errors and promote effective use of technology. And furthermore, especially at the corporate level, safety communication consists also of internal information and social marketing campaigns aiming to increase awareness of and commitment to workplace safety.

Cornelissen (2011, 25) sees corporate communication as an integrated framework for managing (i.e. guiding and coordinating) marketing communication and public relations as can be seen in Figure 4. In Figure 4, we can see that Cornelissen places public

relations disciplines to the left and marketing communication disciplines to the right. Seeing corporate communication as a management framework does not mean that communication within an organization is actually organized accordingly. Marketing can be managed in a separate organization at the corporate level or business unit level, but still the most senior communication practitioner manages integrated corporate communication with the company's reputation in mind (Cornelissen 2011, 25).
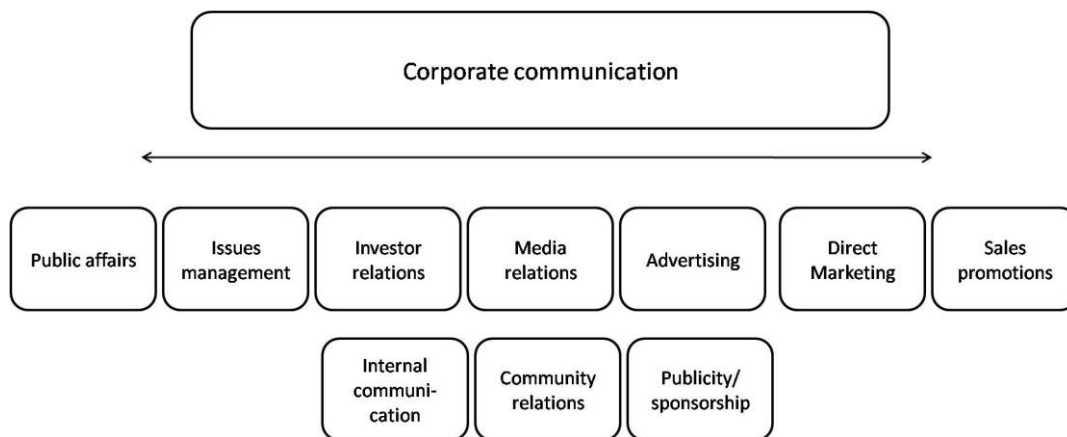
Figure 4. Corporate communication as an integrated framework for managing communication (Cornelissen, 2011, 25)

In this paper, I look at corporate communication and internal communication as part thereof as managed communication, thus separating it from informal communication which Welch and Jackson (2007) call grapevine communication. Communication within an organization is managed at different levels. At least these levels within managed communication can be identified (Welch & Jackson 2007): corporate internal communication to all employees and internal line management communication between line managers and employees. Internal team peer and internal project peer communication that are included in Welch and Jackson's (2007) internal communication matrix (introduced in Table 2 in this paper) can be regarded as more informal communication that cannot be managed and is thus outside the scope of this research paper.

2.2.1 Roles of corporate communication practitioners

To be able to better understand the overall role of corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety, we need to look at the roles of communication practitioners within the corporate communication function. Research about the roles of communication professionals has primarily focused on tasks, activities and functions, often described using different role typologies (Heide & Simonsson, 2014, 132). The practitioner roles are indicators of the power (participation in decision-making) of the corporate communication function in organizations (Dozier & Broom, 1995).

Even though these types of typologies can be criticized as being too categorical, they offer a useful framework from which to look at my own research subject. One of the most referred typologies is the one of Broom and Smith (1979) that distinguishes four roles for communication professionals:

- expert prescriber (taking care of the big picture)
- communication facilitator (being a link between parties, facilitating the communication of others)
- problem-solver (consulting in various communicative tasks)
- communication technician (e.g. providing materials, planning, execution of events)

Even though the typology refers to public relations and specially relationship with client and consultant agency, I find it useful when describing internal communication too, since internal communication can be seen as serving internal clients (management, business functions, other corporate functions) within an organization. Heide & Simonsson (2014, 132) point out that later research has shown the first three roles to be closely related and only a two-fold distinction between managers and technicians is needed. The typology of Broom and Smith offers, however, more interesting nuances for my purpose to evaluate the role of communication professionals.

In their research on developing internal crisis communication, Heide and Simonsson (2014), by suggesting new roles and practices for communication professionals, mentioned also other roles relevant for internal communications:

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- srategist role (can be related to all roles by Broom & Smith)
- role spanning boundaries (serving as a link between horizontal levels within an organization and between organizational silos or between management and external environment)
- role of internal consultant (facilitating co-worker communication)

As a conclusion of their study, Heide and Simonsson (2014, 141) suggest diversified communication roles and a developed managerial role for internal communication. Even though their study concerned internal crisis communication, I consider it to be very applicable to other areas of strategic communication, such as workplace safety communication.

By diversified roles, Heide and Simonsson (2014, 141) refer to the services that the communication function provides: it must be able to offer both managerial and technical expertise covering roles such as director, counselor, pedagogue and facilitator. By development managerial role, Heide and Simonsson mean that the managerial role should be expanded from "knowing and managing all" to the role of facilitation and development of others' (e.g. line management's) communication that is a highly strategic role of communication. They also note that this requires being close to operations, and one way of doing this is to decentralize the communication function to business units and thereby offer communication consultation to both managers and coworkers. As Allessandra Massei (2010) concludes: the main function of internal communication department is no longer to transmit messages, but to promote active communication behaviors at all organizational levels.

2.2.2 Stakeholder approach to corporate communication

Stakeholder relationships and transparent communication (Luoma-aho, 2015) are becoming increasingly critical for organizations in developing and protecting their reputations. These days, stakeholder management is considered an "old-school" way of talking about stakeholder communication. A more preferable approach is stakeholder collaboration and engagement with an emphasis on relationship building, long-term goals, integrated thinking and a coherent approach (Cornelissen 2011, 53). This stems

with the corporate communication approach emphasizing integrated and coherent communication with stakeholders described earlier in this paper.

Also governments and the international community promote the stakeholder perspective. There are several stakeholder initiatives that drive organizations toward responsibilities and effective and transparent communication toward their stakeholders. These initiatives include the UN Global Compact initiative, Global Reporting Initiative and guidelines for business partners and multinational companies (Cornelissen, 2011, 39).

A standard and widely-cited definition of a stakeholder is given by Edward Freeman:

> "A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organizations purpose and objectives" (Cornelissen 2011, 42).

This definition supports the more wider socio-economic stakeholder theory, where all stakeholders are seen as equal and the organization is accountable to them all, not only to itself and shareholders (Cornelissen 2011, 40). This sort of stakeholder model emphasizes communication: the stakeholder groups are interdependent and all need equal consideration and communication from the organization to secure financial performance and continued acceptance of the organization's operations (license to operate). Stakeholder communication is two-way and rather referred to as stakeholder engagement and collaboration (Cornelissen, 2011, 53) than stakeholder management. The interrelated manner of stakeholder communication is emphasized by Luoma-Aho and Vos (2010), who talk about dynamic stakeholder model that acknowledges multiple issue arenas. In various arenas stakeholders communicate with each other and the organization monitors and participates in the discussion, but is not able to control it.

The organization's stakeholder groups (depending on the field it operates in) include at least customers, suppliers, investors, employees, political groups, governments, trade associations and members of local communities. These groups have different stakes or interests (Cornelissen 2011, 43) according to which the stakeholders can be categorized:

- equity stakes, economic/market stakes, influences stakes

- economic, moral stakes

- primary (direct stake with regards to the organization) or secondary groups

- contract (contractual stakeholders), no contract (community stakeholders)

There are different models to use when finding out the importance of stakeholders. Stakeholder salience model (Mitchell & al., 1997, 872) presented in Figure 5 is a useful way to map stakeholder importance according to presence or absence of key attributes, namely stakeholders' power over the organization, legitimacy of their claim and urgency of their demands. As can be seen in Figure 5, stakeholders can be categorized according to which attributes they possess. These categories are named as dormant, discretionary, demanding, dominant, dangerous, dependent and definitive.
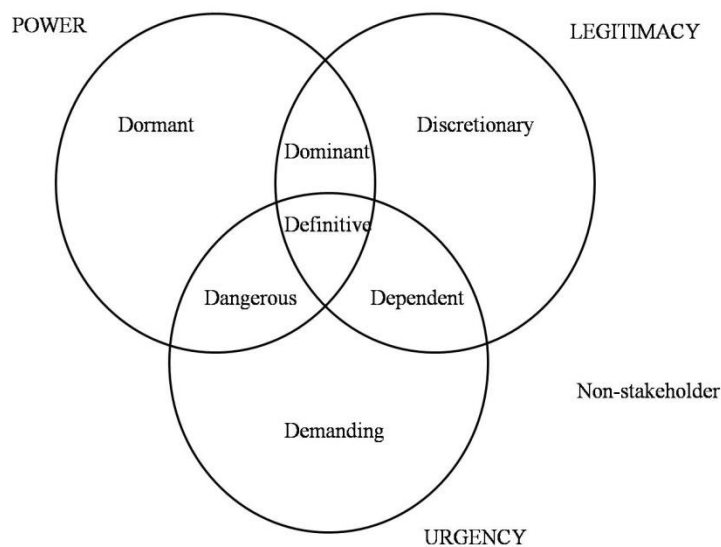
Figure 5. Stakeholder salience model (Mitchell & al., 1997, 872)

As shown in Figure 5. definitive stakeholders are the most important as they possess all three attributes. Internal stakeholders usually fall into this category at least occasionally. Usually defined as dominant stakeholders (with power and legitimacy), employees might move towards definitive ones when the level of urgency of their claim increases.

Dominant and definitive stakeholders (usually employees, customers and shareholders) need to be communicated with continually (Cornelissen, 2011, 47).

	Low	High
Low	**A** Minimal effort	**B** Keep informed
High	**C** Keep satisfied	**A** Key players

POWER (left axis label, Low/High)

LEVEL OF INTEREST (bottom axis label, Low / High)

Figure 6. The power-interest matrix for stakeholder communication (Cornelissen, 2011, 48)

Also the power-interest matrix presented in Figure 6 (Cornelissen 2011, 48-50) is useful when thinking about communicating with stakeholders. Stakeholders can be categorized based on the power they possess and their interest in the organization's activities. As shown in Figure 6, this way we can form a matrix with high and low power and high and low interest. The key players and thus constantly informed are those with high power and high interest and employees self-evidently fall into this category. It should, however, be kept in mind that employees can fall into different categories of the matrix depending on the situation. Site workers may have a lower interest in the organization's activities in a business as usual situation, but the level of interest increases during economical downturn, for instance.

2.2.3 Internal stakeholders

As this thesis concentrates on internal communication, I now look more closely at the interests of internal stakeholders, i.e. the employees. Employees can be roughly divided into categories (management, supervisors, site workers, off-site workers), but they can also be part of other stakeholder groups (investors, community members). All these groups have different interests and needs, and require different communication (Smith 2008, 25).

Smith (2008, 31) suggests different ways to segment internal stakeholders based on:

- age, sex, ethnic background
- location, on site/off site
- educational qualifications
- part time/full time, payroll or not
- time with organization
- position in organization
- technical competence.

Segmentation may vary across various communication topics and require careful consideration with regards to communication. If we look at safety as a communication topic or issue, the most important ways to segment stakeholders when communicating safety issues would be site/off site (site workers might have different interests and power regarding safety than off-site workers and safety surely is of higher importance in the daily work of site workers), position in organization (e.g. line and top management have different roles in safety communication line managers being the primary contact regarding day-to-day safety issues and top management being a supportive backbone for line management communication) and technical competence (site workers might require different information about safety than non-technical off site workers). Welch and Jackson (2006, 188) call to raise questions as to what different preferences for communication content, amount and method workers with different roles have.

The employees should not in any case be regarded as a single public, as Welch and Jackson (2007) point out. Also Smith (2008, 25) emphasizes that different employee

groups should be recognized based on communication issues and needs of the organization and the employees, and apply different communication strategies (i.e. how to reach them and what tools to use) based on this. According to Smith internal communication requires sensitivity and a deep understanding of the organization, and she warns against patronizing employees. I see this point as being of high importance in safety issues. Especially site workers deal with safety issues on a daily basis and might easily get frustrated and annoyed if the top management or headquarters seems to patronize and tell them what to do. Thus, instead of passing information, the more important role of corporate level safety communication could be showing organizations and management's support and commitment to safety issues and in this way emphasize the importance of safety. This could be done, for example, by using participation as a management practice as suggested by Vredenburgh (2002).

2.2.4 Stakeholder communication strategies

After defining stakeholders and their stakes and the importance of different stakeholder groups, the organization needs to communicate with varying groups on a continuous basis by taking their interest into account. The more important stakeholder group in question, the more effective communication is needed. One way to look at stakeholder communication strategies is a rough division into three, as shown in Figure 7 (Cornelissen, 2011). As shown in Figure 7, the strategies are called informational strategy (one-way symmetrical model of communication), persuasive strategy (two-way asymmetrical model) and dialogue strategy (two-way symmetrical model). The strategies result in different stakeholder effects: informational strategy creates awareness, persuasive strategy creates understanding and dialogue strategy creates involvement and finally commitment.

Informational strategy: one-way symmetrical model of communication

| ORGANIZATION | ⟶ | STAKEHOLDER |

Persuasive strategy: two-way asymmetrical model of communication

| ORGANIZATION | ⟶ | STAKEHOLDER |

Feedback

Dialoque strategy: two-way symmetrical model of communication

| ORGANIZATION | ⟶ ⟵ | STAKEHOLDER |

Figure 7. Models of organization-stakeholder communication (Cornelissen, 2011, 50)

It is obvious from the model shown in Figure 7 that communicating with the most important stakeholders (key players, definitive and dominant stakeholders) require all strategy levels with an emphasis on dialogue strategy. Where the communicative objective is to affect attitudes and behavior, the persuasive and dialogue strategy is required. The difference between these strategies is that in persuasive strategy, the two-way element is symmetrical, thus the organization is e.g. gathering feedback from stakeholders whereas in the dialogue strategy, the two-way communication element is asymmetrical, thus the goal is to exchange views and find mutual understanding, not simply change attitude and behavior (Cornelissen 2011, 49-51). Asymmetrical communication is needed since, only collecting feedback from employees is inadequate and cannot be regarded as true dialogue when the emphasis is more on mutual decision-making. If employees feel that the dialogue is false and they are not genuinely being listened to, they might lose the confidence and willingness to commit (Lewis & Russ, 2012).

Cornelissen (2011, 165) differentiates manager-employee communication and corporate information and communication systems as two central areas of internal communication. Manager communication refers to communication between a supervisor and his or her subordinates, and it is usually related to specific tasks,

activities and the well-being of individual employees (Cornelissen 2011, 164). By corporate information and communication systems, Cornelissen refers to a broader focus and broadcasting corporate messages to all employees across the organization. When putting the above-mentioned communication strategies (informational, persuasive and dialogue) into the context of corporate level communication, due to the nature of corporate information and communication systems, the strategy in corporate level communication is usually more informational and persuasive (pointed out also by Welch and Jackson in internal communication matrix described in subsection 2.3.1). These strategies are then supported with manager-employee communication, which puts more emphasis on dialogue strategy. Thus, these strategies are not mutually exclusive and one is not better that the other. Instead, the strategies should more be seen as supporting each other.

When we think about effective stakeholder communication and communication strategies, we need to at least think what is effective from the organization's point of view and from its stakeholders' point of view. It is expected that these viewpoints will vary. Management theory has long studied basic tensions of opposite goals, values and needs between the organization and its members (see e.g. Mumby, 2013, 5) and the question is, how can the organization engage with its members (stakeholders) that have the opposite individual goals, values and needs to those of the organization. In this paper I look at the research topic from the organization's point of view, since I look at corporate communication as a management function. To be able to engage with stakeholders, organizations need to obviously recognize the viewpoints of their stakeholders too.

2.3 Internal communication as part of corporate communication

In this section I look into internal communication as part of the corporate communication function. First, I discuss the definitions of internal communication and how corporate communication scholars see its position within the field of corporate communication. After that, I introduce the internal communication matrix by Welch and Jackson (2007) and internal corporate communication concept derived from it as I use it as a lens through which I look at communication practices in this research paper.

Finally, I set out to consider internal communication channels before returning to workplace safety by defining workplace safety communication and reflect what makes it effective based on the literature reviewed.

Internal communication, also referred to as employee communication, staff communication, internal relations, employee relations, internal public relations and internal communications (see e.g. Welch & Jackson, 2007, 178) can be basically defined as communication with employees internally within the organization (Cornelissen, 2011, 164). It includes informal chat on the "grapevine" as well as managed communication (Welch & Jackson, 2007, 178). The most important objective of internal communication is to commit people to the organization and its goals, usually by strategy communication and participatory actions (Cornelissen, 2011).

According to Smith (2008, 15), internal communication is usually managed within corporate communication, even though she points out that it can also come under human resources or even, unexpectedly, under administration or finance. Smith justifies the management of internal communication within corporate communication by the importance of aligning messages with external communication (Smith, 2008, 15). Message alignment between internal and external stakeholders is important in integrated or strategic communication as already mentioned with reference to previous research (Hallahan & al., 2007, Argenti & al., 2005), but also the different stakes or interests, power, urgency and legitimacy of the stakeholders need to be taken into account.

Welch and Jackson (2007, 178) conclude that internal communication is regarded as part of an organization's strategic communication function (thus corporate communication as described earlier), but argue that the nature, scope, focus and goals of internal communication still need to be discussed and defined. For this, Welch and Jackson suggest the internal communication matrix (which they call the stakeholder approach to internal communication) and internal corporate communication concept derived from this way of thinking. They argue specifically that the stakeholders of internal communication should not be regarded as a single public, but they differ in their level of information of and interest in the organization's messages, as discussed earlier in subsection 2.2.3. In their concept, they also recognize different goals for internal

corporate communication that I found very useful when thinking about my own research topic, workplace safety communication.

2.3.1 Internal communication matrix

Based on their analysis of previous research on internal communication, Welch and Jackson (2007) saw a need to define and segment internal stakeholders more specifically and look at internal communication at different levels of the organization. What they ended up suggesting is called an internal communication matrix (shown in Table 2) which, according to them, can be used to supplement other forms of internal situational analysis and as a tool to analyze, plan and evaluate internal communication. They also refer to this matrix as a stakeholder approach, as the primary setting is to differentiate between different internal stakeholders within an organization. Table 2 shows the different dimensions of internal communication that Welch and Jackson found relevant within an organization.

As shown in Table 2 in the left hand side column, Welch and Jackson recognized four levels of communication which they call dimensions. These dimensions are defined by communication level, direction, participants and content. When looked at in this way, internal communication is not about communicating internally with employees as a single public, but actually also includes communication between line managers and employees, peer communication between team and project members and communication between strategic managers and all employees.

The internal communication matrix as such offers hardly anything surprising. Manager communication between supervisors and subordinates and team communication had been recognized and separated before, and even studied extensively, as Welch and Jackson noted themselves (2007, 185). However, the matrix offers a good framework and tool for communication analysis within an organization as it has several dimensions from where to look at it. Apart from participant perspective described above, the matrix is interesting also from the aspect of direction (the middle column in Table 2). When thinking about two-way or one-way communication, two-way communication is usually required when the goal is to impact employee attitudes, behavior and commitments (see dialogue strategy in Figure 4 and Table 3).

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Table 2. Internal communication matrix (Welch & Jackson, 2007, 185)

Dimension	Level	Direction	Participants	Content
1. Internal line management communication	Line managers/ supervisors	Predominantly two-way	Line managers-employees	Employees' roles, personal impact, e.g. appraisal discussions, team briefings
2. Internal team peer communication	Team colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Team information, e.g. team discussions
3. Internal project peer communication	Project group colleagues	Two-way	Employee-employee	Project information, e.g. project issues
4. Internal corporate communication	Strategic managers/ top management	Predominantly one-way	Strategic managers-all employees	Organizational/ corporate issues, e.g. goals, objectives, new developments, activities and achievements

Welch and Jackson (2007, 187) point out, however, that it is unrealistic to suggest that corporate internal communication between strategic management and all employees could be based on face-to-face dialogue, except in very small organizations.

Also the aspect of content in the matrix gives appealing viewpoints. If we look at the content of internal corporate communication (the last row in the right hand side column in Table 2), we see that e.g. corporate goals and objectives and new developments are at the center. It is, however, impossible to discuss employees' roles and goals in appraisal discussions (the first row in the right hand side column in Table 2) if the corporate goals are not known and understood first. This example shows that the dimensions of the internal communication matrix are also interconnected because communication at different levels affects the other levels too. In other words, messages need to be integrated to be effectively communicated as was previously discussed in relation to integrated or strategic view of corporate communication. This is clearly the case also with workplace safety communication, which is the interest of this paper.

2.3.2 Internal corporate communication

Even though the levels of internal communication matrix are linked and function in an interrelated manner, it is useful to look at internal corporate communication separately since it is the focus area of this research. Internal corporate communication focuses on communication with all employees. Welch and Jackson (2006, 186) refer to academics that emphasize the role of clear, consistent and continuous communication in building employee engagement, and suggest that internal corporate communication can contribute to engagement across the organization. They define their concept of internal corporate communication as "communication between an organization's strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organization, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims".
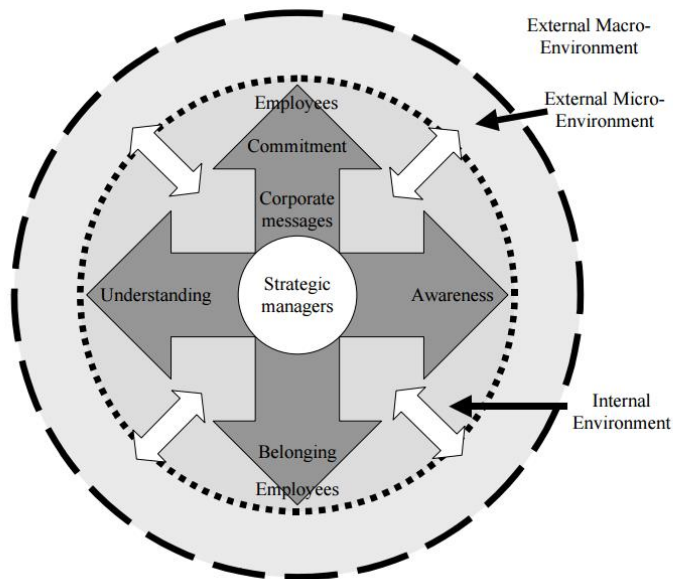
Figure 8. Internal corporate communication (Welch & Jackson, 2006, 186)

The concept of internal corporate communication is visualized in Figure 8 and discussed below based on Welch and Jackson's definitions (2006, 186-194). Firstly, the four arrows in Figure 8 emitting from the center represent corporate messages (e.g. safety-related messages) and the tips represent the goals of internal corporate communication (awareness, understanding, belonging and commitment). The dotted circle represents all employees in the organization. When looking at the internal communication goals, commitment can be seen as a type of loyalty to the organization and described as a positive attitude among employees, and defined in terms of individual identification and involvement with an organization (Welch & Jackson, 2006, 188-189). Commitment can be positively impacted by task-related communication (represented by line-management, team and project peer communication shown in the internal communication matrix in Table 2), and by non-task related communication that equates to internal corporate communication with the task of "explaining corporate goals and being open about problems".

The goal of promoting a positive sense of belonging to the organization refer to what Cornelissen (2011) calls allowing people to identify with their organization which is

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source of motivation. Internal communication is suggested to affect the degree of identification employees feel with their organization and their attitude to support it. Identification is also seen as a persuasive strategy organizations use to influence internal stakeholders, and the ethical dimension needs to be kept in mind. By this, Welch and Jackson mean that organizations need to be cautious so that their actions are not construed as being manipulative toward stakeholders.

Awareness and understanding of change, strategic direction and the organization's evolving aims are seen as important goals as they are seen to help building employee commitment. Welch and Jackson point out that all these above-mentioned goals are interrelated. Referring to DeRidder, they suggest that good quality, effective task-related communication is crucial to creating commitment, while good quality non-task communication (i.e. internal corporate communication) is vital to creating trust. No cause-effect relationship is expected here, but also trust can create quality communication. Internal corporate communication seems to have a role in developing employee commitment and trust (Welch & Jackson, 2006, 190).

Finally, as shown in Figure 8, Welch and Jackson refer to the relationship between internal environment and external environment. By internal environment, they mean the organization's structure, processes, culture, management style, employee relations and internal communication. The external environment consists of macro-environment (political, economic, social, technological, environment and legal) forces and the micro-environment consists of e.g. customers, suppliers, intermediaries and competitors. The internal environment is the focus of this paper and is of interest as it, according to Welch and Jackson (2006, 191), generates the atmosphere or climate in which communication occurs. Organizational and safety climate as part of it were discussed earlier in subsection 2.1.4.

Welch and Jackson note themselves that the model can be criticized due to the fact that it assumes communication is predominantly one-way, from managers to employees. However, they point out that it is unrealistic to assume that internal corporate communication could be primarily face-to-face dialog and that mediated communication is needed. Employees' preferences for channel and content need to be

taken into account so that internal corporate communication meets employees' needs. A combination of one-way and participatory, face-to-face and mediated and downward and upward communication is recommended.

2.3.4 Internal communication channels

Today, when more and more electronic channels are used (including social media, blogs, emails etc.) corporate messages no longer, of course, remain inside the organization (Cornelissen, 2011, 164), thus it might seem somewhat irrelevant to talk about internal communication channels or media. The point is rather that internal and external stakeholders are offered information that is relevant and interesting for them, and that communication involves stakeholders and matches their expectations. Workplace safety is one example of this: safety is of high importance mainly for internal stakeholders and for some external stakeholders (contractors, customers), but is usually less important and relevant for other external stakeholders. Thus in this subsection I cover internal communication channels that I find relevant in communicating safety issues with internal stakeholders.

Cornelissen (2011, 165) reminds us that manager communication and corporate information and communication systems (equal to internal line management communication and corporate internal communication by Welch and Jackson, 2006) may include different content and objectives, but they complement each other ensuring that information flows vertically and horizontally across the organization. The complementary nature of these two is often referred to as downward and upward communication. Downward communication refers to electronic and verbal methods of informing employees about issues concerning the whole organization (performance, employees contribution, what is important, thus mission and what is valued, thus policies) (Cornelissen, 2011, 165). Downward communication involves information from employees that is sent upward toward managers within the organization and consists of employee-related information (information about the employee, coworkers, organizational practices and policies, what needs to be done and how).

Downward and upward communication are linked to each other in different communication channels and practices. Usually upward communication is organized so

that managers stimulate employees' to voice concerns in interpersonal face-to-face meetings and provide them with feedback on practices procedures and organizational changes (Cornelissen, 2011, 167). Simultaneously, corporate level communication systems include e.g. message boards on the intranet and informal meetings at sites that allow upward communication toward senior management and a possibility to ask questions and obtain more information about corporate decisions and organizational developments (Cornelissen, 2011, 167).

Recent studies (Bartels, J. 2006, see also Cornelissen 2011, 167-168) show that downward communication enhances organizational identification when information is regarded as adequate and reliable. This is an important factor when planning and executing internal communication. When information coming from management (with help of internal communication function) is perceived as reliable, employees are more likely to identify with their organization. Identification is impacted also by the degree to which employees feel that they are listened to and are involved by managers when decisions are made (Cornelissen, 2011). Thus good internal communication combines upward and downward communication so that employees are informed and allowed to participate.

Cornelissen links stakeholder communication strategies (introduced in subsection 2.2.4) with communication tactics (channels or media) and stakeholder effects, as presented in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the informational strategy aiming to create awareness consists of mostly mass media channels (called lean media by Lengel & Daft, 1988). When moving toward informational, persuasive and finally dialogue strategy, more face-to-face and participatory channels are used (called rich media by Lengel & Daft, 1988). This model that Cornelissen uses might, however, be too straightforward as, according to Lengel and Daft, also audience size and attitude and message equivocality matter. Lean media is recommended if the audience is large, their attitude is neutral or positive, message equivocality is low and the message will most probably be accepted (Lengel & Daft, 1988).

Welch and Jackson (2006, 187) refer to face-to-face and mediated communication channels in relation to internal corporate communication. Mediated communication can

involve controlled (top managers sending messages straight to employees using e.g. newsletter, video speeches, informal meetings) and uncontrolled media (messages mediated by "gate keepers", i.e. line managers) that can filter or distort strategic messages. Both controlled and uncontrolled media are necessary.

Table 3. Stakeholder communication: from awareness to commitment (Cornelissen, 2011, 49)

Stakeholder effects	**Awareness →**	**Understanding →**	**Involvement →**	**Commitment →**
Tactics	Newsletters Reports Memos Free publicity	Discussions Meetings Advertising and educational campaigns	Consultation Debate	Early incorporation Collective problem-solving
Type of strategy	**Informational**	**Informational/ persuasive**	**Dialogue strategy**	

2.3.5 Workplace safety communication

Even though there has been vast amount of research around safety in organizations, no actual definition of workplace safety communication was to be found. As earlier described in this paper, communication was e.g. looked at as one element of safe working (Parker & al. 2001), one underlying theme in work-related accidents (Hofmann & al. 1995) or as one management-related practice often included in safety programs (Vredenburgh, 2002, 259). Thus, in this final part of the literature overview, I will first consider, based on the literature reviewed, what is regarded as effective communication in internal communication and in workplace safety research, and then define workplace safety communication based on the literature reviewed for this study.

As described in section 2.1, scholars researching workplace safety usually referred to communication at a general level, usually simply called "better and more effective" communication. Parker & al. (2001, 214) refer to "communication quality", which simply means sharing information and encouraging others to talk about aspects of work

that might alert employees and educate them about procedures. Hofmann & al. (1995, 134) note that "faulty communication" is an underlying theme in work-related accidents. Faulty communication can, according to Hofmann & al, range from unfamiliarity with the premises to improper use of equipment, and is thus related to technical safety issues.

Michael & al. (2006, 471) take a broader view and claim that an open and constructive communication atmosphere would benefit the creation of a better safety climate. Vredenburgh (2002, 264-265) emphasizes the role of feedback with regard to performance and employees' authority to change their actions to improve their work conditions to avoid hazards. Vredenburgh (2002, 265) highlights that consistent and forthright (straight, fair, honest) communication is an essential characteristic of any strong organization when looking at safety issues. She states that this sort of good communication leads to trust between the organization and employees, and advances the employees and organizations' tendency to conceal and distort significant available information. This implies that the employees are not e.g. accused of accidents by management, but management understands that the reasons behind accidents are manifold depending on several issues.

To help gain more insight on effective communication, I find it useful to include a model that puts efforts on defining what is, in fact, effective communication in an organizational context. Yates (2006, 74) uses a model she calls a hierarchy of effective communication (Figure 9) to explain companies' higher market premium. The model can, however, be used when looking at communication within organizations in general

As shown in Figure 9, effective communication is seen to build on levels termed foundation level, strategic level and behavioral level in the organization, and the aim is to increase stakeholder awareness, understanding, acceptance, commitment and actions concerning the organization's goals. Effective communication actually requires all these levels to be able to impact employee commitment and behavior. The goals presented by Yates are to a large extent comparable to those that Welch & Jackson (2006) present in their internal corporate communication model (Figure 8.)

it 2. *Hierarchy of Effective Communication*
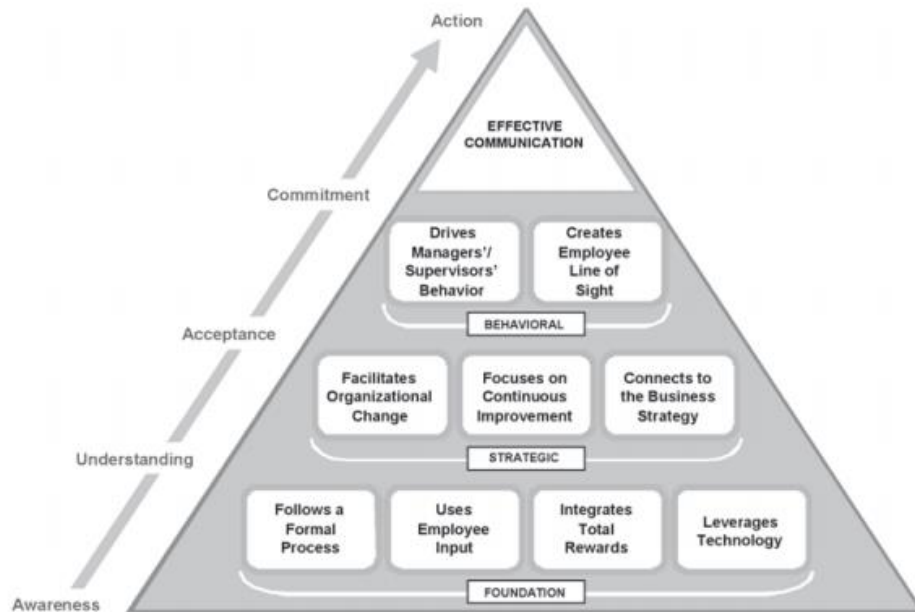
Figure 9. Hierarchy of effective communication (Yates, 2006, 74)

At the foundation level, communication aims to increase awareness and understanding of corporate goals. An effective foundation for communication requires communication to follow a formal process (follows a documented internal communication strategy, includes regular interaction between internal communication managers and business executives, communication is coordinated with e.g. marketing, corporate communication and human resources), uses employee input (feedback from opinion surveys or focus groups on a regular basis), integrates total rewards (acknowledges that not only monetary rewards, but also work environment, culture, development opportunities, and training motivate people) and considers leverage technology (e.g. uses effective and modern lean media such as intranet, blogs, wikis, email in communication).

The strategic level in Figure 9 aims to increase the understanding and acceptance of corporate goals. The strategic level of communication is based on facilitating organizational change (including middle managers' and supervisors' early support to

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change and intermediating messages to employees), measuring impact and continuous improvement and connections to the business strategy. Finally, the behavioral level in Figure 9 aims to increase commitment and action and emphasizes the role of managers and supervisors as communicators. Even though it includes important elements, Yates's model can be criticized based on the fact that it assumes one-way downward communication and ignores two-way and upward communication to involve the employees.

Welch and Jackson (2006, 186) refer to academics that emphasize the role of clear, consistent and continuous communication in building employee engagement. They also stress the importance of the interrelated manner of the communication at different levels. If internal stakeholders do not first understand their organization's strategic direction, they cannot be committed to it and may be reluctant to trust it or their senior manager (Welch & Jackson, 2006, 190). Good or effective communication cannot, however, be defined in a top-down manner, but employees communication preferences need to be taken into account. Welch and Jackson (2006, 188), suggest that employees' preferences for communication content, amount (to avoid information overload) and method (channels) need to be carefully investigated. Smith (2006, 25) also warns against patronizing employees and points out that internal communication requires sensitivity and a deep understanding of the organization.

Even though workplace safety involves several stakeholder groups, employees and contractor employees can be regarded as being the most important groups since their well-being depends on the organization's level of workplace safety. In this paper, I look at safety communication from an internal point of view and thus my definition of safety communication includes employees as a stakeholder group.

Workplace safety can be regarded as a strategic issue for an organization since it involves key stakeholders and affects also the company's reputation. Building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders is a key responsibility of the corporate communication function. Internal communication within the corporate communication function specializes in communication with employees, internally within the

organization. Thus, based on this, workplace safety is an issue that concerns corporate communication in general and internal communication in particular.

Welch & Jackson (2006) offer a useful framework on which to base the definition of workplace safety communication. Workplace safety communication can be defined based largely on the internal corporate communication model of Welch and Jackson (2006). Based on the literature referred to in this subsection, I also included elements that make safety communication effective. Thus, my definition of workplace safety communication is as follows:

> Workplace safety communication is continuous, consistent and forthright two-way communication between an organization's strategic managers, supervisors and employees, with the support of internal corporate communication. Workplace safety communication aims to improve workplace safety and to contribute to a safety-conscious climate by increasing awareness and understanding of workplace safety, improving commitment and by belonging to the organization.

Since workplace safety to a large extent happens between supervisors and team members, this aspect is also included in the definition. Workplace safety communication is thus not restricted to internal corporate communication between top management and employees. Continuous, consistent and two-way nature of communication is required to build commitment and trust between the management and employees. The interrelated manner of communication between top management and employees and line management and employees places workplace safety communication such a way that corporate communication and line management communication do not need to be separated, but aim to support each other. Line management communication is very practical communication and includes guidelines, procedures and goal setting in everyday work situations. Line management communication takes place between supervisors and subordinates and teams, and between employees and team peers. Internal corporate safety communication aims to support line management communication by contributing to increasing employee awareness and understanding about the importance of safety (by offering materials and

defining common messages), and increasing commitment to safety by showing top management's interest and involvement to safety. Internal corporate safety communication happens between top management and all employees in dialog (informal meetings, factory visits), and in a mediated manner using corporate communication channels, such as intranet, staff magazines, newsletters, brochures, campaign materials, and videos.

2.4 Theoretical framework

This study aims to contribute to an enhanced understanding of the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety. In this literature review, I have shed light on the key concepts of workplace safety and the elements it consists of, the role of the management in supporting safe working and safety climate. I have also positioned workplace safety in the framework of corporate communication and internal communication using the stakeholder approach and have presented the practical roles that communication professionals might have in supporting management's safety work. Finally, I have provided a definition of workplace safety communication that summarizes the understanding of communication related to safety work that could be found in the reviewed literature.

Since the main focus of this research paper is in internal corporate communication, the core of my theoretical framework is the internal corporate communication model of Welch & Jackson (2006, see Figure 8). The internal communication model is used in the context of workplace safety. In their model, Welch and Jackson emphasize four goals of internal corporate communication: awareness, understanding, belonging and commitment. In this study, I look at these goals from the perspectives of the role of management (my guiding principle being the management practices of commitment, rewards, communication and feedback, selection, training and participation by Vredenburgh, 2002, see Table 1) and the role of communication professionals (my guiding principle being the typology of the roles of expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solver and communication technician by Broom & Smith, 1979). I also assume that the achievement of internal corporate communication goals requires different stakeholder communication strategies and tactics (channels): awareness and

understanding require informational and persuasive strategies and belonging and commitment require dialogue strategy (Cornelissen, 2011, 49).

In this context, the corporate message is related to workplace safety and the internal environment is safety climate as part of the general organizational climate (Neal & al., 2000). Safety climate refers to a specific form of organizational climate which describes individual and shared perceptions of the value of safety in the work environment (Neal & al., 2000, 100) and degree to which employees believe true priority is given to organizational safety performance (Cooper & Phillips, 2004, 497). In this research, I assume that the way safety work is described by my interviewees indicates the perceived safety climate of the organization and the way communication is linked to it.

Workplace safety communication in this study means continuous, consistent and forthright two-way communication between the organization's strategic managers, supervisors and employees with the support of internal corporate communication. Workplace safety communication aims to improve workplace safety and to contribute to a safety-conscious climate by increasing the awareness and understanding of workplace safety and by improving commitment and the sense of belonging to the organization. In their model of internal corporate communication, Welch & Jackson (2006) emphasize that communication takes place between strategic managers and employees, and that it is predominantly one-way communication. Workplace safety as a strategic message is special, since it directly affects the well-being of the employees. Thus employees are seen to have high interest and high power regarding the issue and are therefore key players (Cornelissen, 2011, 48-50) and definitive stakeholders (Mitchell & al., 1997, 872). Hence in this study, I see it important to include the element of two-way communication as well as to include supervisors as communicators in addition to strategic managers to allow continuous, consistent and forthright communication.

The purpose of the theoretical framework described in this section is to guide my empirical case study research. I will now move on to describe the methods and data used in this research project.

3 METHODS AND DATA

This chapter discusses the methodological choices and the trustworthiness of this study. In sections 3.1 and 3.2, I look more closely at the methods and data collection of this study and in section 3.3, I introduce the case that is used in empirical data collection. Trustworthiness of the study is discussed in section 3.4.

3.1 Research method

The case study method was chosen for this study to be best able to answer "how" research questions in order to explain or describe present circumstances within an organization. Case study is a research method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple data sources (Yin, 2009, 18). Case study research benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis, and it is mainly used to explain, describe, illustrate or enlighten chosen aspects of a given phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

According to Yin (2009), case studies are preferred over e.g. surveys or experiments when the focus of the research is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, as is the situation in this case when internal corporate communication is studied within an organization concentrating on effective corporate level safety communication. Business research very often examines real-life business problems and thus aims to give practical implications to be used by management, even to advance evidence-based management (Bryman & Bell, 2003, 6). As a final outcome, also this research project offers managerial implications to be utilized at the case organization.

Yin (2009, 47, 53) recommends multiple-case studies rather than single-case studies as, obviously, when multiple cases are studied regarding the same phenomenon, the results are often regarded as more compelling and robust. The rationales for single-case studies, on the other hand include critical, unique, revelatory, representative or longitudinal cases (Yin, 2009, 47). The rationale for selecting a single-case design for this study is that the case is representative in its field. We can expect that the role of internal corporate communication in safety issues is similar in most of the organizations operating in similar circumstances (i.e. having large manufacturing or construction

sites), that are of similar size and that have a similar organizational structure. Thus depending on the current situation and challenges organizations are facing, also other organizations could benefit from the practical implications and recommendations given in the conclusions chapter of this study. The results, as such, are not applicable to other organizations, but situational factors need to be taken into account. Overall, the results based on a single study are not suitable for statistical generalization (Yin, 2009, 38). Qualitative research in general is not generalizable (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Rather, previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study (Yin, 2009, 38).

The other practical rationale for selecting a single-case design for this research was that the research is done for the purposes of a master's thesis and thus time and resources are too limited to conduct a multiple-case design. Also the empirical research which is part of this thesis was commissioned by the case company, SSAB, which is an obvious reason for selecting a single-case approach.

3.2 Collection of the research data

The main data collection method for this study was semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The phenomenological interview method (Thomson & al. 1989, 138) was used in a sense that the goal was attaining an in-depth understanding of another person's experiences, and thus no priori set of questions concerning the topic was used. During the interview, only the context using open questions was offered in which the respondents freely described their experiences. The interviews were therefore more like conversations than question and answer sessions. The respondents were assured of their anonymity in the research setting.

The interviews were arranged among key persons from production and safety management (4 persons), safety experts/managers (5 persons) and communication (3 persons) of the case company as presented in Appendix 2. Altogether 12 interviews were conducted between April 2015 and May 2015. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face and 9 interviews were done via telephone for practical reasons, because the interviewees were based in different locations in Finland, Sweden and the US. Each interview lasted about 30-50 minutes. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed

for a thorough analysis of the results. One pilot interview was conducted to identify confusing or unnecessary questions. Other data sources used in this study include archival records and administrative documents. Detailed information about the other data sources is included in Appendix 1.

The data analysis was conducted by using qualitative content analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). From case study specific analytic techniques by Yin (2009, 141), the explanation building technique was used. This technique is mainly applicable to explanatory case studies in narrative form and the goal is to analyze the case study data by building an explanation about the case (Yin, 2009, 141). In the present case study, this would be to use previous theory and empirical data to explain the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety.

3.3 Case company introduction

The present section introduces the case company SSAB in general, discusses the challenges regarding safety issues that the case company was facing at the time the research was conducted in spring 2015, and describes the management, expert and communication organizations around safety issues.

3.3.1 General information about SSAB

The case company, SSAB Corporation, is a Nordic and US-based steel company with ca. 17 300 employees in 50 countries. SSAB Corporation was founded in 1978 when Domnarvets Järnverk, Oxelösunds Järnverk and Norrbottens Järnverk became SSAB. In 2014, SSAB acquired the Finnish company Rautaruukki Corporation and the two companies combined. Annual sales in 2014 were SEK 47,752 million and operating profit was SEK 894 million. (SSAB, 2015b).

SSAB produces Advanced High Strength Steels (AHSS) and Quenched & Tempered steels (Q&T), standard strip, plate and tubular products, as well as construction solutions for global market. The company has an annual steel production capacity of 8.8 million tonnes. SSAB has production plants in Sweden, Finland and the US. There is also a capacity to process and finish the various steel products in China and a number of other countries. SSAB's organization is structured into the following divisions: SSAB

Special Steels, SSAB Europe, SSAB Americas, Tibnor (distribution partner) and Ruukki Construction (building and construction solutions). (SSAB, 2015b). Tibnor and Ruukki Construction were not part of the empirical research due to the fact that their business differs greatly from that of the rest of the organization.

SSAB has defined its vision as achieving "a stronger, lighter, and more sustainable world" (SSAB, 2015a). The company says that the vision points out the direction for the company's long-term development and the objective toward which the company strives. Strong emphasis is put on working together with customers to realize the full potential of lighter, stronger and more durable steel products (SSAB, 2015a). Progress in streamlining own operations (in order to decrease energy consumption and emissions) to achieve the vision is reported annually in the corporate responsibility report (SSAB, 2015c).

SSAB's strategy, called "Taking the lead", is aimed at SSAB becoming the industry-leading producer of high-strength steels globally and the market leader in its home markets. The company considers that the combination with Rautaruukki in 2014 further positioned SSAB to successfully execute this strategy with a goal to regain the position as one of the most profitable steel companies in the world. (SSAB, 2015a). The strategy consists of the following six areas:

- Home market leadership
- Global leadership in high-strength steels
- Leader in value-added services
- Superior customer experience
- High-performing organization
- Flexible operations

Without going into details of these areas, it is worth mentioning that workplace safety is seen as an essential part of a high-performing organization:

> *The SSAB One management philosophy is at the foundation of the company's ambition to constantly improve business operations. Since good work performance and quality requires a safe workplace, SSAB places great importance on ensuring that all employees and subcontractors can perform their work securely and safely (SSAB, 2015d).*

The company states that its values (customer's business in focus, taking responsibility and exceeding expectations) are guiding principles that shape its culture and characteristics and serve "as a compass for our actions and behavior, and describe what we stand for". Values are meant to guide daily decision-making. Again, without going into details, it is worth mentioning that safety is seen as part of taking responsibility and explicitly mentioned by stating that "we work safely and responsibly". (SSAB, 2015c).

3.3.2 Safety issues at the case company

The company has set its objective to be "the safest steel company in the world". Safety is included in SSAB's sustainability strategy, which consists of three modules: sustainable offering, sustainable operations ("to minimize emissions, maximize resource and energy efficiency while at the same time offer our employees a safe and secure workplace") and sustainable partner (SSAB, 2015c). Social responsibility targets announced on the public webpage do not include any targets regarding safety.

The company says that all its major production plants are certified in accordance with OHSAS 18001, an international safety management system. The work has contributed to further strengthening routines for ensuring safer working methods, creating clearer instructions and safer workplaces. (SSAB, 2015c.)

The company and the industry in general have recently suffered from the global economic crisis. SSAB says that the merger and financial issues have recently taken the focus off of safety, but the company acknowledges that safety issues need more attention; at the end of 2014, SSAB even experienced a fatal accident where an employee of a sub-contractor died at the steel mill in Luleå, Sweden (SSAB, 2014).

SSAB's main problem seems to be that in Finland and Sweden, the LTIF is as high as 10 and the company lacks ideas as to how to lower the number (compared e.g. to its sites in US, where the LTIF is under 5). The company acknowledges that grass root safety work at a local level is of high importance, but wants to also examine how corporate internal communication could better support everyday safety work done at a local level.

As already mentioned, the organization has lived through a merger situation in 2014 when Rautaruukki and SSAB combined to form the current SSAB. The merger has naturally required restructuring that mainly applied to organizations in Finland and in Sweden. Some cultural differences between operations in the Nordic countries and Americas division have been recognized, e.g. the working culture with regards to safety appears to be somewhat different.

SSAB's recent actions in corporate safety communication consist of including safety as the most important topic in the internal management road show. In practice, this means that when top executives (including the President & CEO,other members of the Group Executive Committee and Heads of Divisions/Business areas) meet managers and employees in informal meetings in different units and sites, all presentations begin with an introduction to safety issues. SSAB has also drafted a corporate level communication plan with a focus on basic level safety issues and communication actions, including defining key messages and planning and executing safety communication for SSAB and partner employees. (Background interview, Idman Jan. 29, 2015.) To support this work, the company has re-organized its safety organization, which is introduced in the next subsection.

3.3.3 Safety organization of the case company

During late 2014 and early 2015, the case company heavily re-organized its operations due to the merger of the two organizations.

Also the corporate level safety organization was restructured as follows (background interview, Idman Jan. 29,2015):

- Appointment of a director responsible for safety issues with a place on the Group Executive Committee. The Group Executive Committee is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the Group's overall strategies and addresses issues such as acquisitions and divestments (SSAB, 2015d).

- Formulation of a corporate safety management team including management level members from all organizational areas (Special Steels, Europe, Americas, Tibnor, Construction), and group level. The safety management team is responsible for decision-making on initiatives relevant for the whole group and creation of safety culture. The chair of the safety management team is chosen annually from the team members.

- Establishment of a safety expert group, including safety expert level members from all organizational areas, group level and most important production sites. The safety expert group is responsible for sharing information on divisional activities and achieved results, sharing best practices and information on serious incidents and preparing initiatives to be decided in the safety management team. The chair of the safety expert group reports to the safety management team.

- To support the work of the above mentioned groups, a corporate safety communication management and expert team was formed including communication management from group level and communication experts from all organizational areas and the most important manufacturing sites. The Head of Internal Communications chairs the team. The team is responsible for managing corporate safety communication across the whole company at a group level. An external partner is used for planning and executing internal campaigns and materials.

The new model for organizing corporate level safety work cooperation is meant to harmonize procedures and metrics (e.g. how to measure LTIF figures) and help people to better learn from each other and share best practices.

The corporate communication function (called Corporate Identity and Communications) in the case company is organized around the following specialty and divisional areas:

- Investor Relations and Financial Communications
- Internal Communications
- Corporate Identity and Digital Communications
- Media Relations and PR
- Divisional areas (Special Steels, Europe, Americas, Construction, Tibnor)
- Corporate sustainability

The head of each area is a member of the Communication Management Board and in case of divisional areas, also a member of the Management Board of the division in question. The head of Corporate Identity and Communications is a member of the Group Executive Committee. The communication expert or manager of each divisional area and particular production site is usually part of a safety committee (e.g. Safety Committee of SSAB Europe).

The safety organization and the communication organization shed light on the safety work and communication done at different levels in the case organization. At least these levels can be mentioned:

- Corporate level safety work and communication
- Divisional level safety work and communication
- Local level safety work and communication

Corporate level safety work and communication refers to the situation when the communicator is CEO and other Group Executive Committee members, and the aim is to give a common direction and theme with broad guidelines. The divisional level (Special Steels, Europe, Americas, Construction, Tibnor) refers to work done to make the common direction and theme more concrete for the division in question (e.g. safety

needs in the construction business vary from those in the distribution business, and also sub-contractor and partner safety issues are of huge importance) and help managers and supervisor working in the production sites to talk about the themes. The local level refers to work done at production sites and in units (e.g. steel mills), covering things relevant in a particular production unit. The divisional level and local level have their own safety communication plans and objectives. Local level communication happens mainly between employees and work teams and their supervisors, and is thus regarded as line management and team or project peer communication (Welch & Johnson, 2007, 185). This study is restricted to corporate internal communication, which aims to support safety work done at the divisional and local level. Since all communication professionals within the company are, however, part of the same group communication function (the above-mentioned Corporate Identity and Communications), their work is relevant at all these levels due to e.g. coordination issues.

At the local level, also two separate communication practices need to be divided: general communication regarding workplace safety (responsibility of communication) and more normative and strict occupational health and safety communication with administrative focus and restricted by law (in Finnish "työsuojelu", publishing e.g. releases/bulletins called in Finnish "työsuojelutiedote", responsibility of safety organization). When referring to safety communication in this thesis I mean the general level communication.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the study

Reliability, validity and generalizability are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research, especially quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2003, 286). Alternative approaches to quality assessment have been suggested for qualitative research because it is mainly not involved in measurement, findings are often not meant to be generalized, and replication is different than that of quantitative research, since the analysis includes researchers' own interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Lincoln & Cuba (as cited by Bryman & Bell, 2003, 288) propose assessing trustworthiness according to criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and

confirmability. Each of these criteria is next discussed related to the research conducted in this master's thesis.

Since within social sciences it is believed there are several truths about social reality, the criteria of research credibility refer to whether one is able to convince readers that the reality introduced in a particular research is acceptable (Bryman & Bell, 2003, 288). In this study, I have contributed to credibility by carrying out the research by good practice and described that practice in as much detail as possible. I have also submitted the research findings to the case organization to ensure that I have correctly understood the social world I have studied (organization and its internal corporate communication function with regards to workplace safety communication in this case).

Qualitative research typically entails the study of a small group or single case organization as in my own research project. Thus the findings tend to be unique in that context and in a given time are not generalizable (Bryman & Bell, 2003, 289). Judgments about the transferability of the findings to other milieus depend on how detailed or dense a description the researcher gives about the culture or organization she or he has studied (Bryman & Bell, 2003). In this research paper I have described as closely as possible the case organization in general, the safety communication organization in particular, the current situation of the case organization in general and the safety issues they faced when the research was conducted. I have also described who participated in the interview and survey, and how they were selected. The basic structure of the semi-structured interview is presented in Appendix 3.

My own judgment about the transferability of the findings of this research is that the findings can, at least to some extent, be transferred to similar organizations operating in a similar industry and facing similar challenges as those in the case organization. In practice, this means that large or even multinational organizations with large manufacturing sites facing severe workplace safety threats and who have organized their communication in a similar manner to the case company studied here (meaning including corporate level communication function supporting business unit and local level communication) and face similar challenges in safety work (need to decrease LTIF numbers by trying to affect attitudes and behavior of the employees) could benefit from

the findings and practical implications of this study. Of course, it needs to be taken account that the results might have been different if different organization was being studied or even the same organization at a different time. But as stated before, by describing the organization and the context as closely as possible, I have made it possible for the reader to make judgments about the possible transferability of this study.

By the criteria of dependability, Lincoln and Cuba (as cited by Bryman & Bell, 2003, 289) refer to the reliability of the research, thus the degree to which a study can be replicated. They suggest that the researcher should adopt an auditing approach even during the study when other researches would audit how procedures are and have been followed. As we are now looking at a master's thesis, this kind of auditing process already exists as peers act as opponents and the thesis supervisor and reviewers audit the process. Of course, the researcher should not rely too much on the auditing of others but, as Lincoln and Cuba (as cited by Bryman & Bell, 2003, 289) put it, the researcher should ensure having complete records of all phases of the research process including problem formulation, selection of participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions. Yin (2009, 118) also refers to this process by suggesting the creation of a case study database for organizing and documenting the data collected for case studies. In this study, I have created a research data base including all relevant material to be accessed in order to evaluate the process of my research work and the chain of evidence as to how the conclusions of this study were derived.

The last criteria of trustworthiness by Lincoln and Cuba is confirmability, which refers to ensuring that the researcher has acted in good faith and has not overly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to affect the conducting of research and conclusions derived from it (Bryman & Bell, 2003, 289). It needs to be noticed that the qualitative research of social sciences cannot be value free as it involves the interviewees, who interpret the constructed (not objective) reality and a researcher who interprets the results (Bryman & Bell, 2003, Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I, as a researcher, need to be aware of my values that reflect my personal beliefs and feelings

that might impact on data collection, analysis, interpretation of data and conclusions of this study.

When conducting this study, I recognized at least the following subjective issues concerning the project. First of all, I chose the research area according to my own interests. Internal communication has been my personal interest for a long time, and examining internal communication was a great opportunity for me to get familiar with the subject and broaden my professional substance. A positive side of this is that having the opportunity to pick your own research area ensures motivation and doing research for real businesses ensures that the practical implications are covered thoroughly. Workplace safety, on the other hand, is of huge importance at workplaces and I wanted to contribute to it by offering practical implications how to support it with better communication. Also according to several communication professionals, there is lack of practical advice on how corporate level communication could better support a safer working environment.

The second thing that needs to be discussed in relation to personal values is that the case company, SSAB, that commissioned this research, is my employer. I know the organization and some of the people involved quite well, and I acknowledge that I need to be careful that this does not affect my research work. I had, however, been absent from the workplace on study leave for quite a while when conducting the study, and there had been massive restructuring and changes due to the merger described earlier. In that sense, I was an outside observer of the situation of the internal communication, as I was not involved in it professionally at that time. My work history within the company had also involved mainly external communications, so studying internal communication was outside my own territory. Knowing the organization well is, however, a positive aspect from the validity point of view. I understand the challenges of the organization well and thus it can be said that I had a good knowledge and understanding about what I was studying.

4 FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the main findings of the empirical research based on the interview research and other data sources used in the study. Detailed information about the data is provided in the appendices as the following: data sources used in the study (Appendix 1), interview data (Appendix 2) and themes of the semi-structured interviews (Appendix 3).

The main research question of this study was:

> 1) What is the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety?

The empirical questions helping to answer the main research question were:

> 1) How is workplace safety perceived and made sense of at the case company?
>
> 2) How is communication linked to workplace safety?
>
> 3) What is the role of management in promoting workplace safety?
>
> 4) What is perceived as effective safety communication at the case company?
>
> 5) What sort of communication activities does the management use to promote and enable workplace safety, and what challenges does the organization see related to them?

The analysis of the research data is organized around these empirical questions. My own conclusions about the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety as well as managerial implications for the case company are covered in the Discussion and conclusions part of the study (Chapters 5).

Even though cultural differences were outside the scope of this study, it became obvious, based on the interviews, that the SSAB Americas division was somewhat more advanced in safety work and climate compared to the divisions in Sweden and Finland,

which were very similar to each other. This is reflected also in the LTIF figures (the number of lost time injuries i.e. fatalities and lost work day cases per million work hours) for SSAB Americas and the divisions, SSAB Special Steels and SSAB Europe, in the Nordic countries (LTIF 5 in the Americas versus LTIF 10 in Sweden and Finland). The interviewees mentioned several potential reasons for this, but since the work cultures between these regions seem quite different from each other, there is no point in comparing them. The interview data was also focused in the Nordic countries (10 interviewees were from Sweden and Finland, and 2 from the Americas) and for this reason most of the findings refer to the situation in Sweden and Finland, which wasvery similar. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to look at the general situation at the case company, rather than to identify the differences between countries.

4.1 Workplace safety perceived as a process, journey, attitude or value

Safety climate describes individual and shared perceptions of the value of safety in the work environment (Neal & al., 2000, 100). How interviewees described and thus perceived the safety climate in the case organization can be grouped into 4 categories: the perception of workplace safety as 1) a process, 2) a journey, 3) an attitude or 4) a value. Examples of safety communication given by the interviewees can be linked to these perceptions and examples of communication varied from pragmatic to emotional according to the perception. The categories were intertwined, and it seems that no unified safety climate can be perceived within the case organization.

A general remark based on the interviews and other material analyzed is that safety processes, practicalities, climate and communication vary greatly across the case organization. Workplace safety, therefore, appears to be a very multi-faceted concept. The importance of workplace safety is acknowledged, but the interviewees stressed that the safety practicalities of the "new SSAB" (meaning SSAB and Rautaruukki as a combined company) are only just being formulated, and the situation varies between countries, business units and also between production sites. Even some "tensions" based on an older merger, that of the acquisition and subsequent merger in 2007 of the US-based company IPSCO Inc. by SSAB, were mentioned.

I will next present the different approaches to workplace safety that could be recognized in the case organization and link examples of the role of communication to illustrate how the interviewees made sense of them.

4.1.1 Workplace safety as a process

The most common way of describing safety work was to perceive it as a long-term and ongoing activity in the organization, and thus see it as a process. The interviewees described that workplace safety as something that requires long-term, systematic work starting from the top management all the way to the factory floor. Hence workplace safety was described as a strategic issue of huge importance.

The approach of seeing safety as a process seems to be rooted in the top management's objective (or vision) to become "the safest steel company in the world". This means safety work and communication becomes a process striving to achieve this objective. The objective itself felt good according to the interviewees. Some saw it more as an objective that just requires hard and systematic work. Others perceived it more as an ambitious vision statement aiming to guide and commit people. For some, the objective felt huge, even unattainable, since the best steel companies achieve LTIF figures of under 1 (compared to the case organization, which achieves approximately LTIF 10 at the moment). The following quotation illustrates the approach of seeing safety as a process:

> *I think it (the objective) should be split into milestones and we should understand that it will take many years' work for us to get there.[…] Otherwise, the objective is too hard and unrealistic to be able to commit to it.[…] As a vision statement, it is great – even though it is hard to accomplish, we do need to try (Management)*

The long-term perspective could be seen in quotes like "We have reduced the number of accidents over the past 10 years" and "It is a 10-year evolution". Thus the interviewees that described safety as a process understood that results do not come quickly, even though this also caused frustration: partly because safety work was considered to be demanding and not rewarding ("the numbers just seem not to go down") and partly

because the vision seems impossible to achieve. When talking about systematic work, the interviewees stated that safety should be integrated into everything that people do, as the following quotation illustrates:

> *When we want to become better and decrease LTIF numbers, safety should always be included. It is not a separate item in a production downtime plan, but included in every phase, also in management… […] It is also pervasive in the sense that we want to extend it also to home and family life, that people work safely there, too (Management)*

Safety is not explicitly part of the corporate strategy (it is part of a high-performing organization, see Case company introduction in section 3.3), and in the sustainability strategy it is referred to, but not largely emphasized. However, in the company's vision of "A stronger, lighter and more sustainable world", safety is one component under "sustainable world", and the interviewees strongly saw it as a strategic issue. The interviewees justified this by stating that safety is so important that it should be integrated in everything, starting with management systems. This includes also accountability issues, as line management in a legal sense is accountable for workplace safety, even though each and every employee is responsible for working safely.

Safety was mentioned as being strategic also in a sense that it involves other stakeholders than employees (customers, shareholders, community members and media were mentioned). For instance, there are customers that require good safety levels for reputational reasons and also shareholders and local communities are interested in safety issues. The following quotations illustrate the importance of safety from a strategic point of view:

> *It (safety) is, more than anything, a strategic issue. We have defined our vision as including being profitable, specialization, emphasizing customer focus and transparency… and safety, including workplace safety, process safety and product safety, is an essential part of the strategy. […] If you can manage and lead safety, it is assumed that you have also quality*

management and cost-efficiency in control. They are not exclusive (Management)

As regards reputation, if we say that we are a world-class company in manufacturing special steels, we need to have all management systems in order, including safety (Management)

Seeing workplace safety as a process can also have a downside because work might then become too technical. Safety work might become a superficial performance, involving only things that are included in measurement systems.

Safety work is very structured and includes guidelines. There are safety activities to perform, and supervisors know what is expected from them and they have tools. But this is a weakness, too, because it easily gets to the point that supervisors think that if I do this and that, then I have taken care of safety and they believe it is enough. And then they forget the common everyday talk about safety! (Communication)

When seeing safety as a process, the role of internal corporate communication was mainly to report progress. This is a very pragmatic and routine way of communicating, and the main purpose seems to be to report injury frequencies. This way of communication was especially emphasized and desired by the Safety Experts/Managers that participated in the interviews conducted during this study. The interviewees mentioned that injury frequencies are figures that people are used to seeing and interpreting, even though it was also mentioned that when presented on the info screens on the factory floor, the figures usually just pass the eyes of employees with no reaction or interest. The figures were also included, for example, in the quarterly internal magazine (the magazine includes also other regular safety topics in article format) and internal presentations of the CEO. The research data did not include information about how the CEO presents safety issues in his presentations, i.e. whether or not he includes other messages than simply presenting the progress numbers.

Many interviewees mentioned that there is a new theme (responsibility) for safety work and communication can, in part, help complement pragmatic, process-related

communication. The main message to be communicated is "Be responsible to yourself, to your coworkers and customers, and to your family and friends - Act safely". Three different stories were planned to communicate the message.

Various communication materials (videos, intranet content and own intranet section, visual posters, cardboards presenting human figures to factory sites, pictures, managerial materials) were being prepared around the theme during the time of the interviews. People seemed to be very excited about this since it was the first time the combined company had launched a corporate level umbrella theme for safety work and communication. The human touch and storytelling were also appreciated since these are very different from the process-related pragmatic communication described above and relates more to workplace safety perceived as a journey as is described next.

4.1.2 Workplace safety as a journey

Another way of making sense of workplace safety was to describe it as a journey. What is different compared to process thinking was that the interviewees described the journey more concretely by using good examples and actual steps and phases that are needed during the journey.

> *To go under 10 in LTIF and to decrease accidents… it is a journey we need to go through. It requires a new way of thinking, learning and education… So that people understand that working safely is part of their expertise and knowhow (Safety Expert/Manager)*

Those working closely with everyday safety issues, i.e. Safety Experts/Managers and the management, described safety work as phases the organization needs to walk through to make improvements. Based on the interview data, it seems that the organizational units, production sites and even work groups (consisting of fewer than 20 people) are living in different phases of the journey. Even though the journey was sometimes described as hard, the interviewees were keen to give good, concrete examples about the safety work they had done. At least work around safety equipment, preventing hand injuries, improving the working conditions of crane operators, being able to work a certain amount of days without injuries at a production site, improving

maintenance safety and well-organized safety training were mentioned. Thus the journey seemed to have pit stops (the good examples and success stories) that encouraged moving forward.

Two interviewees from the management mentioned a so-called Bradley curve (see Appendix 4), which is used in safety work to describe and analyze safety culture and is also one way to see safety work as a journey. Apparently, the curve is not used on a large scale in the case company, but according to some internet sources it is used by other companies too, even though no reliable academic source was to be found. In brief, the idea of the Bradley curve is that safety culture moves from being reactive, dependent, interdependent and finally interdependent. A reactive safety culture is based on instincts, dependent is based on supervision, independent is based on personal responsibility and interdependent safety culture is based on team responsibility for each other. The culture of the organization is expected to be linked to injury frequency, and as the safety culture develops towards interdependent, the injury frequency rate goes down.

The Bradley curve is used in some parts of the case company as a tool to evaluate where the organization (or its divisions or units) stands in its safety culture, reported an interviewee from management. It can also help in linking safety operations and communication to safety culture, e.g. by formulating safety messages that are different in the different parts of the journey. For example, an interviewee from management said that it may be too early for the case company to require responsibility for each other in workplace safety (interdependent culture based on the Bradley curve) when the employees do not even take personal responsibility for themselves (independent culture based on the Bradley curve).

When talking about safety as a journey, internal corporate communication seemed to have a more influential role compared to the pragmatic way of seeing safety as a process. One interviewee, emphasizing the continuous and consistent manner of communicating, described the role of communication as follows:

We have a vision and an objective, and we need to formulate a path of operations and decide what our journey is to reach the objective. When communicating, we don't do this thing in one month and that thing in another month, but we need to see the big picture and communication is constantly involved by showing where we have succeeded. [...] It is a journey that takes us forward all the time (Management)

The success stories that were told by the interviewees offer a completely different platform for communication than the injury frequencies described earlier in subsection 4.1.1. Also other types of stories can be used, such as those built around the responsibility theme described in subsection 4.1.2. Storytelling is influential in communication since good stories might provide a deeper sense of meaning and purpose (Barry & Elmes, 1997, 431).

4.1.3 Workplace safety as an attitude

Several interviewees said that when the goal is to go under 10 in LTIF, safety work requires something other than a technical approach (meaning a safe working environment, proper safety equipment and safety procedures). By this, they meant that more emphasis should be placed on employees' and management's attitude and behavior. This can be seen as a pit stop on the journey, but also as a way of perceiving safety culture. The following quotes refer to the situation in the Nordic countries and are intended to capture the essence of what the interviewees meant by describing safety as an attitude:

At least in Scandinavia, we have done a lot of systematic work, but we need to develop the attitude - safety is still not between the ears of everybody (Management)

I say the challenge is the attitude. Everybody should personally take responsibility for working safely by thinking all the time how do I do this thing safely. In practice, people still take shortcuts and take serious risks (Communication)

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I think it has a lot to do with the safety culture, because lots of employees do what they have done for 20 years. It perhaps worked then, but now we need to think and speak in another way, the safety way (Communication)

Attitude reflects what I call the safety climate and has been changing for better for a long time. Attitude is very good in general, but there are examples where it is not. And as management, we are weak to deal with bad attitude and behavior and that is the bad attitude of the management (Safety Expert/Manager)

Interviewees even felt that technical safety (meaning a safe working environment, proper safety equipment and safety procedures) is in very good shape in the company, even though it was acknowledged that it requires continuous work and alertness from everyone. So, as the quotations above illustrate, the interviewees felt that the most important thing now is to impact attitudes, behavior and good management practices. Once again, the perceptions are intertwined and impacting attitudes was also seen as a process or journey - things do not change overnight, but require systematic work and collaboration across the organization.

As recognized generally, attitudes are hard to change. At the time the interviews here were conducted, the case organization was working a lot around safety issues and was in particular trying to affect the attitudes and behavior of employees. This felt like a hard job and there was no mention of specific solutions to solve the problem. The need for face-to-face communication between supervisors and their teams and between top management and all employees was recognized, but in a large organization, the latter is a challenging task as is mentioned also by Welch and Jackson (2007). Hence also mediated communication channels (including line management communication between teams and supervisors mediating the message from the top management) are needed to support this.

What the interviewees recognized was the need to involve the employees more to the safety work to improve the attitude. This becomes obvious from the following quotations:

We have a lot of rules and instructions about what and how we should operate and that is definitely in place. What is not yet in place is our own employees' responsibility for their own and their colleagues' safety.[…] I also feel that all our managers have the ambition to get our employees more involved in the safety work (Safety Expert/Manager)

We try to involve employees…we need to do this to a much greater extent. We need to offer each and everyone, each and every day an opportunity to work with safety and to be involved to a greater extent. As an example, we do a lot of safety rounds, but too few people attend and the consciousness that everybody must participate needs to be improved (Safety Expert/Manager)

This is in line with Vredenburgh's (2002) management practices regarding safety which gives participation a big role where participation is perceived as real and employees really feel empowered. Interviewees also said that employee participation is important, because people working on the factory floor know the situations best and will easily get frustrated at just being told what to do by someone who does not do "the real work".

Safety training, safety rounds (when management and employees go through safety issues on the factory floor) and encouraging practical safety initiatives were mentioned as being ways to involve employees in safety work. When involving employees in safety work, internal corporate communication has a more consultative role such as helping management in formulating messages and providing topics and themes for communication, as described in the next quotation from a person working in communications:

Supervisors are an important channel for communication and our role (corporate communication's role) is to help them in what and how they can communicate. Our expertise is in how they can bring up certain things (Communication)

The responsibility umbrella theme described earlier is one effort in helping supervisors when formulating their messages. Since the theme was just being launched within the

organization and thus based on the interviews and other research data, it was not yet largely visible in communication. The interviewees felt that the responsibility message was emotional and personal, it was easy to communicate, and it related to the everyday work of the employees. The theme felt like a good way to start influencing attitudes and behavior, and it was usable across the organization from the corporate level to the local level. In addition to the corporate-wide theme of responsibility, there will be divisional and local safety themes and actions supporting different needs. For example, contractor safety has been identified as one of the additional themes where both safety and communications organizations are paying extra attention.

4.1.4 Workplace safety as a value

The most ambitious way to make sense of workplace safety was to describe it as a value. In a way, safety is a value if it is integrated in people's everyday work and thinking (in safety as process thinking it was seen to be important to integrate safety in the management systems). Describing safety as a value was, to a large extent, meant to separate it from being a priority, which was also a way to describe safety. The following two quotations illustrate the difference between seeing safety as a value or a priority:

> *We should never say that safety is our priority, since priorities change in business cycles. Safety cannot be put up and then down. It is a value that stays no matter what happens in the outside world. This needs to be communicated too (Management)*

> *Safety is prioritized for the whole organization and it is at the top of the agenda. […] I think there is a good climate for it, almost everybody talks about safety and really, really think that the most important thing is to prevent accidents. […] When you go higher in the organization, even top management sees it as a high priority and of high importance (Safety Expert/Manager)*

Both ways indicate that safety is important, the distinction being that whereas priorities may change, values are more permanent. One interviewee brought up an example that due to the economic downturn, safety issues were put aside and more emphasis was

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given to productivity and profitability issues at the case company. This obviously sends a strong message to the organization and tends to downgrade the long-term work that has been done in the organization to improve workplace safety.

Of course, the use of words (that is using word priority or value) in an interview situation is only an observation, and, based on the actual interview data, safety seems more like a core value of the company than a priority that is interchangeable with another priority. Actually, safety is included in the company core values that are 1) The customer business in focus, 2) Taking responsibility (e.g. by working safely) and 3) Exceeding expectations. Thus seeing safety as a value is supported by the guiding principles of the case company that give a strong message that safety is of extreme importance and guide daily activities and decisions. According to the principle of continuous communication with the most salient stakeholders (i.e. employees in this case) (Cornelissen 2011), the corporate values are something that need to be integrated into corporate communication the whole time.

Describing safety as a value was more present in interviews conducted with the management. Safety experts/mangers tended to describe it more as a priority or journey. Process thinking was also tightly intertwined with the value thinking. By this, I mean that safety was described as a long process after which it was seen to become a value – not only for the management, but for all employees. To illustrate this, the next quotation is from SSAB Americas, where the organization seems to be at a more advanced phase in systematic safety work:

> *One of the core values of SSAB is safety. We want our employees to have a workplace where they can work safely and leave home in the same condition that they came to work in the morning.[…] The job is to manufacture steel, but a component in manufacturing steel is that it has to be safe. We have worked diligently to make safety part of the job. […] It is a 10-year evolution. Over time, people become more conscious and more aware of safety, and safety becomes part of the culture and the job and the accident rates go down (Management)*

While talking about safety as a value, the interviewees (working in communication and the safety organization) also raised concerns that even though safety is regarded as being of high importance, management does not always seem to have time for safety issues due to other priorities.

> *The purpose is that they (the managers) should talk to their people, but they have so much else to do. Sometimes I think they lose that part. I don't know if they could deliver the message all the time (Communication)*

As the previous quotation also shows, the high pace of communication was regarded as a way of showing that safety is a value. Even though some interviewees voiced concern that overly communication diminishes the importance of the issue (in a sense that the continuous messages are not being noticed), many of them also thought that keeping safety high on the agenda all the time stresses its importance. This includes, not only corporate communication in mediated channels, but also the importance of supervisors communicating with their teams and top management communicating with all employees. It is not enough to say that safety is our value, this needs to be shown in actions, too, as a couple of interviewees put it. Thus communication seems to have the biggest role in the case when safety is perceived as a value, since safety is then seen as a pervasive value that affects the attitudes and the behavior of the employees.

4.2. Informative, consultative and influential roles of corporate safety communication

Corporate communication as a function was understood to have an umbrella role when connected to safety work. This umbrella role was meant to illustrate the role of internal corporate communication in showing and connecting safety messages from the management all the way to the local level and supporting the work of local communication teams. Informative, consultative and influential roles of communication could be recognized based on the interview research material. Communication mostly had an informative role in keeping the organization constantly aware of safety, its objectives and best practices. On the other hand, communication was seen to have a consultative role in supporting management in its safety work. The most demanding role was the influential role when the purpose was to impact the safety attitude and

behavior of the employees and the management. The case company appears to have the greatest challenges in the latter role.

At a general level, the goal of safety communication at the case company is described as being to communicate the focus areas of safety work to the organization and to support the safety work done by the line organization. Three types of roles for communication professionals supporting these general goals could be recognized in the interview data:

1) Informative role: Inform employees about safety issues and objectives (e.g. the safety vision) and share stories and best practices

2) Consultative role: Support the management in safety work (e.g. by helping in how and what to communicate about safety)

3) Influential role: Affect the safety attitude and behavior of the employees and management (e.g. by listening and discussing, supporting participation)

The roles were to some extent covered also in section 4.1 when linked to the four ways of perceiving workplace safety that also indicate some aspects of the safety culture of the case organization. In this section, the roles of communication are described in more detail.

4.2.1 Informative role

Based on the interviews, it seems that the informing and sharing type of goals of communication are emphasized in the case organization. When talking about communication and its importance, the interviewees usually talked about writing and publishing articles on the intranet and in the internal magazine, preparing presentations, finding and sharing success stories and best practices utilized at different production sites, publishing LTIF figures of the organization or making videos, pictures and posters. The interviewees described a more mediated than face-to-face type of communication. The essence of the informative role can be captured in the next quotation:

> *The role of (corporate) communication with regards to safety issues is to serve as a supporting function as is the case in any other issue. We provide content creation, communication channels and ideas to support the issue in question. Of course, it needs to be remembered that workplace safety involves the employees' well-being and it might be related to severe, even fatal accidents and in this sense it has a different value than other topics (Communication)*

This type of informing and sharing activities were seen as continuous work that was advanced all the time in the organization, sometimes even too much, since some people felt there to be too much communication about safety e.g. on the intranet and info screens (i.e. screens used at production sites for employees not having intranet access on a daily basis). The risk of too much information is that the message is not noticed since it has been seen many times before.

According to the typology of Broom and Smith (1979), the informative role equals to a large extent the role of communication technician, thus mainly providing materials, planning, and execution of events. However, also the role of communication facilitator described by Broom and Smith (1979) could be recognized in the informative sense. By this, I mean that the corporate communication function was also seen as a link between business divisions and having a role in building bridges, avoiding suspicions and tensions between divisions by sharing information, as illustrated in the quotation below:

> *There are some tensions and suspicions between divisions. We could work more closely horizontally across the organization, do some nice communication actions together, share success stories, bring facts to the table and this way decrease tensions (Management)*

If we look at the goals of the internal corporate communication concept by Welch and Jackson (2006), the informative role supports mainly advancing the goals of awareness and understanding. Communication strategy is then mainly informational using mediated channels with some elements from the persuasive strategy, such as meetings and educational campaigns (Cornelissen, 2011, 49). As Welch and Jackson (2006, 190)

point out, the goals of internal corporate communication are interrelated and increasing awareness and understanding of the evolving aims and strategic direction (safety related in this case) of the organization contribute to developing commitment and trust in the organization. Developing commitment can be positively impacted by task-communication (line management communication) and non-task communication (internal corporate communication), and requires management to play a strong role. In supporting the management in this, communication professionals can have a consultative role, which is discussed next.

4.2.2 Consultative role

The consultative role of communication professionals in supporting the management was seen as being important and was described by the interviewees in several different ways. The most common way, however, was to describe it through the role of communication technician and thus landing it in between technician and problem-solver, if we use the typology by Broom and Smith (1979). The following quotation is meant to illustrate my point in this:

> *I see it in a way that the management needs to have the vision that safety is important and then communication produces food/input for them to talk about. In this, I see my role in raising safety issues in general communication, on the intranet and info screens and keep it in the minds of people (Communication)*

Communication was also seen as having a bigger, consultative role as an umbrella (related to the expert prescriber role described by Broom and Smith, 1979), but this role appears to be underestimated and hidden behind the informative role, as described in a management quotation below:

> *Communication group (function) helps safety work when they help providing information, like examples, communicate how we are performing against our targets, benchmark against others in our business and roll all this together. It has to start from the very top of the company – Chairman and CEO level. Communication serves to provide information*

to help to define what the Chairman and CEO expects. You set an
objective at a very high level and it goes all the way through the
operations and communication is part of that – they help to convey the
message (Management)

One concrete way of supporting management that was mentioned was to support management in providing help in how to communicate about safety issues. Even though communication is an essential part of management practice (Vredenburgh, 2002), supervisors are not communication experts themselves and could benefit greatly from communicative help and training. Thus the consultative role equals also that of communication facilitator by Broom and Smith (1979) when the objective is to facilitate coworkers' and managers' communication. Communicators stated that they already do this kind of work to some extent, but naturally it is also a matter of resources and seems not to be very systematic.

The consultative role of communication is thus mainly linked to the goal of commitment in internal corporate communication described by Welch & Jackson (2006). To be able to contribute to this goal, the management needs to show strong commitment to safety work themselves (Hofmann & al., 1995, Vredenburgh, 2002). When referring to stakeholder communication strategies by Cornelissen (2011, 49), this would require the use of a two-way dialogue strategy toward the employees, thus consulting, early incorporation and problem-solving.

4.2.3 Influential role

The goal of influencing attitude and behavior of employees and management was seen as being important, but usually described by words "we should", thus there seems to be more need for that. This is, of course, also a matter of time and resources – while firefighting, whether in management or in communication, it is impossible to find time for listening and discussion, both of which were found to be important when trying to influence attitudes.

The influential role was perceived by the interviewees as being difficult. The challenge of influencing attitudes and behavior was well acknowledged, but the means of

achieving the objective were somewhat lacking, as illustrated in the following quotation:

> *The objective of safety communication is to decrease the LTIF figures and that sounds huge! […] We need to fragment this somehow by keeping safe working in the minds of people and in this way somehow connect with attitudes. This is like change communication, repeating and guiding to change attitudes that then change behavior (Communication)*

Since the organization is large (17 000 employees in 50 countries), the interviewees addressed a concern firstly of how to reach all employees and secondly of how to convey right message for them. In this, the role of line management becomes crucial, as pointed out also by Michael & al. (2005), since line managers and supervisors mediate the message from the top management to the employees. In this way, the influential role is linked to the above described consultative role – communication professionals can help the management in what and how to talk about workplace safety, but their current role in this seems to be quite small.

One way of influencing attitudes and behavior mentioned by the interviewees was to use emotional and personal content, such as stories preferably presented in visual format (pictures and videos). Obviously this is only one separate way, but worth mentioning since it was brought up by several interviewees. Related to this, the interviewees mentioned that the message should be aligned – CEO talking about the same thing as the emotional story presented in video format. One interviewee saw the role of corporate communication function in this way:

> *Face-to-face communication and other channels work to complement each other. If we have the intranet and internal magazine that include safety material, too, then we show that this is important and safety comes first. If we say that safety comes first, but you can never read about it in internal communication channels, then it seems not to be that important (Communication)*

When looking at the goals of internal corporate communication by Welch & Jackson (2006), the influential role of communication is mainly linked to the goal of promoting a positive sense of belonging. When describing belonging, Welch and Jakcson (2006, 189) use Cornelissen's words by stating it is "allowing people to identify with their organization". Organizational identification, on the other hand, can be linked to organizational climate (Neal & al., 2000, 100). Thus promoting a positive sense of belonging and the influential role of communication in supporting it is strongly linked to organizational climate, i.e. individual and shared perceptions of the value of safety in the work environment (Neal & al., 2000, 100).

It was acknowledged by the case organization even before the interviews were conducted, that the main problem seems to be how to influence employee attitude and behavior s (see case company introduction in section 3.3) and the interview research material seems to support this view. However, it should be noted that the goals (awareness, understanding, commitment and belonging) of internal corporate communication are interrelated; they are all important and should support each other and thus require integrated communication (Welch & Jackson, 2006, 194). Therefore, these informational, consultative and influential roles of communication professionals should be seen in an interrelated manner too – none of them is able to contribute to employee attitudes and behavior alone, but all roles are needed.

I will next look more closely at the role of management in safety work as described by the interviewees.

4.3 The management supports, enables, encourages and intervenes

The role of management in safety work and communication was greatly emphasized by all interviewees. When making sense of the management's role in safety work, the interviewees saw it in a twofold way. Firstly, since the management is accountable for a safe working environment and safety procedures, they have a role in intervening in and, in the worst case, punishing unsafe behavior. Secondly, the management's role is to proactively enable, encourage and support safe working by, for instance, setting an example (commitment when using management practices by Vredenburgh, 2002). Management practices seem to be strongly linked to the perceived safety climate discussed in section 4.1. Perceived challenges were linked to a lack of unified common practices in intervening in unsafe behavior and the scarce recourse of management time devoted to safety work.

In general, the interviewees described it as being the management's responsibility to arrange a safe working environment, to make sure that employees know and comply with working processes and safety requirements, and use safety equipment and ultimately intervene in unsafe behavior. Managing (in the generally accepted sense of planning, organizing and controlling) these issues is, however, not enough, but leadership (setting direction, aligning people, motivating employees) is also needed and this is what supporting, enabling and encouraging safe working is about.

Demand for the management to intervene in and punish unsafe behavior is naturally rooted in the fact that the line management is directly responsible and accountable by law for a safe working environment. The interviewees felt that the management in SSAB Americas had a stronger culture in intervening than the management in the Nordic countries, where disciplinary actions are not that streamlined and strong. Harmonization of these procedures is seen as a challenge for the organization and actions are have already taken to improve the situation.

Intervening and punishing has, of course, a negative flavor that, at least to some extent, cannot be avoided. The tone of voice is different when talking about intervening than when talking about, for example, taking care of the workforce and sends a different message to the employees as can be seen when comparing the next two quotations:

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Too often we seek a technical solution to a problem, e.g. we build a guardrail instead of intervening in the person's unsafe behavior. This we need to overcome. Safety is a matter of management and we need to understand that intervening in unsafe behavior is our duty (Management)

You have to communicate, you have to talk to people and you need to tell them you want them to be safe. That is the starting point. You have to say that it is your objective and their objective for them to be safe. [...] If you have a workforce you really care about, you cannot and will not overload them by saying that we want you to be safe (Management)

The role of supporting, enabling and encouraging safe working is a role that needs support from the top management. Previous research shows that management showing visible commitment has a huge role in improving workplace safety (see e.g. Hofmann & al. 1995). Some interviewees expressed concerns that even though the top management might be committed to safety issues, it is not necessarily visible to the organization, but the management should lead more by setting an example. According to the employee survey conducted at Raahe steel mill in Finland in 2014, the employees felt that their direct supervisors regarded safety as being significantly more important than the top management did. The employees also wished that they could participate more in the development of workplace safety at the mill.

Also trust between employees and management was brought up by the interviewees as an important thing that is linked to committing to workplace safety.

We (management) have to show what we do and then people will also believe in what we say (Safety Expert/Manager)

The only way to gain trust and receive appreciation is that supervisors and managers lead by example and are fair and consistent in their managing style (Management)

If we look at management practices that Vredenburgh (2002) regards as important for safety work (management commitment, rewards, communication and feedback, selection, training and participation), management commitment was referred to most by

the interviewees. None of the interviewees brought up rewards when the role of management was discussed, even though it can be assumed that reward systems exist as management practices. Communication and feedback was naturally discussed as it was one of the themes of the interview. Interestingly, selection and hiring policies were brought up by only one interviewee, who stated that a safety-conscious attitude is not explicitly included in the selection criteria used at the site where the person worked.

Training and participation were seen as effective management practices, and communication was seen to influence them. These are discussed in the next section along with other factors that were seen to make safety communication effective.

4.4 Effective safety communication participates, stresses mutual responsibility and is personal and positive

What was largely emphasized by the interviewees was that safety communication is most of all expected to be continuous and proactive. Regarding the desired content and style of effective safety communication, four areas were highlighted: 1) participative communication and discussion, 2) stressing mutual responsibility, 3) making communication personal for the employees and 4) positive tone of voice and good examples. The challenges recognized were mostly linked to fear of safety information overload, the lack of vertical and horizontal coordination (working in silos) and the recognized problem of reaching and delivering an appropriate message to 17 000 employees working in 50 countries.

Workplace safety involves the organization's most important and salient stakeholder group, namely employees that need to be communicated constantly (Cornelissen, 2011). Thus safety communication cannot be project- or campaign-based communication, but it needs constant attention, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> *Safety work never stops. Every day is a new day. You're not finished, after one day there is another day when you need to constantly be reinforcing the information and keeping people focused. It is not like "Well, we did it for a month and now we're done," but you need to do it constantly (Management)*

Continuous communication can be seen in the fact that the communication function of the case organization has prepared a separate, annual communication plan for safety issues alone. The plan includes activities such as content creation for the intranet and social media, creating and updating visual elements, communicating the selected theme of responsibility, supporting the management roadshow and preparing visual elements for communication. In addition, the quarterly internal magazine Steel, which is distributed to all employees around the world, includes a page dedicated to safety-related topics and some issues are built around safety topics alone. Also external resources (advertising agency) are used in creating visuals and content for safety communication.

Especially safety experts/managers called for proactive safety communication. They justified this by stating that in addition to publishing statistics (LTIF figures about lost time injuries), safety needs attention before something happens and in this way also a more positive approach could be used. After something happens, it is too late to communicate positively about it.

As described above, the main role of the internal corporate communication function seems to be informing the organization about safety-related topics and sharing associated stories and best practices. Many of the interviewees shared their concern that there is too much information about safety in corporate channels (namely the intranet, info screens at the production sites, email notifications and internal magazine) and the attention of employees might be lost for this reason. This is why new and innovative ways of communication were called for and more emphasis on consultative work of the communication function was suggested.

According to the interviewees, efficient safety communication should include elements that can be grouped under the following four headlines:

a) Participative communication and discussion

b) Stressing mutual responsibility

c) Making communication personal for the employees

d) Positive tone of voice and good examples

Participative communication and discussion was emphasized very strongly by the interviewees. They said that employees should be supported in giving improvement ideas, but also in making improvements themselves. Employees participate in safety rounds when management review safety issues at a site and also in different safety development groups, but their role should be emphasized and encouraged. If safety is seen as very management led (as seems to be the case at the moment), this is not possible and also employees' commitment to safety might not be at the level desired.

Also mutual responsibility links to the same thing. Many interviewees used the expression "everybody is responsible for themselves, for their coworkers and for their family" that strongly links to the chosen safety and communication theme of responsibility. People felt that the theme was a good one, was able to touch people personally and it was also at a general level, which was good since it was easy to integrate into all activities covering corporate, divisional and local safety work.

The need to make communication personal was brought up by interviewees from communication and the safety organization. The following citations exemplify this:

> *The vision is to be the safest steel company in the world and the main theme is responsibility…Then certain specific things are expected from you so that we can become the safest steel company. This means different things for all of us (Communication)*

> *Sometimes initiatives from the management seem almost like a burden, since they overlap; we might have similar (local) initiatives that are based*

on our own needs. I think it is necessary for safety work to be very close to the activities (Safety Expert/Manager)

I say we work together (in corporate and local communication). I don't see us working at another level, we work together. There are some differences… not so many, but when you work at a local level it is easier for the employee to identify things with themselves […] Sometimes corporate communication can be distant; it is not about me, it is about someone else (Communication)

The last quotation above illustrates the situation that large organizations often face: they tend to work in silos that can make it hard to achieve common goals hard. The interview data indicate that the organization has silos between divisions (SSAB Special Steels, SSAB Europe, SSAB Americas), between countries, (Sweden, Finland, the US, and the rest of the world consisting of ca. 50 countries), between units (the most important production sites of Hämeenlinna and Raahe in Finland, Luleå, Borlänge and Oxelösund in Sweden, and Mobile and Montpelier in the US) and between and within functions (between the safety organization and communication organization, and within the communication function between local, divisional and corporate communication). Based on the interview data, it can be estimated that cooperation between silos is inefficient. The following quotations are meant to illustrate the perceived situation:

I think we need to check that is the local safety organization talking with local and corporate communication and thus sending the right message to the employees (ManagementCorporate communication needs to function in a way that does not interfere too much with local communication (Management)

There was a good initiative from the top level that we should have signs (pictures) in the factory about how people should be dressed. This was a very good initiative, but we didn't participate in how they should look, so we now have the wrong signs and people don't recognize themselves […]

Even clothing does not look the same in the Americas, Sweden and Finland (Safety Expert/Manager)

It is really important that the message is formulated locally, it has to be. Sometimes we have too little time to localize materials. It takes a lot of time to do it in a right way (Safety Expert/Manager)

However, the situation probably is, to a large extent, linked to the merger situation that the organization has gone through and a lot of effort has gone into improving the situation already. For example, organization around workplace safety has been formulated (see Case company introduction in section 3.3) with a corporate level person with responsibility to improve common safety practices and communication. The company has also a management philosophy called SSAB One, which involves the whole organization completing 8 training modules over the course of 2 years, and work was being done during the interviews to integrate safety into all modules. As regards communication, new responsibility themed actions had already been planned during the time of the interviews. It seemed that the actions were well organized; the interviewees felt that they were being involved in planning and implementation in an early phase and the message (responsibility) was good, touching and personal for the employees. The interviewees across the organization had great expectations regarding the planned communicative actions. The obvious challenge was how to reach all 17 000 employees and make the message relevant to them.

The interviewees, especially in communication and the safety organization, said that communication could be somewhat more positive. By this, they referred to proactive safety communication, not to cases when an accident had already occurred and the organization informed about it. Several interviewees stated that many times only misbehavior or wrong-doings are noticed, but not when somebody is doing something good. This is illustrated by the following citation:

The tone of voice is terribly strict and accusing, mainly "don't do this and you mustn't do that". I find it old fashioned and we should get rid of it and use more tones in communication. You can also say that this you can do

and this is a good way of doing this, instead of using negativity all the time
(Communication)

By positive, the interviewees meant that success stories around the organization could be shared, a positive feeling around safety work emphasized, use of expressions as to what it is allowed to do (not always state rules and restrictions) even humor was being asked for. Humor in relation to workplace safety can, of course, be dangerous since safety is about the wellbeing of the personnel, as this quotation from communication summarizes:

Our company and its culture are very serious regardless of the country we operate in. If we wanted to make an internal communication effort and use humor as our primary means of communication, we shouldn't pick safety as the content. We should start using humor by picking a theme way other than safety (Communication)

4.5. Activities used by the management to promote and enable workplace safety

Safety communication activities can be roughly divided into face-to-face and mediated activities. The interviewees naturally emphasized the recognized importance of face-to-face communication. The use of face-to-face and mediated channels seemed to be in rather good balance, even though more management time for safety issues was desired. As regards the corporate communication function, the interviewees referred mostly to writing texts to mediated channels. The interviewees noticed that even though this informative role is important, putting too much emphasis on it may be a challenge, since communication resources could be used more efficiently because all roles of communication are needed to be able to achieve the goals (informative, consultative and influential roles described in section 4.2). This was specially noticed by communication personnel themselves.

When referring to face-to-face related safety communication, the interviewees mentioned direct contacts with supervisors and teams (line management communication), management site visits of the, safety rounds conducted together with management and employees in the factory, personal appraisal discussions, various

meetings (management meetings, team meetings, etc.) and safety trainings. Also recruiting principles were mentioned, even though it appears that safety-conscious attitude is not consistently used as a recruitment criterion.

All interviewees referred to the importance of personable, face-to-face communication in communicating the safety message in the organization. Also the role of direct supervisors was emphasized. A survey conducted at SSAB's Hämeenlinna works in Finland about the expectations of the employees about safety communication indicated that employees wanted to be informed about safety issues directly and face-to-face by their own supervisors. This is challenging because the works operates in 5 shifts and employees do not even meet their direct supervisors during every shift. Supervisors can thus become communication bottlenecks.

Obviously face-to-face communication between top management and all employees poses challenges since there are 17 000 employees in 50 countries. As presented in the internal corporate communication model by Welch and Jackson (2007), corporate communication happens between top management and all employees, and for practical reasons this cannot always be face-to-face, direct communication, but mediated channels including emails, the intranet, personnel magazine, newsletters and also other managers are needed. Also middle managers and supervisors can be seen as channels, as is seen in the next citation:

> *When we talk about communication for the whole company, we need to show that the message comes from the CEO. It should not be received as a communication package from communications, it should be a message from the CEO [...] Locally it is important that managers ... have time to discuss it from a local perspective before sending it out to employees. The risk is that they will think and show that this is something we are forced to inform you about (Safety Expert/Manager)*

As illustrated in the quotation above, there is a risk that the corporate message from top management is altered in the process or worse, it is communicated in a way that shows non-commitment to the message. Research has shown that management's non-

commitment to safety is connected to the safety climate of an organization, i.e. how important safety is perceived to be within a particular organization (Hofmann & al. 1995). The interview data do not show that these kinds of problems actually exist to any large extent. The interviewees described the safety culture or climate in general as being good, and people think that safety is important. However, it was mentioned several times that this varies across the organization, between countries, between sites and even between working groups of 15-20 people.

It is therefore well justified to ask the question of whether there is such a thing as a common or general SSAB safety climate? Or is safety climate rather a very local thing that is mostly influenced by the line managers supervising the workgroups of 15-20 people on the factory floor and the unwritten rules that those groups stick to, even if they know the official rules and guidelines regarding safety? The next citations are meant to open up this viewpoint:

> *For better and worse, you can see that there is a heritage in a working group. Even if people are changed over time, the culture within group stays, because they learn from each other how the thing works […] New persons learn the climate from the old members of the group. To be able to break this heritage we need a very dedicated manager who is not just saying safety first, but actually setting an example (Safety Expert/Manager)*

Mediated channels that were brought up during the interviews included the intranet, internal magazine Steel, management presentations, videos, visual materials (posters and pictures for instance), email bulletins, separate safety bulletins (produced by the safety organization) and info screens at the production sites, instructions, policies (Safety Policy for SSAB, Safety Management Basic Requirements), statistics (LTIF progress). Use of videos was seen as a good way of influential communication that has the potential to use emotional content and affect attitudes and behavior. Mediated channels were mostly seen as supporting the face-to-face communication done by top management and line management.

The biggest challenges of communication activities the management use to promote and enable workplace safety were related to

- reaching people (a technical challenge due to a large organization)
- conveying the right type of messages (e.g. need to use short, concrete and to-the-point messages)
- better showing of management commitment (e.g. need for more managers on the floor talking to people)
- affecting people's attitude to think safety all the time
- balancing communication so that safety does not become too dominant (or manipulative) issue
- improving the coherency of communication (now too much and too various messages, no unified message can be recognized)
- finding relevant information from various sources (e.g. from the intranet)
- preventing working in silos (people working at different sites work separately and do not use their professional network in the company; the management, safety organization and communication organization seem to work separately and not having common message, thus more co-operation needed)
- increasing the amount of proactive communication (communicate positively before something awful happens)
- attaining harmonized visual identity in all sites
- showing and visualizing the safety efforts of the organization with high pace (by using the means of communication)

These challenges that are perceived within the case organization illustrate the various roles, tasks and goals of communication that are related to workplace safety communication. I will now move on to the discussion and conclusion part of the paper, where also recommendations to the management regarding the perceived challenges are given.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I this chapter, I will conclude the main findings of this study and discuss them from the case company point of view as well as at a general level. The aim is to respond to my main research question: "What is the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety". I will also compare the findings with earlier research presented in Chapter 2 and summarize the overall importance of my study. Finally, I will conclude managerial implications based on the findings of this research to be used by the management and communication at the case organization.

5.1 Research summary

The purpose of this master's thesis research project was to investigate more closely what is the role of internal corporate communication in supporting workplace safety, thus how internal communication as a management function can support involving, committing and motivating employees to act safely in their everyday work. Workplace safety is a critical and even strategic issue for organizations where employees are exposed to severe work-related risks on a daily basis. Based on the literature reviewed for this purpose, I noticed that communication was usually referred to at a very general level in connection with workplace safety, and there was an obvious lack of integrated thinking. Usually simply the need for effective communication or the effects of faulty communication were mentioned. This is why I considered it important to look at the role of communication in more detail.

To be able to shed light on the role of communication in safety work, I used a theoretical framework that consisted of the reviewed literature with the key elements of the internal corporate communication model and internal communication matrix (Welch & Jackson, 2006), roles of communication professionals (Broom & Smith, 1979), management practices in safety work (Vredenburgh, 2002), model for stakeholder communication strategies (Cornelissen, 2011) and research on safety climate in contributing to workplace safety (Neal & al., 2000).

A single case study was chosen for a research method since this was the best for the purpose of investigating a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context using

multiple data sources (Yin, 2009, 18). The case organization was SSAB, a Nordic and US-based steel company which had recognized challenges in improving workplace safety, especially, apart from technical safety issues, by influencing the attitudes and behavior of the employees. The empirical data collected for the case study consisted of 12 qualitative, semi-structured interviews among safety experts, management and communication professionals of the case organization. Also other data sources (described in more detail in Appendix 1), such as archival records, administrative documents and previous survey results were used.

The main research question this study sought to answer was: what is the role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety. Based on the findings presented in Chapter 4, it seems that communication has a more extensive role in supporting workplace safety than that suggested in previous, safety-related studies. Previous research has mainly referred to communication at a very general level, for example, by simply emphasizing quality communication in providing information about how to work safely (Parker & al., 2001) or as one management practice for showing e.g. commitment to workplace safety (Vredenburgh, 2002). The roles of communication were researched from the perspective of internal corporate communication (Welch and Jackson, 2006) in how the roles supported the goals of communication (awareness, understanding, commitment and belonging).

Three roles of communication were recognized based on the study: informative, consultative and influential roles. In addition, an umbrella role of the corporate communication function was recognized meaning the overall objective and task to contribute to integrated communication emphasizing message alignment across the organization (Argenti & al., 2005). The three roles are interrelated and support each other – any one role alone is not able to contribute adequately to improving workplace safety.

The findings indicate that the typology by Broom and Smith (1979), which was included in the theoretical framework of this study, is not suitable for describing the role of communication in supporting better workplace safety. The reason for this might be that workplace safety is strongly seen as a management function requiring wide support

from the internal communication function and in this way, the informative, consultative and influential roles mixed together the roles that Broom and Smith described in their typology (expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem-solver and communication technician). In the informative role, the communication function focused on informing the organization about safety-related issues, objectives and initiatives, thus contributing to the goals of awareness and understanding defined by Welch and Jackson (2006). The role mixed the roles of communication technician and communication facilitator, since the informing and sharing best practices types of communicative tasks were seen as building bridges between business units and helping to avoid working in silos.

In the consultative role, the communication function focused on supporting the management in what and how to communicate about safety, and thus contributed to the role of commitment described by Welch and Jackson (2006). The role was the most extensive one and mixed all roles described by Broom and Smith, and had special significance in helping the management to show visible commitment to workplace safety, which is regarded an important managerial practice in safety work (Vredenburgh, 2000). In the influential role, the focus of the communication function turned to the employee perspective and how the attitude and behavior of employees could be influenced to be more safety-oriented and in this way contributed to the goal of belonging defined by Welch and Jackson (2006). The role mixed the roles of communication facilitator and expert-prescriber, since the participative communication and dialogue strategy (Cornelissen, 2011) were in an important position and it was important to take care of the big picture.

The roles of communication recognized in this case research seem to be linked to the perceived safety climate (or culture), and are mainly seen in supporting the management in safety work. In this particular study, four ways of perceiving safety (and indicating safety climate) were recognized: perceiving safety as a process, a journey, an attitude and a value. When seeing safety as a process, the informative role of communication was emphasized. When seeing safety as a journey, both the informative and consultative roles were significant. Seeing safety as an attitude or value seems to require

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communication to assume a more influential role. In the case organization, perceiving safety as a process and as a journey was the most common way, and the role of communication was mainly informative. The findings of the current study indicate the informative role to be important, but could be expanded to cover other roles to be able to better achieve the goals of communication. Suggestions for the expansions of the role are given in connection with the managerial implications (section 5.4).

After presenting the research summary, in the next section I will discuss the main findings in more detail to show how I have reached the conclusions of this study.

5.2 Discussion of the main findings

This chapter is organized in the order of the empirical questions that were used when analyzing the findings of the case study research (Chapter 4). The recognized challenges at the case company are discussed separately in section 5.3, after which I present managerial implications concerning the challenges and the study in general (section 5.4).

5.2.1 The perceptions of workplace safety indicate the safety climate

Safety climate describes individual and shared perceptions of the value of safety in the work environment (Neal & al., 2000, 100). Perceiving safety simply as an important issue is not, however, adequate to estimate its value in the organization, since obviously it is regarded as very important since it involves employee wellbeing and the provision of a safe workplace as required by law. How the interviewees described and perceived safety work in general can be used when evaluating the value of safety and thus indicating the safety climate of the organization.

The interviewees perceived safety in their work environment as a process, a journey, an attitude and as a value. To describe these perceptions in brief, it can be summarized that process thinking (which was the most common way of describing safety) emphasized long-term, ongoing and systematic safety work integrated into management systems. Journey thinking on the other hand emphasized phases that the organization need to go through to improve its performance. Attitude thinking highlighted the importance of employee behavior and attitude rather than technical safety, and value thinking saw

safety as a pervasive value of the organization, rather than a priority that can change over time.

A general, somewhat surprising, remark based on the interviews was that actually there might not be a common or general safety climate at the case organization, but the perceptions of the value of safety vary between countries, business divisions, and manufacturing sites and even between workgroups of 15-20 people. Previous studies (Hofmann & al., 1995, Vredenburgh, 2002, Michael & al., 2005) have shown that top management and line management and supervisors showing visible commitment to workplace safety is linked to how the employees value safety in their work. This can justify the seeming lack of a common safety climate, since the level of management's perceived visible commitment to safety may vary across an organization consisting of 17 000 people in 50 countries. The organization is currently experiencing a time of change, and common procedures and practices are just being formulated. Corporate communication can have a significant role in supporting this.

Another remark made based on the findings of the study is that the role of communication is emphasized differently depending on how the safety climate was perceived (process, journey, attitude or value). When perceiving safety as a process, the role of communication was to mainly report progress, i.e. publishing LTIF figures and reporting about safety initiatives. When seen as a journey, the communicative task was to highlight "pit stops", i.e. achievements, good examples and success stories. In attitude thinking, more emphasis was given to face-to-face communication and participative actions, where the role of communication could more support the management with what and how to communicate. Finally, value thinking was seen as requiring integrated communication (Hallahan & al., 2007, Argenti & al., 2005), with company values (safety as part of the value of responsibility in this case) integrated into all communicative actions.

I find these recognized tasks of communication interesting, since they show that communication can have a broader role than has been suggested in previous studies, which usually refer to informing employees about the importance of the issue (e.g. Parker & al. 2001, Hofmann & al. 1995). According to Vredenburgh (2002),

communication and feedback is an important management practice included in safety programs and based on the findings of this study, communication function can actually have a major role in supporting the management. The roles of communication professionals are discussed further in the next section.

5.2.2 The roles of communication are interrelated and linked to the perceptions of workplace safety

Previous studies of the roles of communication practitioners have focused on tasks, activities and functions and provided different role typologies when describing these (Heide & Simonsson, 2014). One of these typologies, by Broom & Smith (1979), was included in the theoretical framework of this study and so offered a lens through which to look at how the goals of internal corporate communication (awareness, understanding, commitment and belonging) were achieved. The practitioner roles can be seen as indicating the power (i.e. participation in decision-making) of the corporate communication in organizations (Dozier & Broom, 1995).

The typology by Broom & Smith did not, however, offer a useful categorization for describing the roles of communication with regards to safety work. This is because, based on the interviews conducted, the roles of communication are, to a large extent, interrelated and linked to the perceptions of workplace safety. By this I mean that the recognized roles based on this study combined several of those roles described by Broom & Smith.

The recognized roles of communication professionals based on this study were namely the informative role, consultative role and influential role. In addition to this, also the umbrella role of communication was recognized, meaning communication's role in showing and linking the safety message from the management all the way down to the employee level and supporting local safety work that is being done at the production sites.

The informative role consists of informing employees about safety issues, objectives and performance, and sharing stories and best practices. The informative role corresponds to the communication technician role described by Broom & Smith (1979),

but includes also elements of the role of communication facilitator, since e.g. sharing best practices and learning from each other were seen as a way to build bridges between organizational silos. The informative role was mostly linked to the situation where safety was described as a process or a journey and mainly an informational type of stakeholder strategy creating awareness (using mainly mediated channels as communication tactics) was being used (Cornelissen, 2011). It advanced the goals of awareness and understanding described by Welch & Jackson (2006) in their concept of internal corporate communication. This role was clearly the dominant one in the case organization.

The consultative role can be described in communication professionals' efforts in supporting the management in safety work e.g. by helping in what and how to communicate about safety. This role combines all roles from the typology of Broom and Smith, since communication can help management in what to communicate (technician role in providing materials), how to communicate (problem-solver consulting in communicative tasks and facilitator facilitating the communication of others) and serve as an umbrella conveying the management message across the organization (expert-prescriber role taking care of the big picture).

Workplace safety is, to a large extent, regarded as a management issue, both based on the literature reviewed for this study and on the interviews conducted. This may explain why the consultative role in supporting the management becomes essential and includes many roles and tasks. The consultative role was recognized by the interviewees and also practiced to some extent, but its importance seemed to be hidden behind the informative role, which was clearly dominant. The consultative role was mainly linked to the situation where safety was seen as an attitude and value, since these can be seen as being where the management has the biggest role. A mainly persuasive stakeholder strategy (using mainly discussions and meetings, and advertising and educational campaigns as communication tactics) to increase understanding was being used (Cornelissen, 2011). Regarding the goals of internal corporate communication, the consultative role can be seen as advancing the goal of commitment to the organization.

Finally, the influential role of communication was seen as influencing the safety attitude and behavior of the employees and the management e.g. by listening, discussing and supporting participation. This role was described by the interviewees, but no actual ways of how to advance it were recognized and the task was perceived as challenging. This role corresponds mostly to that of Broom and Smith's communication facilitator, since being a link between parties and facilitating communication of others could help at least in recognizing the attitudes and behaviors and the patterns behind them. Communication professionals could have this kind of role since their role in the first place is to build and maintain relationships with key stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2011) and in this way build bridges between parties and facilitate discussion in different forums. The influential role benefits most from the dialogue strategy that aims to involve and commit stakeholders by using early incorporation and collective problem-solving as communication tactics (Cornelissen, 2011).

It cannot be assumed, however, that any particular task, activity or function alone can contribute to the safety-conscious attitudes and behavior of the employees and management. Hence, even though the influential role seems to link most to the goals of belonging to internal corporate communication as defined by Welch & Jackson (2006), this goal seems to be the most challenging one and an integrated approach comprising all the roles described above is required.

5.2.3 The two-fold role of the management

The interviewees saw the role of the management in safety work in a two-fold way. Firstly, the management was seen as having a role in intervening in and even punishing unsafe behavior. Secondly, the management's role was to proactively enable, encourage and support safe working by, for instance, setting an example. The first role of intervening and punishing came as somewhat of a surprise, since previous studies did not indicate that this kind of role would be important, but instead showed visible commitment to safety work was being emphasized (Hofmann & al., 1995, Vredenburgh, 2002, Michael & al., 2006). Based on the interviews conducted, it seems that one explanation for this role could be that the general organizational culture was described as being very serious by some of the interviewees and the tone of voice was described

as being somewhat negative and accusatory (by only telling what not to do instead of telling what it is allowed to do). Obviously, this role is rooted in the fact that the management is, by law, responsible and accountable for a safe working environment.

The second role of proactively enabling, encouraging and supporting safe working can be looked at by using the framework of management practices defined by Vredenburgh (2002, see Table 1), which were also included in the theoretical framework of this research paper. Based on the case study research, commitment, communication and feedback (even though feedback was not particularly mentioned) were seen as the most important roles of the management. Training and participation were linked since training was seen to be an efficient way of engaging employees. The need to increase employee participation was strongly seen in the case company to enable views about workplace safety to be obtained from those actually performing the work. According to Vredenburgh (2002), engaging employees is an efficient way to commit them to safe working where this offers actual engagement and possibilities impact on how the work is performed. Rewards and selection, on the other hand, were given hardly any attention. Even though selection was briefly mentioned, a safety-conscious attitude was not a consistent hiring criterion. However, the interview responses might been the way they were because the main focus of the study was safety communication and the obviously important role of management commitment in safety work was highly emphasized by the interviewees.

5.2.4 Effective workplace safety communication

Based on the reviewed literature, I defined workplace safety communication for the purpose of this research as follows:

> Workplace safety communication is continuous, consistent and forthright two-way communication between an organization's strategic managers, supervisors and employees, with the support of internal corporate communication. Workplace safety communication aims to improve workplace safety and contribute to a safety-conscious climate by increasing awareness and understanding of workplace safety and improving commitment and by belonging to the organization.

The interviewees in this case study regarded a continuous and high-pace manner of communication as being important, since it was seen as keeping the topic in the minds of the employees constantly and thus advancing the goals of awareness and understanding. Continuous communication was important when safety was perceived as a process or a journey. Two-way communication was highlighted when safety was perceived as an attitude or value. Also communication consistency with integrated messages was regarded as important, but not yet fully utilized, even though the umbrella message of responsibility was just being launched. The two-way communication element was highlighted, since the interviewees stressed the importance of participative communication and discussion, but also this area was seen as requiring more emphasis in the case organization.

The interviewees also linked effective safety communication to include highlighting the aspect of mutual responsibility, making communication personal for the employees and using a positive tone of voice and good examples. These can be seen in advancing the goals of commitment and belonging to the organization and its objectives, since they may impact the creation of a positive safety climate. Previous studies have shown that a positive organizational and safety climate is linked to the safety performance of the organization (Neal & al., 2000, Cooper & Phillips, 2004). These elements of effective workplace safety communication were recognized based on this single case study and further studies are required to demonstrate how they actually may affect the creation of a positive climate. For organizations struggling with safety issues, they offer, however, new angles for communication worth trying in practice.

5.3 Key challenges regarding workplace safety at the case company

The interviewees described both face-to-face and mediated communication activities in connection to workplace safety communication. The balance between face-to-face and mediated communication seemed to be quite good, even though there was a desire for more management time for safety issues, and the informative role of the communication function was clearly dominant.

The perceived challenges in communication appear to be either technical challenges that could be solved rather easily (e.g. by grouping safety related topics on the intranet under relevant headlines and offering line managers and supervisors practical communication packages on the intranet to be used) or more comprehensive challenges that require larger efforts from the management, e.g. by better utilizing the recognized informational, consultative and influential roles of communication.

The rather easily resolved technical challenges include:

- finding relevant information on the intranet
- increasing proactive communication before something awful happens
- attaining harmonized visual identity at all sites
- showing and visualizing the safety efforts of the organization at a high pace
- conveying the right type of messages (e.g. need to use short, concrete and to-the-point messages)

The more comprehensive challenges requiring more management effort with the help of corporate communication include:

- reaching people (a technical challenge due to a large organization)
- better showing of management commitment (e.g. need for more managers on the floor talking to people)
- affecting people's attitude to think safety all the time
- balancing communication so that safety does not become too dominant (or manipulative) issue

- improving the coherency of communication (now too much and too various messages, no unified message can be recognized)

- preventing working in silos (people working at different sites work separately and do not use their professional network in the company; the management, safety organization and communication organization seem to work separately and not have a common message, thus more cooperation is needed)

5.4 Managerial implications concerning the study

The present study can be used to offer some answers to the above mentioned challenges. The findings suggest that at the case organization the main challenges in workplace safety communication are related to too narrow use of the potential of the corporate communication function, working in silos in the organization, which prevents integrated thinking in communication, and using a too strict and pragmatic way of communicating about safety issues.

Thus, it is recommended that the company concentrates on the following issues in workplace safety communication:

> 1) Broaden the role of communication from informative to consultative and influential roles to be able to better support the management in improving the safety climate
>
> 2) Prevent working in silos to allow integrated thinking in communication
>
> 3) Develop more positive, emotional and personal ways of communication that emphasize mutual responsibility for workplace safety

All roles of communication professionals recognized in this research (informative, consultative and influential) are of high importance and support each other in achieving the objectives of workplace safety communication (namely improving workplace safety and contributing to a safety-conscious climate by increasing awareness and understanding of workplace safety and improving commitment and belonging to the organization). Too often, however, communicators remain in the role of technicians, as was the case in this study. Heide and Simonsson (2014) have similar findings on the

role of communication professionals in internal crisis communication. Based on their findings, Heide and Simonsson stress that communication professionals should take the role of strategists rather than technicians, and they should act more and more as communication facilitators and co-communicators coaching the rest of the organizations to be better communicators. This study supports the findings of Heide and Simonsson by its findings that the role of communication professionals is too narrow.

A communicator taking the role of strategist is a demanding task and requires self-confidence from communication professionals, but can be regarded as being even critical for organizations. Workplace safety can be regarded as a critical and strategic issue, at least for large industrial organizations, such as the case company. The findings of this study suggest that the role of communication in the case company is mainly informative and, as such, is unable to adequately support the strategic issue of workplace safety that cuts across the whole organization horizontally and vertically. Thus it is recommended that the role is expanded to cover consultative and influential elements to be able to better support the management in safety work.

Working in organizational silos is a challenge that large organizations often face and the situation can make it difficult to achieve common goals. The findings of this research project indicate that the case organization has silos between divisions, business units, countries, production sites and between and within safety and communication functions. These silos might be the reason for some of the other perceived challenges covered in section 5.3, such as the lack of coherency in communication, reaching people and balancing communication between safety and other important corporate messages. Emphasizing corporate communication's role as an umbrella, might be one solution to getting rid of the silos and allowing the integrated communication required when dealing with strategic issues, such as workplace safety. The role of communication in a particular organization is an indicator of the power and participation in decision-making of the corporate communication function, as Dozier and Broom (1995) point out. Thus, without power and participation in decision-making, it is impossible for corporate communication to serve as an umbrella role. This study did not cover the issues of

power and does not reveal whether the corporate communication function has the power to take on this role, so this is left to the discussion of the case organization itself.

It became strongly evident from the interviews conducted, that there is a need and desire to find new, even innovative ways to provide safety work and safety communication in the case organization to be able to influence the attitudes and behavior of the employees and management. This was a recognized problem even before the study, and it received reinforcement during the project since the organizational and safety climate of the organization was described as being rather serious, ways of talking about safety was strict. Besides commitment and caring, sometimes even accusatory, intervening and punishing were emphasized in the role of the management. In addition, the communication actions described were rather pragmatic, emphasizing the reporting of LTIF figures and progress of safety initiatives (this was linked to the informative role of communication that was dominant), even though also good examples and storytelling were being used, at least to some extent.

The interviewees thought that effective safety communication should include participative communication and discussion, it should stress the parties' mutual responsibility, and communication should be personal for the employees and use a positive tone of voice and good examples. Each of these areas should be looked into in more detail and also allow employees to express their concerns and wishes about the content and channels of workplace safety communication. What came to my knowledge, two employee surveys have been done in recent years concerning safety work and safety communication as part of it: one at the Hämeenlinna mill, Finland and the other at the Raahe mill Finland. These surveys were, however conducted before the merger and they were independent of each other. The case organization would highly benefit from organizing a survey for employees that is planned in a centralized manner. This research project could be utilized in planning the survey, since it offers information about what could be emphasized when evaluating and planning workplace safety communication.

In Figure 10, I have summarized the key things I regard as being important in workplace safety communication based on literature reviewed for this project, as well as

based on the findings of the case study research. Table 10 is meant to serve as a tool for communication professionals and management when evaluating and planning workplace safety communication activities.

As shown in Figure 10, it utilizes the internal corporate communication model presented by Welch and Jackson (2006). Workplace safety communication advances the goals of awareness of safety issues, an understanding of their importance to oneself, coworkers and the organization, visible commitment to acting safely and belonging to the organization. The internal environment in this context is the safety climate as a part of the overall organizational climate and workplace safety messages represent the corporate messages.

How internal corporate communication can support better workplace safety is presented on the right hand side of Figure 10. All of the intertwined roles of communication (informative, consultative and influential roles) need to be utilized and since, based on this study, the roles are linked of how safety work is perceived (perceived safety climate) the roles evolve when the safety climate develops within the organization. Workplace safety communication is a special, strategic topic that requires special attention from the management and thus the focus is on the consultative and influential roles of communication, even though the informative role is of high importance, too.

The role of management is essential, and communication should be first and foremost planned in a way to support line management and supervisors as well as top management in safety work. In Figure 10, I have included only those roles of management that were seen as important according to this case study, and thus the roles differ compared to those presented by Vredenburgh (2002) and used in the a theoretical framework of this study. The supporting role should be emphasized since it allows a more positive tone of voice than the intervening role. The messages and style of communication (apart from forthright, aligned, consistent and continuous that were recognized in previous study, too) in Figure 10 are recognized based solely on this case study, and thus need to be tried out to establish how they work in practice. As regards channels, even though it is important to obtain a balance between face-to-face and mediated channels, extra attention should be paid to dialogue and participation, since

these were seen as an important part of safety communication and management practices both in earlier studies (e.g. Vredenburgh, 2002) and in the current study.
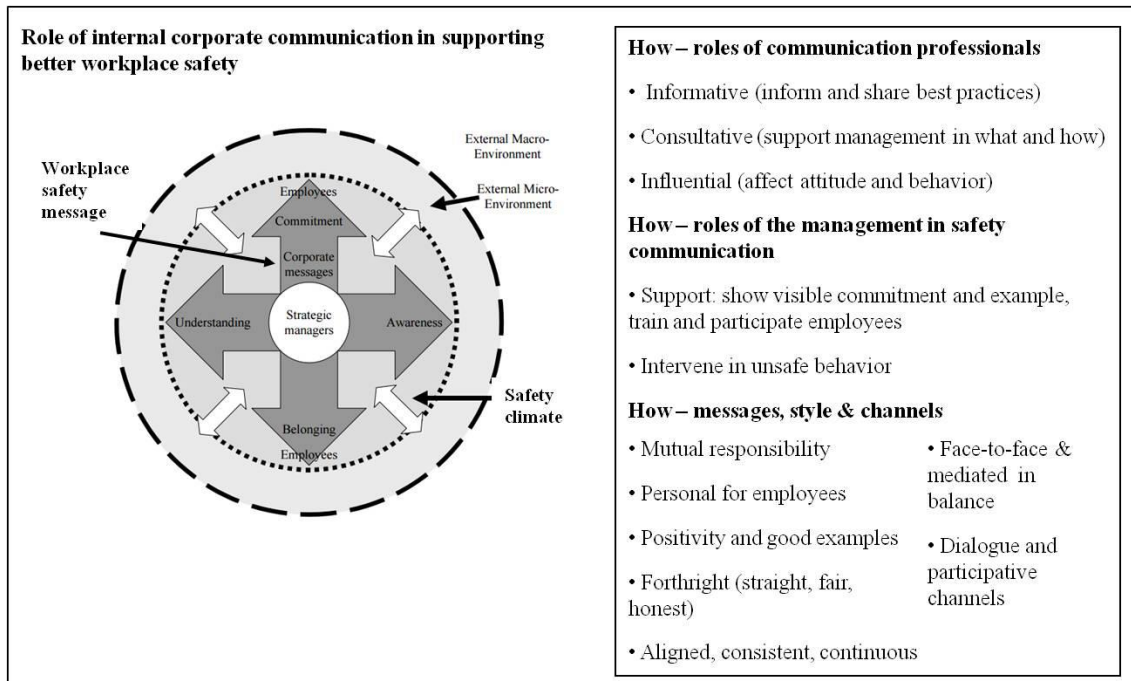
Figure 10. Tool for evaluating and planning workplace safety communication

As a managerial implication to answer the challenges presented above, I have also included Table 4, which can be used when planning workplace safety communication. In Table 4, I have linked the ways to perceive workplace safety and the roles of communication resulting in possible activities related to them. I used the findings of this study (recognized perceptions of safety as process, journey, attitude and value and informative, consultative and influential roles of communication) and decided to utilize also the Bradley curve (presented in Appendix 4), because it seemed to be familiar at least to some people at the case organization. Table 4 combines my findings and the Bradley curve in the left hand side column, which describes safety climate (or culture) and links them with the roles of communication in the top row that I recognized in this study.

The matrix created this way can be utilized when expanding safety communication to assume a broader role in supporting the management in safety work, and takes into account the findings of this study that the role of communication needs to be expanded (from informative to consultative and influential) when the safety climate evolves from reactive and dependent (safety perceived as a process or a journey) culture toward an independent and interdependent culture (safety perceived as an attitude or as a value). As was the case in Figure 10, also Table 4 can be used as a tool when evaluating and planning workplace safety communication to better support management's safety work. When interpreting Table 4, it should be noted that the roles of communication are intertwined, which means that the actions linked to the roles and perceived safety climate could possibly be suitable applied to other parts of the matrix as well.

Table 4. Perceived workplace safety and the role of communication

Role of communication / Way to perceive workplace safety/ Safety climate	Informative role (focus on informing and sharing best practices)	Consultative role (focus on management support)	Influential role (focus on employee perspective)
Safety as a process/journey (comparable to reactive and dependent safety culture): "safety is important, but management takes care of it)	Communicate objectives and report progress, share success stories, message linked to past/current phase of the process/journey	Continuous communication, making sure safety is included in managerial materials	Use of metaphors such as safety as a journey to make the message understandable and memorable
Safety as an attitude (comparable to independent safety culture) "I will do my part that we can be safe"	Use emotional content, that is personal to the employees, message integrated and aligned with strategy and values	Help management in how and what to communicate	Offer participative forums to listen employees' voice, use storytelling to be able to provide a deeper sense of meaning and purpose
Safety as a value (comparable to interdependent safety culture) "We are proud to be safe"	Safety message integrated into all communication in different forums (incl. mediated channels, line management communication and internal corporate communication)	Link between top management and employees building trust, two-way communication	Mutual responsibility, use emotional, personal, positive messages (what it is allowed to do), give faces to safety work, encourage common & everyday talk about safety

5.5 Suggestions for further research

The present study is a case study that looks into workplace safety as a management practice and communication function in particular circumstances. Thus the suggestions for further study are first given concerning the case organization and then more generally.

Concerning the circumstances of the case organization, the present study suggests at least three directions for further research. First, the employees' perceptions of workplace safety and communication could and should be looked into in more detail. In the interviews conducted in this study, only management, safety managers/experts and communication professionals were included. This was because the purpose of the study was to look at workplace safety communication as a management practice and a communication function. Welch and Jackson (2006) emphasize that internal corporate communication needs to take into account the employees' preferences for channel and content, so that the communication is able to meet their particular needs. Thus to make communication efficient and achieve the desired goals (awareness, understanding, commitment and engagement), employees should be extensively listened to. Figure 10 and Table 4 summarize aspects that can help when planning research into the employees' perspective.

Again, since the organization is large and includes 17 000 employees, this could be a two-phase process: in the first phase, the line management, supervisors and team leaders working on the factory floor could be included in an interview study to find out their views about workplace safety communication and obtain opinions about how employees could participated in the research project. In the second phase, the employees could be partly interviewed and partly participate in a survey study to be able to obtain as much feedback about communication as possible. SSAB has included sub-contractors as an important stakeholder group concerning workplace safety, and this group should be included in the study, since they have a huge stake in safety issues. Contractors are, however, in a different position compared to SSAB's own employees and thus investigating their views should possibly be planned separately.

Secondly, it became obvious during the interviews conducted that the case organization is still in the middle of a huge combination of the Swedish and US-based SSAB and Finnish-based Rautaruukki to form the new SSAB. This change situation has had significant impacts also on the safety work and communication of the case company and people have to learn new ways of thinking and operating. Thus, also change management would offer an interesting framework for exploring how internal communication can contribute to the implementation of change management programs, such as in the case studied here improving workplace safety communication.

Thirdly, the case organization and the industry in general would benefit from a benchmark study of workplace safety communication. It is interesting that some companies in the same industry achieve LTIF figures as low as under one. Comparing the communicative practices of an extremely well-performing company, a middle-range company (such as the case organization) and a poor-performing company would be beneficial to obtain deeper knowledge about how communicative practices can impact safety results. The present study offers one possible framework for evaluating the role of communication in supporting better workplace safety.

More generally, the present study paves the way for further study of three areas: content of safety communication, use of participative methods as a management and communication practice and the roles of communication professionals. Firstly, when looking at Figure 10, which summarizes the key ideas of the role of communication in supporting better workplace safety, the content of safety messages was the least investigated in this paper. Since in many industries workplace safety is a critical, even strategic issue, it would be valuable to look at it from the discursive point of view. Is safety explicitly included in the corporate strategy or sustainability strategy? How? How is the safety message communicated by the management and made sense of by the employees? What kind of power relations are involved and how can they be perceived?

Secondly, employee participation is regarded as essential when trying to increase employee commitment to workplace safety (e.g. Vredenburgh, 2002). This became strongly evident also based on this interview material, but only little was found out about how. What participative methods are actually being used? How? Are they true or

false, i.e. do they allow genuine and honest participation? How could these be improved? What actual implications do they have? How do the employees feel about them?

Lastly, the roles of communication professionals regarding safety work could be examined in more detail. The present study helped in shedding light on what the roles of communication professionals might be in relation to the perceived safety culture and in relation to the role of management, but more research is required to find out what implications this actually has on the safety performance of the organization.

The interviewees also linked effective safety communication to include highlighting the importance of mutual responsibility, making communication personal to the employees and using a positive tone of voice and good examples. These can be seen in advancing the goals of commitment and belonging to the organization and its goals, since they may have an influence on creating a positive safety climate. Previous studies have shown that a positive organizational and safety climate is linked to the safety performance of organization (Neal & al., 2000, Cooper & Phillips, 2004). These elements were recognized based on this single case study and further study is required to demonstrate how they actually may influence the creation of a positive climate.

As a final remark, I would like to raise a question that is linked to perceiving safety as a an ongoing process: what happens in safety work and communication when the organization achieves very low LTIF figures, for example, below one, as some steel companies have achieved? Or becomes "the safest steel company in the world" which is the objective of the case organization? Does the process then come to an end? As said by one of the interviewees:

> "*Safety work never stops. Every day is a new day. You're not finished, after one day, there is another day when you need to constantly be reinforcing the information and keeping people focused (Management)*

If we look into the future, safety cannot then be a process; it truly needs to be a value for the organization, reinforced and supported every single day – also with the help of the corporate internal communication.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Data sources used in the research

Background material for research	Source & type of material	Date
Previous communication surveys within the case organization		
Development of safety communication at SSAB Hämeenlinna works, Finland	SSAB, employee survey conducted by Minna Sundman	10/2014
Employee survey about safety issues including communications at Raahe works, Finland	SSAB, employee survey conducted by SSAB	4/2014
Safety performance and management related materials		
LTIF statistics at SSAB and steel industry in general	SSAB & World Steel Association, statistics	5/2015
Safety management basic requirements for SSAB	SSAB, guidelines for management and supervisors	2015
Safety performance review	SSAB, performance report for board/top management	4/2015
Safety policy for SSAB	SSAB, policy document	2015
Communication materials		
Safety communication actions 2015	SSAB, communication plan	4/2015
Description of group level safety theme and actions	SSAB, communication plan, examples of materials including videos	4/2015
CEO's internal roadshow presentation (included part covering safety issues)	SSAB, internal presentation material	2014
Workplace safety organization at group level	SSAB, organizational chart	5/2015
Organizational chart of Corporate Identity and Communications	SSAB, organizational chart	8/2015
Internal article for intranet headlined: Taking responsibility – new safety organizations in place	SSAB, word file	2015
Steel Magazine	SSAB, printed staff magazine	2/2015

APPENDIX 2. Interview data

Interviewee's position	Organization & location	Date and type of interview
Communications	SSAB Group, based in Finland	09.04. 2015 (face-to-face)
Safety expert/Safety manager	SSAB Europe, based in Finland	20.04.2015 (telephone)
Management	SSAB Group, based in Finland	24.04.2015 (face-to-face)
Safety expert/manager	SSAB Europe, based in Finland	29.04.2015 (telephone)
Management	SSAB Americas, Based in the US	29.04.2015 (telephone)
Management	SSAB Europe, based in Finland	04.05.2015 (telephone)
Communications	SSAB Europe, based in Finland	06.05.2015 (face-to-face)
Safety expert/Safety manager	SSAB Special Steels, based in Sweden	08.05.2015 (telephone)
Management	SSAB Special Steels, based in Sweden	11.05.2015 (telephone)
Communications	SSAB Europe, based in Sweden	15.05.2015 (telephone)
Safety expert/Safety manager	SSAB Americas, Based in the US	19.05.2015 (telephone)
Safety expert/Safety manager	SSAB, based in Sweden	22.05.2015 (telephone)

APPENDIX 3: Themes of the semi-structured interviews

Safety in general at SSAB

- How safety work is described, what is important, what is the situation at the moment
- What are the challenges/successes
- Role of the management
- Attitudes and culture – how is visible
- Merger situation & safety
- Differences between countries/business units

Safety communication and role

- General role, tasks, objectives of communication
- Main objectives
- Challenges/successes
- What is important, what makes communication effective
- What is needed more/less
- How communication supports management

Safety communication messages & channels

- How and what to communicate
- Feelings about the objective of "To be among the safest steel companies in the world" and theme of responsibility
- Face-to-face and mediated channels (examples)
- Challenges/successes

APPENDIX 4: Safety culture (so-called Bradley curve)
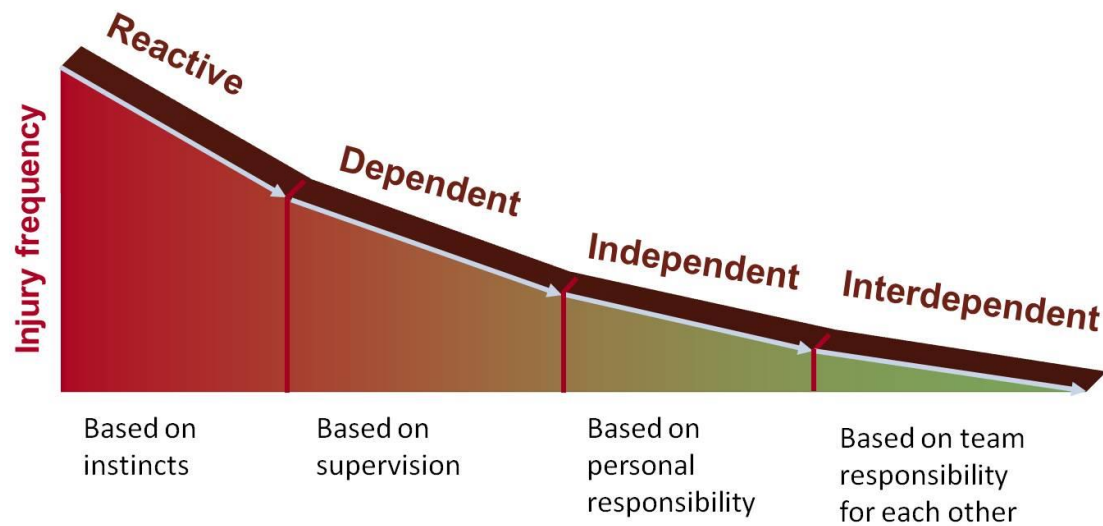
The figure is based on internal material received from the case organization and partly translated from Swedish to English.