



UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION ON MENTAL HEALTH IN
THE GERMAN TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY:
WHAT DOES GENERATION Z REALLY WANT?

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to
obtain a Master's Degree in Communication Studies:
Strategic Communication and Leadership

By

Julia Lindsey Starke

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas

September 2024



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Abstract

With Generation Z entering the workforce, organizations have new employees of unique characteristics, attitudes and needs. Not only is the mental health of Generation Z often worse than those of other generations, but when working in the technology industry, employees are often suffering from burnout or stress, influencing their overall mental health. Therefore, organizations have started to support employees on mental health and wellbeing through internal communication. Yet, limited research available, which is why this dissertation aims to answer the following research question: “How can internal communication strategies be affected by the mental health needs of Generation Z employees in the technology industry in Germany?”.

Through a mixed method approach, a quantitative survey of 107 answers of Generation Z employees in the German technology industry uncovered their opinions and attitudes towards mental health communication. At the same time, seven qualitative interviews with internal communication and/or human resource experts investigated current strategies on mental health in the technology industry, to draw a comparison between the strategies utilized, and those wanted. The results show that while there is an overall alignment between the current strategies and needs of Generation Z, organizations need to pay more attention to topics that are relevant to the generation, as well as shifting away from simply communicating about the topic, but truly integrating it into their overall strategies to ensure employee engagement.

Keywords: Mental Health, Wellbeing, Internal Communication, Strategies, Generation Z

Resumo

Com a entrada da Geração Z no mercado de trabalho, as organizações têm novos trabalhadores com características, atitudes e necessidades únicas. Não só a saúde mental da Geração Z é frequentemente pior do que a das outras gerações, como também, quando trabalham na indústria tecnológica, os colaboradores sofrem frequentemente de esgotamento ou stress, o que influencia a sua saúde mental geral. Por conseguinte, as organizações começaram a apoiar os seus colaboradores em relação a saúde mental e bem-estar através da comunicação interna. No entanto, a literatura disponível é limitada, razão pela qual esta dissertação pretende responder à seguinte questão de investigação: "Como é que as estratégias de comunicação interna podem ser afectadas pelas necessidades de saúde mental dos colaboradores da Geração Z na indústria tecnológica na Alemanha?".

Através de uma abordagem de método misto, um inquérito quantitativo de 107 respostas de empregados da Geração Z na indústria tecnológica alemã revelou opiniões e atitudes em relação à comunicação sobre saúde mental. Ao mesmo tempo, sete entrevistas qualitativas com especialistas em comunicação interna e/ou recursos humanos investigaram as estratégias actuais sobre a saúde mental na indústria tecnológica, para estabelecer uma comparação entre as estratégias utilizadas e as desejadas. Os resultados mostram que, embora exista um alinhamento geral entre as estratégias actuais e as necessidades da Geração Z, as organizações precisam de prestar mais atenção aos tópicos que são relevantes para a geração, bem como deixar de simplesmente comunicar o assunto, e, em vez disso, integrá-lo verdadeiramente nas suas estratégias gerais para garantir o envolvimento dos colaboradores.

Palavras-chave: Mental Health, Wellbeing, Internal Communication, Strategies, Generation Z

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Introduction

For many years, acknowledging and addressing mental health problems came with stigma and prejudice. Even now, it is still an ongoing issue in today's society, with mental health problems often being ignored (Rössler, 2016). In 2019, according to the World Health Organization (2022a), 970 million people globally lived with a mental health problem. These mental health issues, which include depression and anxiety, not only influence the way a person functions in everyday life (Beddington et al., 2008), but also in the workplace (Attridge, 2019; World Health Organization, n.d.-a). They can influence one's ability to be productive or confident, and the overall ability to contribute to their work easily (World Health Organization, n.d.-a). Consequently, some organizations have already started to put more emphasis on mental health and have started to concern themselves with the overall wellbeing of their employees (Wu et al., 2021), while other organizations still fail to support their employees and are not addressing and recognizing these topics of mental health, stress, or burnout openly (Deloitte, 2023).

Organizations operating within the technology and information technology industry are specifically known to be fast-paced and tiring (Reeder, 2020). Not only that, but the information technology industry is also known to have higher stress levels and more mental health issues than other industries (Bryant, 2023; Padma et al., 2015; Rao & Chandraiah, 2012). One function within organizations that has increasingly focused on mental health is the internal communication department (Gallagher, 2022). This department is often responsible for providing information and inspire and involve employees to become part of the organization (Verčič et al., 2022). Thus, they also often deliver information on mental health and wellbeing (Gallagher, 2022) and additionally provide initiatives to address the mental health concerns of their employees such as events, trainings or other internal, as well as external, resources.

Generation Z, those born in or after 1996 (McKinsey & Company, 2023), is a generation that has been actively voicing their mental health concerns and raising awareness for mental health in general (Bethune, 2019; Imagen Insights, 2023). Additionally, this Generation is also known to struggle with poor mental health (Coe et al., 2023), thus impacted by anxiety or stress (Deloitte, 2023). As the newest generation entering the workforce, they bring with them unique perspectives and characteristics. In the workplace, they are described as confident and creative

(Bencsik et al. (2016), as well as emotional, transparent and innovative amongst other characteristics (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). Further, they are often stressed about their work-life-balance, toxic work environments and their connected mental health (Deloitte, 2023). Given these concerns and their interest in mental health, previous studies have concluded that Generation Z puts high value on employers who provide mental health support (Coe et al., 2023; Deloitte, 2023).

Generation Z now entering the workforce presents employers with the opportunity to engage more with their employees on the topic of mental health and wellbeing (Coe et al., 2023). While companies indicate that they are already communicating about mental health internally, there is still little research on how it is actually implemented in practice. Furthermore, there is almost no research or existing literature that connects all four topics: mental health, Generation Z, internal communication and the technology industry. Taking into consideration the earlier mentioned points of Generation Z entering the workforce, as well as the technology industry being prone to mental health issues, there is an important research gap that this dissertation aims to fill. To provide new understanding of such important topics, the dissertation conducts research on the following question:

"How can internal communication strategies be affected by the mental health needs of Generation Z employees in the technology industry in Germany?".

The goals are to investigate current internal communication practices on mental health and compare them with the actual mental health needs of Generation Z, while also providing practical implications for organizations. To be able to answer this research question and subsequent goals, the dissertation is structured into two parts. First, a theoretical framework, covering existing literature on Generation Z, Internal Communication and Mental Health, and secondly, the empirical study, which gathers data to fulfil the research goals and provide answers to the question.

The first chapter in the theoretical framework introduces Generation Z, their main characteristics as well as their behaviour and expectations of the workplace. As part of the second chapter, the various definitions of internal communication are given. As the topic of

mental health in the workplace is also closely related to employee engagement, this term and its connection to internal communication is explained. The second chapter then covers the internal communication and engagement preferences of Generation Z. Lastly reviewed is the topic mental health. This third chapter firstly introduces mental health and its various types, followed by Generation Z's mental health attitudes, perceptions and overall mental state. Afterwards, how mental health influences the workplace and employees is explained, as well as initiatives and internal communication practices to support and engage employees on the topic of mental health.

The second part of the dissertation is the empirical study, starting with the explanation of the significance of the study. This is followed by the research question and delivery of research goals and explaining the mixed method approach used. The next chapter then describes how the data was collected through interviews and a survey, and how this data was analyzed. As with any study, it is important to consider biases and deliver proof of validity and reliability. The final part of the dissertation is the results of the data, its discussion and finally, the conclusion, which also includes any limitations that were encountered in the process of the research.

Part I: Theoretical Framework

1. Generation Z

Extensive research has been done on generational differences, specifically on older generations. Yet, with the rise of the “fastest-growing generation” called Generation Z (Wells, 2023, para 2), not just scholars but also organizations are still trying to understand this new generation’s characteristics in everyday life as well as the workplace. Developing an understanding of this new generation is highly important, as they will be the ones to influence and transform the future (Scholz & Renning, 2019).

Organizations are already experiencing this wave of young, inexperienced employees, and are starting to appreciate the positive changes Generation Z can make in the workplace, while others are also struggling to understand their distinctive attitudes and expectations (Wells, 2023). Current challenges and opportunities like digitization, globalization, or new technologies, all aspects that other generations have not experienced at all or to such an extent, make it even more apparent that identifying and specifying the key characteristics of this generation should be considered (Scholz & Renning, 2019) before conducting further research.

1.1. Introduction to Generations

Before introducing the term ‘Generation Z’, it is important to understand the term ‘generation’ itself. According to Jansen (1974), a generation can be identified and described by two prerequisites, namely (1) a particular time dimension, and (2) a particular historical context. The first dimension identifies a generation by those who live at the same time while also sharing the same age. People of different ages can live at the same time, but because they do not share the same age, they are separated into different generations. In the historical context setting, members of a generation are identified by shared historical events or circumstances, or similar views on these circumstances. More specifically, this means that a generation “consists of people of the same age who interpret their similar circumstances by attaching similar meanings to these circumstances, by seeing the world in the same way” (Jansen, 1974, p. 93-94). According to the author, this does not mean that members of the same generation share the exact same perspectives, but rather having collective ones, as well as individuals and unique views (Jansen, 1974).

One of the most known generational theories is by Strauss and Howe (1991). This theory states that generations, those with the same behaviour and same age, change every 20 years. Additionally, the authors believe in an 80-year cycle, after which the four generations of that cycle are faced with a crisis or challenge, leading to a new social order (Strauss & Howe, 1991 as cited in Artese, 2019). Overall, the increasing differences between generations more than ever before makes it highly important to know what defines each generation, to be able to understand one another. Throughout life, generations of different ages experience the same events, however at what stage and age in life a person experiences a political shift, technological change or social marker defines their mindset and individual view. In business, segmenting your market into generations is the common first step of market research. Other generational differences can include values, attitudes, and communication (McCrindle, 2014).

Now that it is understood what a generation is, and why it is important to define them, Table 1 summarizes the above information and provides an overview of the current main generations, divided into their generational name or terminology, and birth years (Dimock, 2019). However, as Dimock (2019) states, it needs to be noted that the years of which each generation starts or ends can vary by one or two years between different authors. Therefore, to later have a larger sample later on in the data collection, 1996 will be used instead of 1997, as suggested by Dimock (2019). Prior to the term '*Baby Boomers*', the practice of labelling generations did not exist in the same way it does today. However, the term was established because of the clear implications of the second world war on this generation and started the practice of labelling generations (McCrindle, 2014).

Table 1*Overview of Generations*

Generation	Birth Years
Silent Generation	1928-1945
Baby Boomers	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1980
Generation Y or Millennials	1981-1995
Generation Z	1996-2012

Note. Own illustration. The table displays the birth years and the term commonly known for each generation.

A main difference between the above-displayed generations is their technological use. Babyboomers witnessed the rise of television, whereas Generation X grew up with the first computers, Generation Y was able to be the first generation to grow up with the internet, and Generation Z learned to live with all of the above from the start (Dimock, 2019). Therefore, Generation Y and Z are often referred to as technological or digital ‘natives’, having grown up with technology, whereas older generations can be called ‘digital immigrants’, who learned how to use and lived with technology later in their life (McCrindle, 2014). The digital usage leads to Generation Z also living a different lifestyle than previous generations, as they spend much of their life online, looking for any type of information, making purchases, or sharing their interests with others on social media. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2023).

Besides technological use, there are more differences between Generation Z and previous generations. Born and raised at the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st, this generation was faced with changing and challenging global environment. When it comes to politics, finances, environment, and social life, this generation is labelled as more aware and cautious of these topics than previous generations (Ameen et al., 2023; McCrindle, 2014). Moreover, Generation Z (McCrindle, 2014) is the first global generation, in all aspects of life, such as movies, technology, food, trends and more. Many of these aspects have been global for

previous generations, however the list of this generation is longer and more complex than ever before.

Globalization could be why Generation Z is also known to be an inclusive generation, specifically online, as it does not matter to them rather their friends are online, or in the physical world. The people they want interact are not chosen based on location, but rather on shared interests (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Additionally, Generation Z also values diversity. For this generation, diversity does not stop at gender or race, but compared to other generations, they also include identity and orientation (Gomez et al., n.d.). The following chapter will explain more specific characteristics, lifestyles, values and behaviours that describe Generation Z.

According to Scholz and Renning (2019), Generation Z is marked by three main issues, compared to previous generations. Firstly, this generation is used to structure due to overstructured and bureaucratic school systems, specifically in Germany. Therefore, structure is also expected in everyday, whereas previous Generation Y is characterized by openness and fluidity. Secondly, Generation Z is faced with feelings of insecurity when it comes to life and the workplace. The authors mention that this generation is faced with a difficult labour market that is facing many lay-offs in the last years, unstable health-care systems and low pension systems. The last issue, connected to the previously mentioned one, is labelled by the authors as '*feeling good*'. Generation Z has grown up with overprotective parents, which protect the children of this generation from negative feelings and assessments, whether it is in daily life or school. Therefore, the generation has become used to feeling good about themselves rather than being able to take criticism. This leads to Generation Z expecting to experience a 'feel good environment' in all aspects of life, specifically in the workplace (Scholz & Renning, 2019).

1.2 Generation Z – Main Characteristics

Seemiller and Grace (2019) characterize Generation Z with a multitude of words. Mainly, they are open and compassionate, courageous, and caring. Furthermore, they are honest, loyal, creative, curious, tolerant, eager, and thoughtful amongst other characteristics. Burawat (2023) adds that they are also characterized as thoroughly educated, driven by purpose, and yearning for freedom and being independent. Seemiller and Grace (2019) as well as McCrindle (2014) also describe Generation Z as conscious, caring and worried about political and environmental

issues. Seemiller and Grace (2019) also believe Generation Z to be optimistic and hopeful to change the world to a better place, despite current situations such as political conflicts or violence. As mentioned earlier, Scholz and Renning (2019) state that they are often over-protected by their parents, which McCrindle (2014) agrees with this, and adds on that over-protection leads to these young people being growingly nervous and anxious.

Many describe Generation Z as caring and conscious about the environment (Djafarova & Foots, 2021; Lendvai et al., 2022; McCrindle, 2014; Seemiller & Grace, 2019; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). Djafarova and Foots (2021) also add that their strong personal and moral beliefs on ethics and the environment are reinforced through social media, as it contributes to the awareness of ethical issues amongst this generation. At the same time, research by Djafarova and Foots (2021) also revealed that only some members show ethical consumption habits and are overall conscious of their consumer behavior. Research conducted in Portugal with Generation Z on sustainability and tourism showed similar results, with this generation not strong, rooted sustainable or pro-environmental lifestyles. Conscious habits and behaviours are limited to recycling and observing their own water and energy consumption (Pinho & Gomes, 2023).

Similarly, Lendvai et al. (2022) explored Generation Z's lifestyle and values in terms of health and sustainability in Hungary. They discovered that the highest values are being open to latest technologies, trying new things, and purchasing sustainable and responsible products. In addition, this generation also values self-development and training, products without animal testing, sharing information on sustainability and health, and lastly, working out and exercising. Seemiller and Grace (2019) add that they value happiness, family and relationships, fulfilling employment and being financially stable. Motivation comes from success, relationships and following their passions.

As previously mentioned, Generation Z is known as 'digital natives', with their behaviour with technology therefore being different than the behavior of previous generations. Laor and Galily (2022) explored the media consumption patterns between Generation Y and Z. Their findings revealed that Generation Z uses more digital and new media such as YouTube or videos-on-demand than previous generations. Also mentioned earlier was the fact that Generation Y grew up with the development of the television, which explains why these

researchers found that Generation Y consumes more, and more frequently, television than Generation Z. However, both generations portray similar patterns in their television consumption. On-demand-content is highly important to Generation Z, as it is part of their daily routine. They are used to having any content available, whenever they want it to (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020).

Pichler et al. (2021) also states that this generation prefers communication through electronic means. Correspondingly, the earlier mentioned study by Harari et al. (2022) also concluded that Generation Z, in comparison with Generation X, prefers both digital and physical forms of communication products, whereas Generation X prefers physical. This generation also experiences communication and information overload, which leads to them preferring images rather than words and phrases (McCrindle, 2014). Also, McCrindle (2014) describes members of Generation Z as the most advanced and empowered in terms of technological and social abilities, demonstrating confidence and intuition when using digital technology such as social media, smartphones and more.

Further, McCrindle (2014) addresses the generation's multitasking behaviour. Generation Z promptly switches between tasks, which often leads to them disregarding accuracy, and rather makes them focus on speed. Again, the author connects this to the digital nature of the generation, as they are used to a lifestyle in "a wireless, hyperlinked, user-generated world where they are only ever a few clicks away from any piece of knowledge" (p. 72). As a generation that is often marketed to, holding their attention is rather difficult, not only because of their multitasking nature, disruptions and distractions, but also because their attention span is rather short, as they are used to changing and refreshing content on social media and other apps (McCrindle, 2014; Munsch, 2021).

Additionally, Generation Z is marked by individualism (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Pichler et al., 2021). This individualism also becomes apparent in their behaviour, such as learning, communication or interaction with others, which might hinder the generation in working in groups (Pichler et al., 2021). Individualistic character traits are also important to consider in the workplace. Although it is an individualistic generation, Generation Z is yet strongly influenced and shaped by their friends, specifically through social media, as it extends the network in which

Generation Z is influenced from a geographic network to a technological one, in which one can be influenced at all times (McCrindle and Fell, 2019).

Djafarova and Foots (2022) also discovered that Generation Z watches their own social media presence and image very carefully, as they fear their friends' opinions of what they might be posting online. At the same time, this generation expects and wants to portray their authentic selves online, being honest and open on their social networks, rather than faking a perfect life (Rosario, 2022). Further, research also showed that not only recommendations of friends or online reviews, but also those of social media influencers, can influence this generations' purchasing behaviour (Djafarova & Foots, 2022; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). Generation Z values and trusts their opinions, and specifically engages with those who show similar behaviour to themselves (Djafarova & Foots, 2022). Overall, this young generation's consumer behaviour is commonly peer pressured into following current trends (McCrindle, 2014).

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought an increase in feelings of stress and loneliness to Gen Z (Becker, 2022). Harari et al. (2022) also investigated the difference between Gen X and Gen Z's attitudes, personal values and resilience in connection to the pandemic. The research revealed that Generation Z is less resilient in times of crisis, meaning that this younger generation was not coping well with implications of the pandemic. However, participants did show resilience in terms of adhering to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, and also showed higher openness to change compared to Generation X. They also value new experiences, and self-expression compared to the other generation. Overall, the authors research shows that Generation Z is more sensitive than previous generations (Harari et al., 2022).

To conclude the above, Generation Z can be described by a multitude of characteristics: open, compassionate, honest and optimistic amongst other. At the same time, they are also marked as a generation that is anxious, sensitive and over-cared for. They are conscious when it comes to political, ethical and environmental issues, yet their behaviour sometimes does not match these values. In addition, their behaviour and lifestyle is marked by globalization and technology. Specifically social media plays a large role in their life; not only do they spend a lot of time on it, but they are also influenced by their peers all around the world and are careful about the image they portray online. Although influenced and shaped by their networks, they show individualistic attitudes and have a hard time collaborating with others. As *'digital*

natives', even their preferred communication is based on electronics. Their attention span is rather short, and they are experts at multi-tasking, making it difficult to catch their attention fully.

1.3 Generation Z in the Workplace

With Generation Z on its way to entering the workplace full-time, many studies have been done in the past on this generations' expectations of employers, how to attract this young talent, and how this generation behaves in the workplace. Especially with most of the previous mentioned generations at the workplace together at the same time, uncovering generational differences has been a priority of many researchers. Each generation's characteristics can influence their work perspectives, and managers and leaders need to find a way to manage and adjust to each generation, in order to promote collaboration between generations as well (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011).

In the previous chapters, the main characteristics of Generation Z were delivered, as well as the main adjectives used to describe this generation. Additionally, research has also been done on how Generation Z is perceived in the workplace. Research done by Bencsik et al. (2016) delivered a diverse overview of perspectives and opinions on Generation Y and Z in the workplace. The 410 participants of the research described these two young generations as overly confident and creative, with perfect communication. Likewise, research conducted by Racolța-Paina and Irini (2021) explored Human Resource (HR) professionals' opinions, experiences and challenges with Generation Z in the workforce. Respondents described Generation Z as "dynamic, transparent, creative, innovative, involved, tolerant, socially responsible, emotional, knowledgeable, and individualistic" (Paina & Irini, 2021, p. 81). But the research also showed that HR employees believe Generation Z has unrealistic expectations about wage and is often inexperienced (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021).

Positively mentioned by respondents in the study by Bencsik et al. (2016) was the fact that Generations Y and Z dislike monotony, individual activities or marketing. In addition, their research showed that respondents believe that these younger generations show better performance in technological fields, and subjects of creativity and innovation. Pichler et al. (2021) also notes that Generation Z is known to appreciate assistance from their supervisors and

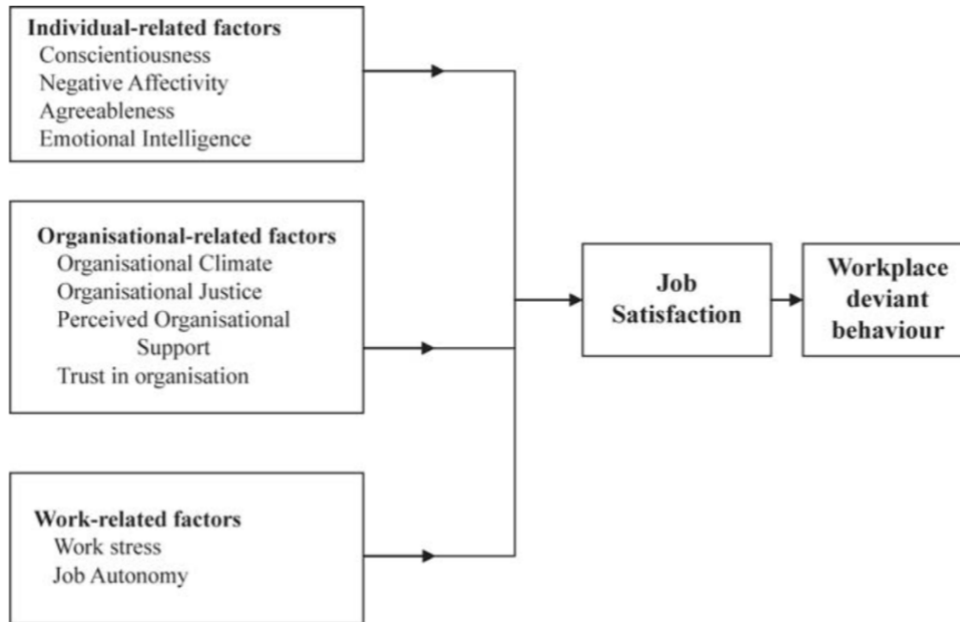
colleagues. Although Generation Z can be described as being career driven, at the same time they are labelled as being non-committed and non-hard working, as well as poor performers when it comes to administrative tasks compared to other generations (Bencsik et al., 2016).

Also shown in the earlier chapters was the unique and different behaviour and interests of Generation Z. These can also lead to intergenerational conflict in the workplace, as Bencsik et al.'s research (2016) shows that communication and differences in thinking are the main factors that can hinder collaboration between generations. Some respondents of the research believe that it is a manager's role to resolve this conflict. Overall, the majority of respondents believe a change in communication for the organization is key to handling these younger generations. Even managers from one generation prior, millennials, should adapt to Generation Z's preferences of collaboration and communication despite the potential little generational gap (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021). Older generations in the workplace focusing on communication methods and technologies they are used to, rather than focusing on Generation Z, can be ineffective when trying to reach this generation (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). This shows the importance of exploring the preferences of communication, as part of this dissertation, from the viewpoint of Generation Z.

Often called '*job hoppers*', this generation is also known to switch jobs more frequently than any other generation (Stacey, 2023; Stahl, 2022; Zimmerman, 2023). This brings up the question as to how Generation Z can experience job satisfaction, and which factors influence their intention to stay at a company. Alias et al. (2013) created a framework that investigates factors that can lead to job satisfaction, which ultimately also leads to workplace deviant behaviour. Workplace behaviour can be categorized both into positive and negative and describes how employees can contribute positively to an organizations' effectiveness, goals or on the other hand destruct the organization in with deviant behaviour, e.g. employees stealing. The framework suggests that any negative factors mentioned will lead to dissatisfaction with the job, therefore deviant behaviour. For example, if an employee is distrust towards their management, it leads to job dissatisfaction and deviant behaviour. The overall framework and each factor can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework for Measuring Workplace Deviant Behaviour



Note. From “Predictors of workplace deviant behaviour: HRD agenda for Malaysian support personnel” by M. Alias, R. Mohd Rasdi, M. Ismail, M. and B. Abu Samah, 2013, *European Journal of Training and Development*, 37 (2), p. 174 (<https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591311301671>). Copyright 2013 Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Job satisfaction overall is an important motivation for Generation Z to stay at company (Achmad et al., 2023). Other factors and motivations to stay at a company are often money and career opportunities (Bencsik et al.’s, 2016; Pandita, 2021; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021; Imagen Insights, 2023). Achmad et al. (2023) also found that talent development plays a significant role for Generation Z, which also positively influences the overall job satisfaction. As seen in the framework, work stress influences job satisfaction, and for Generation Z, a positive work-life balance is highly important when deciding which company they would like to work for (Imagen Insights, 2023; Silva et al., 2023). According to HR experts, members of this generation also value an organization and workplace that supports and interacts with their community (Pandita,

2021). This generation also shows organizational commitment, instead of job hopping, when they believe the organization aligns with their own persona (Silva et al., 2023).

Racolța-Paina and Irini (2021) also add that this generation expects transparent communication, work projects that are challenging, and other benefits besides a competitive wage. Scholz and Grotefend (2019) agree that this generation searches for purposeful and interesting work. Generation Z also expects and prefers to work in flexible working programs such as hybrid-work (Imagen Insights, 2023; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021). Adding onto this, Becker (2022) showed that the younger generation overall portrays more positive attitudes towards hybrid workplace training, which is not a surprise as Generation Z is known to be more flexible and adaptable to change than others. Similarly, Pandita (2021) believes that upon entering the workforce in the future, Generation Z will not work in 9-to-5 jobs, but rather with more flexibility. Further, the author believes that hierarchies in the workplace in the future will be flatter than currently, and job titles will be less important. Technology will play an even bigger role due to Generation Z's nature with technology.

Other research has also been investigating the types of motivation Generation Z experiences in the workplace. The main motivational styles that characterize Generation Z are extrinsic motivation (receiving rewards or other types of recognitions) and intrinsic motivation (being driven by self-satisfaction and contributing to organizational goals). However, this generation can also be labelled as 'amotivated' (not self-determined to follow goals). Lastly, Generation Z is not motivated by identified regulations (adapting outside behaviours as their own) (Mahmoud et al., 2020).

It should be noted that previous research on generational differences in the workplace has shown that Generation Z experience lower levels of employee engagement¹ (Burawat, 2023). This means that they are less engaged with their job and put less priority on work in their lives, as they also show little effort in fully carrying out their responsibilities and tasks, while other generations show higher willingness to show maximum effort. French (2022) agrees with this, and describes how Generation Z, in comparison to previous generations, does not believe in a hustle work culture, where burnout was common, and issues like anxiety, depression, and mental

¹ The overall concept of employee engagement and the preferences of Generation Z will also be explained and examined in more detail in the following chapter.

health were unheard of in the workplace. Instead, Generation Z believes in putting their own mental wellbeing before work. This shows the importance of not only properly engaging with this generation according to their preferences, but also highlights how mental health should be considered as an important factor for higher employee engagement.

2. Internal Communication

2.1 Internal Communication in Organizations

As one of the “fastest growing specializations of public relations and communication” (Verčič et al., 2012, p. 223), much research has been done on internal communication. Yet, new technological advantages are changing the field, especially when it comes to the choice of channels (Verčič et al., 2022). In addition to that, new generations entering the workplace, such as Generation Z, present difficulties for traditional internal communication methods and practitioners have to adapt their already-difficult way of reaching their target audiences (Müller & Müller, 2022). Organizations and researchers are also paying attention to employee engagement, and how internal communication can contribute to it (Verčič et al., 2022). Therefore, this chapter will explore all three above-mentioned topics: internal communication, employee engagement, and Generation Z.

2.1.1 Definitions of Internal Communication

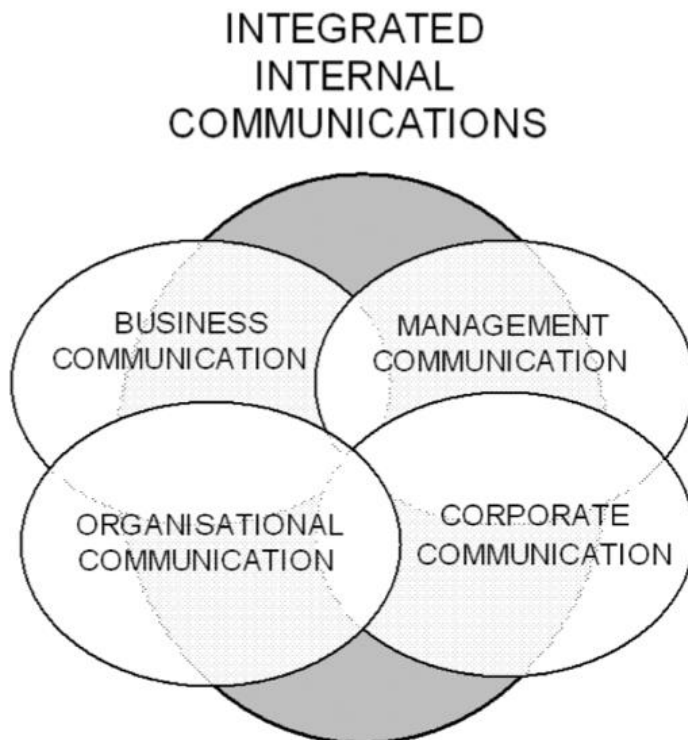
Welch and Jackson (2007) describe internal communication as one of seven types of organizational communication, next to (1) public relations, (2) public affairs, (3) environmental communication, (4) investor relations, (5) labour market communications (recruitment) and (6) corporate advertising. As the seventh type, internal communication is described as the communication that is taking place between managers and their employees. However, this is a rather broad scope. Instead, the authors also state that “internal communication is the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organisations” (Welch & Jackson, 2007, p. 183), delivering a more specific definition.

Internal communication is often described using other terms, such as organizational communication or employee communication (Verčič et al., 2012; Tench & Yeomans, 2014). In addition, terms often used are also community relations, marketing communications, or leadership communication (Smith & Mounter, 2008). Internal communication is also often associated with change and crisis communication. Interaction, transparency, and discussion are key components of internal communication (Dahlman & Heide, 2020). According to Kalla (2005), integrated internal communication draws from four different areas of communication, in order to deliver multidisciplinary framework. These four areas are business communication.

management communication, organizational communication and corporate communication (Kalla, 2005), as seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Framework Integrated Internal Communications



Note. From “Integrated internal communications: a multidisciplinary perspective” by H.K. Kalla, 2005, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 10 (4), p. 306 (<https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280510630106>). Copyright 2005 by Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Research by Kalla (2005) also showed that many believe the lines between the different functions are becoming increasingly blurred, and that much of internal communication is no longer confined to communication about corporate information. Specifically, management communication, as a key part of internal communication, shows the importance for a multilevel framework. Managers are often the missing gap between corporate communication function and

employees to deliver internal communication (Kalla, 2005). Previous research also showed that many understand internal communication simply as all communication within an organization. More specifically, internal communication is also understood as a management function, responsible for delivering and producing organizational communication, information and internal media, while blending with aspects of human resources and marketing, overall sitting in the communication department.² Yet, they still consider internal communication to be their own separate function, working closely together with other departments³ (Verčič et al., 2012).

Araújo and Miranda (2020) agree that internal communication is a multidisciplinary field, and that different areas are of importance for internal communication. They state that internal communication is both formal and informal communication, and is overall contributing to information sharing, relationship and trust building with employees. In addition, internal communication is also reliant on managerial decisions, strategic planning and stakeholder segmentation, proving once again its multilevel framework. Overall, internal communication is reliant on organizational strategy, and therefore approaches of internal communication will differ in each organization (Quirke, 2017).

As said, internal communication also needs to be viewed as a strategic function, and in order to be able to communicate effectively all employees need to be involved, in addition to them understanding that it is important they possess good communication skills (Kalla, 2005). Internal communication can be described as strategic when it is deliberated planned and ongoingly worked on so that it encourages, pushes, grows and shifts the strategic directions an organization is undertaking (Dahlman & Heide, 2020).

Further, internal communication can be described as a strategic tool, if employees can exchange knowledge and information, gain meaning from it and add value through decision-making, based on internal communication (Quirke, 2017). Verčič et al. (2022) on the other hand states that internal communication has a strategic nature, due to its strong influence on organizational outcomes, which will be more examined in the next chapter. The authors state

² Other goals of internal communication are described in the following sub-chapter 2.1.2.

³ In which department internal communication sits in an organization is explored in sub-chapter 2.1.3.

that “even if its strategies are not formally planned or written down, internal communication must be understood as a central function of strategic management.” (Verčič et al., 2022, p. 34).

Yet, planning internal communication has numerous advantages: it ensures that employees are not experiencing information overload, the right channels are used, and the right people are reached (Quirke, 2017). Through planning, strategies and goals can be organized, tracked and controlled, and internal communication efforts and their effectiveness can be measured and evaluated more effortlessly (Verčič et al., 2022). Strategic internal communication can help understand what works, and what does not, and therefore contribute to the overall success of an organization (Verčič et al., 2022). However, organizations often focus only on distributing content and establishing awareness. Rather, they should focus on the effects communication can have, such as understanding the received communication, how it can be interpreted and the then following actions that could take place (Quirke, 2017). According to Carramenha (2019), companies are often limited to distributing information because they lack support from management and their strategic discussions. Therefore, one of the following chapters will review how internal communication can be strategized.

For this research, internal communication is defined and understood as the following: internal communication is the official creation and exchange of information between the organization or the employer, and its employees (Verčič, 2019). More specifically, internal communication is also understood as managed communication of the organization to inform, inspire and involve employees in creating meaningful and effective organizations (Verčič et al., 2022). This definition, especially the aspect of providing or exchanging information as well as inspiring and involving employees, is important to consider in this research, as it explores, amongst other things, the information that is shared with employees about mental health and wellbeing, and whether or not organizations are actively involving and supporting their employees around this topic.

2.1.2 Goals and Influences of Internal Communication

Internal communication can follow many goals and objectives. Argenti (1998) states seven goals of internal communication from a manager’s point of view based on previous research by Troy (1988), namely the following in order of importance:

1. Raise team-spirit and promote a good environment within the workforce
2. Inform about internal changes
3. Educate on employee benefits and other compensations
4. Improve staff knowledge on the organizations, culture, products and services
5. Help staff change their behaviour to be more entrepreneurial, quality-focused, and productive
6. Improve staff awareness of important health and social concerns and trends
7. Include staff in community service

Although older, these goals are still relevant today according to other research. A recent survey revealed that many organizations today still focus on communicating about topics such as culture, customer experience, benefits and rewards, health and safety, or new systems (change), amongst other topics and priorities (Gallagher, 2022), similar to the goals mentioned above in 1998/1988. As mentioned, these goals deliver an overview from a managerial perspective, adding a more diverse view on the topic, rather than a communication professionals' point of view. Since its publication, Argenti's article has been widely cited by scholars and other research in the field of organizational and internal communication (Araújo & Miranda, 2020; Verčič et al., 2021).

Another well-known article in the field also focusing on goals and objectives of internal communication is one by Welch and Jackson (2007). They explain that internal communication has four main objectives:

1. "Contributing to internal relationships characterized by employee commitment
2. promoting a positive sense of belonging in employees
3. developing their awareness of environmental change; and
4. developing their understanding of the need for the organization to evolve its aims in response to, or in anticipation of, environmental change" (p. 188).

This article and its content can also be considered as older; however, it is amongst the common frameworks of internal communication, delivering a specific definition of internal communication from a stakeholder approach. Further, the main objectives mentioned above have proven to still be of value today, as research has shown that the purpose of internal communication today is still about creating feelings of culture and belonging, and that topics often communicated about the strategies of the organization, amongst other topics such as diversity, health or sustainability (Gallagher, 2022). Similarly to Argenti's article, Welch and Jackson's article has been used as the basis for more research, such as Verčič et al. (2012) and Welch (2012), making it possible to close gaps in the literature and the field.

Other authors state that internal communication is also used to communicate the organizations mission, vision and values, creating feelings of commitment, integration and identification for the employees (Welch, 2012; Martinenz & Hurtado, 2018; Meirinhos et al., 2022). Further, if done successfully, it can create awareness and understanding among employees about the opportunities and threats their organization is facing, and what priorities the organization is putting (Welch, 2012). It also contributes to the involvement of employees in organizational processes (Meirinhos et al., 2022), and whether or not employees feel like their contributions are being valued, and if they feel the organizations cares about employees' wellbeing (Santiago, 2020).

Many authors agree that internal communication affects organizational effectiveness (Kalla, 2005; Tench & Yeomans, 2014; Welch, 2012, 2019). Further, internal communication also supports positive relationships between employees and senior managers through communication (Welch, 2019), as well as mutual, trusting relationships with internal publics (Tench & Yeomans, 2014). It can also support developing a sense of community within organizations. To achieve this feeling, relationships between the organizations and employees, whether it is leaders or employees, needs to be established and sustained (Karanges et al., 2015).

If an organization regularly shares information, especially honest ones, it can lead to employees being more productive, motivated to do their jobs, and committed to the organization's goals (Argenti, 1998). Although often internal communication puts sharing results and providing information and announcements as their main goal, as seen above, sharing knowledge can be more important for daily tasks of employees. Knowledge sharing and internal

interaction also influences organizations' actions and activities, can lead to increased feelings of security for employees and higher efficiency and motivation, while feedback can improve the organizations (Kalla, 2005). Good internal communication relies on good interpretation and mutual understanding of messages, with dialogues often being necessary.

One-sided communication or other poor internal communication can also be counter-productive and affect organizations negatively, as it can interfere with an organization trying to reach their goals (Welch, 2012; Dahlman & Heide, 2021). Amongst other consequences, it can lead to low motivation and job satisfaction of employees, a negative work atmosphere, insufficient of knowledge sharing and learning opportunities, and it can also hinder an organization in implementing change correctly and successfully (Dahlman & Heide, 2020). Internal communication should also not only focus delivering information from management to employees or other target groups, as it plays a higher function in the organization as seen above, and therefore needs a better strategic, functioning approach (Dahlman & Heide, 2021; Meirinhos et al., 2022).

2.1.3 Performing Internal Communication

In practice, internal communication can be performed through many different channels, can be organized by many different teams, with different types and lengths and load of information. Verčič et al. (2022) believes that many organizations lack a formal strategy or strategic goals, but all use internal communication to influence their employees' knowledge, feelings and actions. Therefore, before explaining the different channels to use for internal communication, it is also important to understand the are many different types, directions and formats it can take on within the organization for strategic planning purposes.

Welch (2012) differentiates between different formats of media that can be used to reach audiences: print, electronic, and face-to face. With the rise of social media, Verčič (2019) adds this as another format to the previous mentioned list. However, Tench and Yeomans (2014) believe that newer channels are not necessarily better. Instead, many authors agree that the right channels and methods should be chosen based on employee preferences (Tench & Yeomans, 2014; Welch, 2012; Welch & Jackson, 2007). Communication can take place through different flows or directions, including one-way (asymmetrical), two-way (symmetrical) and again, face-

to-face (Tench & Yeomans, 2014; Men, 2014; Verčič et al., 2022). Authors agree that internal communication should be a two-way process instead of one-way, as it leads to employees being more productive, satisfied and feeling understood (Argenti, 1998; Men, 2014; Verčič, 2019). Additionally, even with the rise of technology, face-to-face communication is still a valuable method, as it promotes social interaction, information sharing, and non-verbal feedback (Kalla, 2005; Men, 2014).

Welch and Jackson (2007) designed four specific dimensions of internal communication. Each dimension takes place on a different organizational level, with different participants, stakeholders and content, as seen in Table 2. The authors propose that the mentioned dimensions specify internal communication as the “communication between an organisation’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organisation, a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims“ (p. 186)

Table 2*Dimensions of Internal Communication*

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 task 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	Organisational/corporate issues, e.g. goals, objectives, new developments, activities and achievements

Note. From “Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach” by M. Welch and P.R. Jackson, 2007, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12(2), p. 185 (<https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280710744847>). Copyright 2007 by Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Internal communication can also take place through many channels, and should be chosen based on resources, goals, the message and also the preferences of those being communicated with (Verčič et al., 2022). According to Men (2014), many organizations mostly use email, followed by meetings, and lastly print media such as brochures, newsletters or posters, in order to inform employees about changes, events and other decisions made by the organization. Far less used are digital channels such as online meetings, or social media. However, social media is often used to gather feedback or concerns as “social media blurred the boundaries between communication hierarchies and thus more significantly expanded participation and the sharing of opinions, ideas, and knowledge in corporate social networks” (Men, 2014, p. 271).

In contrast to what organizations use, the study also found that employees prefer channels such as emails, meetings and interpersonal communication, followed by print media and internal websites. Welch (2012) confirmed similar results through a qualitative survey, investigating 46

employees and their preferences of media and messages for internal communication. It was discovered that most preferred electronic formats, like newsletters via email or intranet, while some prefer both electronic and print, or at least having the options to receive printed information when wanted. This leads to the conclusion that most employees prefer electronic methods, with some wanting a mixed approach (print and electronic), and rarely print. The study also showed that sustainability plays an important role, as respondents noted that they would prefer cost-effective and sustainable electronic formats. Verčič et al., (2022) delivers an overview of channels, divided into traditional channels and newer channels (based on technological advances), as well as interactive or non-interactive as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Matrix of Traditional and New Internal Communication Channels

	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>New</i>
Not interactive	Newsletters Magazines Information boards Posters Memos Mail sent to home	Digital newsletters Information on LCD or other screens Podcasts Blogs Video posts Group e-mails
Somewhat interactive	Meetings in larger groups Live events	Intranet One-on-one e-mails Live web-casting Video conferencing in larger groups Social networks Internal communication applications (apps)
Interactive	Meetings in smaller groups Team building One-on-one interactions Rumor mills	Video conferencing in smaller groups One-on-one video conferencing

Note. From *Internal Communication and Employer Brands* (p. 41), by A.T. Verčič, D. Verčič and A. Špoljarić, 2022, Routledge. Copyright 2022 by Routledge.

Concerning the question, who should be responsible for internal communication, many options are possible, and the answer often varies depending on the size and industry of the organization (Verčič et al., 2022). Argenti (1998) believes that internal communication techniques do not vary from external ones, and that internal communication should be the responsibility of the cooperate communication department. Similarly, Smith and Mounter (2008) also states that it is often part of corporate communication, therefore bordering external communications.

Verčič (2019) agrees that internal communication can be the responsibility of public relations, human resources management, or marketing, but that in most cases public relations or cooperate communication departments understand the need of internal audiences the most. The author also states that other scholars often believe it to be a part of internal marketing, however, does not believe this to be true in the practice. Internal communication rarely has their own separate function within organizations, and instead is placed within management functions, often even lacking internal communication specialists (Verčič et al., 2022).

Similarly, a survey conducted by the company Gallagher in 2022 also revealed that corporate communication is most often the department responsible for internal communication, especially in larger organizations. They also found that in 15% of respondents, internal communication is part of the executive team, and that 10% of respondents actually do not have a separate internal communication department within their company. In comparison with Verčič et al. (2022), the report by Gallagher (2023) states that human resources is the most valuable department for internal communication. At the same time, the survey revealed that in practice, HR is responsible for internal communication mostly in smaller organizations.

2.2 Defining Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has become a concept that many leaders and managers in organizations have concerned themselves with (Welch, 2011). Many authors agree that the term employee engagement often overlaps with many other constructs, and finding one definition is rather difficult (Kumar & Pansari, 2014; Saks, 2006; Saks & Gruman, 204; Welch, 2011). Schaufeli et al. (2002) define employee engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind” (p. 74). This state is constant and compelling (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). According

to Robertson-Smith and Markwick (2009), many companies believe employee engagement to be attachment, commitment, and loyalty of the employee to its organization.

Yet Saks (2006) believes that commitment and engagement are two different constructs, as commitment is an attitude, and engagement on the other hand is the extent to which an employee is focused and absorbed in their role within the organization. He also differentiates between organization engagement and job engagement, as organization engagement is influenced by support, and job engagement by both support, and also job characteristics. Job engagement is perceived higher amongst the research participants than organizational engagement. Employee engagement is also driven by job satisfaction and commitment (positively) and quitting intentions (negatively), and the overall attitudes, goals and actions of the employee (Saks, 2006).

Other, newer research has also proven the relationship between employee engagement and job commitment (Ahakwa et al., 2021; Sandhya & Sulphey, 2021). Sandhya and Sulphey (2021) showed that in the information technology (IT) industry, the higher the employee engagement, the lower the intention to leave the organization. Ahakwa et al. (2021) also states that not only do employees need to feel engaged to show commitment, but they also need to be satisfied with their jobs. Whether or not an employee feels engaged at work is also significantly influenced by the working environment, as well as the team atmosphere and co-worker relationships (Anitha, 2014). According to the author, “this signifies the importance of a healthy work atmosphere and good interpersonal harmony with fellow members in the organisation for anyone to be engaged positively at work” (Anitha, 2014, p. 318).

Similarly, Jenkins and Delbridge (2013) state organizational values, job features, organizational support, social relations, employee voice and organizational integrity as the six drivers of employee engagement. Their research showed that employee engagement can be divided into two approaches: soft and hard. The authors also noted that both approaches can exist at the same time. With a soft approach of employee engagement, the organization is able to consistently communicate company values and strategy, promoting management support and dialogue, ultimately allowing connections to form within the company and employees to identify themselves with the organization. A hard approach on the other hand does not allow organizations, often due to size and structure, to align the overall organizational strategy with

employee engagement, therefore not communicating values and narrative. This leads to negative employee engagement and a workplace that is disconnected.

Nevertheless, good employee engagement increases employee productivity while improving the company's image and therefore influences the financial return positively (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Welch (2011) states that not only does engagement influence employees' motivation and attitudes, but it also influences the organization's effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness. Overall, the employee's performance can be positively influenced by employee engagement (Ahakwa et al., 2021; Anitha, 2014). Sahoo and Sahu (2009) also agree that organizations need to start "measuring, monitoring and maximizing the level of engagement amongst the employees and ensuring it is not left to chance" (p. 74). Gupta and Sharma (2019) call engagement a two-way process, where organizations, in return for engaging with its employees, get employees that simply and effortlessly support the organization, its goals, values and success.

Engaged employees are motivated to support and contribute to the organization's goals (Gupta & Sharma, 2019; Tucker, 2020), and they believe and feel that they are integrated, supported and united within the organization (Zibbell, 2023). At work, they show strong levels of energy and strong mentality, as well as a readiness to put effort into their task, and showing endurance in the face of challenges. These employees experience enthusiasm and pride, feel inspired yet challenged (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). At the same time, over-engagement needs to be avoided, as it can lead to damaged interactions between employees, contribute to stress that is related to work and do quite the opposite of commitment, namely withdrawal towards the organization (MacCormick et al., 2012). Research has also shown that burnout and employee engagement are negatively related to each other (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Employees in a high-demanding job are more likely to experience burnout, which leads to other health problems, which can ultimately lead to employees quitting their job. Positive employee engagement and offering the correct resources for their job can help combat employee turnover intentions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Zibbell (2023) believes that employee engagement has to include multiple departments such as HR, employee relations and employee experience amongst others, and that all aspects of employee experience have to be considered for optimal employee engagement. This could

question what the difference between employee engagement and employee experience is. According to Tucker (2020), a positive employee experience increases employees' engagement. Employee experience is hereby understood as the feelings an employee is experiencing towards their organization when interacting. To reach positive and high levels of employee engagement, organizations need to positively influence the employee experience. For this research, employee engagement will be defined as the following: employees are fully engaged in their work, emotionally committed and physically active in their role. This is demonstrated by the fact that they are very interested in their work, are dedicated to it and the organization, and are energized by it (Welch, 2011). This depends on a positive and safe employee experience, therefore connecting the two constructs as mentioned above by Tucker (2020).

2.3 Internal Communication and Employee Engagement

As seen earlier, employee engagement is an important concept for organizations due to its positive outcomes. Welch (2012) states that "to contribute to engagement, the organizational practice of internal corporate communication requires practical and theoretical consideration to enable communication perceived as appropriate by employees" (p. 45). Employee engagement can mean commitment as an employee to the organization as stated earlier. Research has also shown that formal communication, in contrary to belief that it is connections between employees, that makes employees commit to organizations (Downs & Adrian, 2004). They also state that management exist to communicate the vision of the organization, and that therefore communication plays a big role in employees choosing to follow the vision and commit to the organization.

Research by Karanges et al (2015) also proved that internal communication and employee engagement are positively associated with another, showing that optimizing internal communication is significant for positive employee engagement. Their research also showed that internal supervisor communication can influence employee engagement. Arif et al. (2023) also revealed that meaningful manager or supervisor communication can lead to higher engagement amongst employees, which ultimately leads to employees showing understanding of the organization's goals, supportive behaviours in the workplace, and emotional intelligence. Karanges et al. (2015) state that communication can influence employees' feelings of

identification towards the organization, and that internal communication needs to reassure employees to share ideas and opinions and need to be involved in discussions about their role to establish a link between the employee's own values and goals and those of the organization. The channels chosen therefore need to allow dialogue and idea sharing for managers and employees so that engagement is build (Arif et al., 2023). Accordingly, identification with the organization is extremely important for an employee to engage with their work (Karanges et al, 2015).

Similar research to Karanges et al. done by Verčić et al. (2022) however showed that internal communication alone cannot affect employee engagement, instead organizational support and employer attractiveness also play significant roles as mediators. Further, the authors suggest that internal communication needs to resort to other areas, such as psychology, marketing, or branding (due to the influence of employer attractiveness) to properly engage. Understanding the attitudes of employees is also highly important to find accurate strategies of engagement, as well as offering feedback, supporting, caring and listening to employees to foster a community and connections. In order to promote employee engagement, internal communication needs to integrate and communicate aspects such as offers and benefits that can establish the organization as a desired employer, with a working environment focused on innovation and productivity.

Welch (2011) also agrees that employee engagement can be influenced by internal communication with the right strategies and tactics. She addresses that although internal communication can influence attitudes and motivations of employees, specific character traits of employees cannot be influenced through communication and therefore cannot be properly engaged. It is therefore important for internal communication to properly understand the preferences, attitudes and characteristics of its employees when it comes to internal communication, to be able to promote employee engagement. Further, Welch (2011) states that poor communication can lead to disengagement. Similar to what was already mentioned above, she believes that the content of the messages and its tone should strategically be thought about as they can influence the level of engagement. The level of engagement that is already experienced by each individual employee also indicates the type of information one needs.

Davadoorst and Javadi (2019) adapted a communication concept by Johlke and Juhan (2001), by adding a fifth dimension of internal communication. According to the authors, those dimensions ultimately lead to employee engagement, summarizing the earlier delivered information. These dimensions are the following:

1. Communication mode: Include the methods used to transmit communication, both formal and informal, like newsletters, emails, blogs or phone calls,
2. Communication frequency: the amount of communication between employees and the organization. Insufficient or excessive overload of communication leads to employee dissatisfaction,
3. Communication content: the strategy that is used to communicate with employees, and is differentiated between directive, like direct instructions, or indirective communication, that is flexible and supports employees to include themselves in making decisions
4. Communication quality: can be evaluated by the time it is received, by trust and accuracy, full to get work done properly, and perfectly and easy to understand, however it is subjective to the receiver
5. Communication direction: is divided into bidirectional communication, where employees are encouraged to give feedback to the information provided, and unidirectional communication, where information is only provided but employees are not able to respond (p. 58-60).⁴

2.4 Workplace Communication and Engagement Preferences of Generation Z

With Generation Z not fully in the workplace just yet, limited research has been done on internal communication and engagement preferences of this generation; this indicates the importance of this dissertation and filling the research gap.

As mentioned already, Generation Z is known for their technological affinities. This digital communication is not only seen in their daily, private lives but also at the workplace

⁴ These dimensions support the explained methodology in chapter 4.

(Janssen & Cardini, 2021; Kick et al., 2015) Research showed that in their private life, this generation relies on texting and other instant messaging apps, rather than phone calls. Although their preferred communication is not email in their private lives, in the workplace this channel is most used, followed by telephone (Janssen & Cardini, 2021). For employers, this means adapting their communication channels of those younger generations, e.g. using social networking sites (Kick et al., 2015).

The research by Janssen and Cardini (2021) also showed that Generation Z does not feel uncomfortable when not being able to access their phones at work, but rather sees it as an opportunity to focus on their work and tasks. Yet, Kick et al. (2015) believes that this generation will have a hard time being integrated into the workplace, specifically with previous generations, due to their digital communication habits. Schroth (2019) agrees that “relying on e-communication is not the most effective” (p. 13), and that it is the managers responsibility to help this younger generation adapt to other means of communication, as well as explaining how and when to use each different channel. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, generational differences can also lead to poor communication in the workplace.

Research by Šakytė-Statnickė et al. (2023) explored internal communication between different generations, and the effectiveness of internal communication channels for each generation. The research made it clear that the digital nature and behaviour of Generation Z also influences the workplace. This generation is most effectively reached through social media, as also indicated above, and audio or video conferences. Not effective on the other hand where channels such as newsletters or other forms of written text, e.g. reports or bulletin boards. The research also noted that the Covid-19 pandemic made organizations more prone to switch to latest technologies more adequate for younger generations, which made it easier for those generations to handle the implications of the pandemic in the workplace.

From a manager's viewpoint however, research by Tidhar (2022) showed that many believe digital communication is not the key to connecting with Generation Z, but rather interpersonal communication, as the use of digital channels creates a distance between the two parties. Specifically, the pandemic made it difficult through the above-mentioned video conferences to connect interpersonally and was not useful for good communication. Post-pandemic in 2023, organizations still rely on newest technology to make the biggest impact on

their overall employees, not just Generation Z, as research has shown that live broadcast videos or and intranet channels as well as the use of apps became even more popular than previous years (Gallagher, 2024).

It needs to be noted that Generation Z also shows frustration with the use of technology in the workplace. This dissatisfaction is based on distraction, over-reliance on technology and lack of boundaries. Respondents perceive technology as distracting, leading to difficulty concentrating at work. In terms of lack of boundaries, the research showed that Generation Z believes that employers expect constant accessibility, and therefore feeling like they are unable to completely disconnect from work (Janssen & Carradini, 2021). Lastly when it comes workplace communication, Hee and Yi (2023) revealed that Generation Z shows different communication types than Generation X or Y, and that Generation Z is more likely to adapt their opinions and behaviour to those around them and avoid conflict or confrontation in terms of communication.

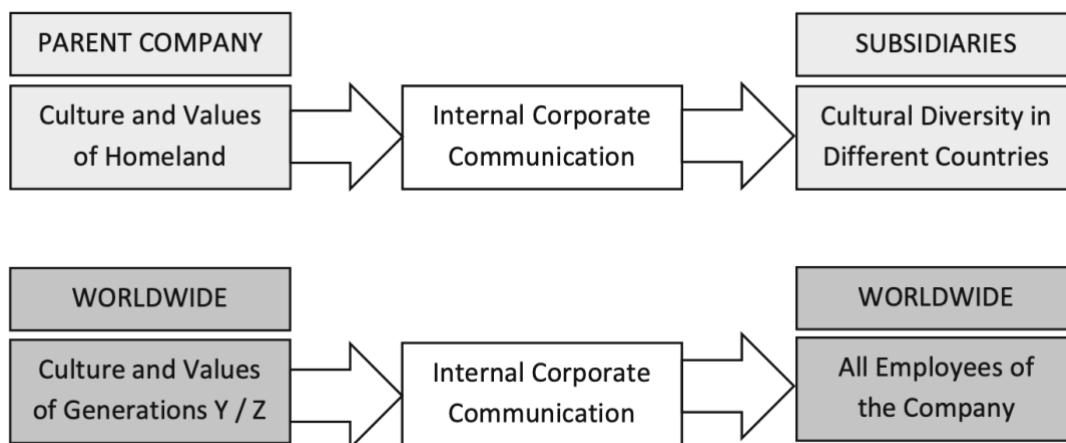
Earlier mentioned were workplace motivations and expectations of this generation. When comparing with other generations such as Generation Y, they show less energy and effort when it comes to their work. Specifically looking at engagement characteristics and preferences of Generation Z, they show higher engagement when experiencing promotions, benefits other than salary, satisfaction with job, supervision and co-workers (Melarkode & Thakur, 2022). Moreover, members of this generation feel engaged when being given personal and professional development opportunities, authentic leadership by being transparent, reliable and honest and are given feedback opportunities (Schroth, 2019; Tidhar, 2022). Most importantly, they feel engaged when organizations offer good mental health and wellness programs (Schroth, 2019).

Because of this generations' specific characteristics, Müller and Müller (2022) propose a completely new framework for globally operating organizations to adapt their corporate culture. Instead of focusing solely on culture based on nationality and countries, organizations should adapt to a generational culture based on generations Y and Z. Reason being is that for the first time, Generation Y and Z are similar worldwide, bringing the opportunity for organizations to focus on the similarities of these organizations to create a global corporate culture that is sustainable in the future. Previously, global organization focused on local cultures of their subsidiaries. However, for internal communication specifically, this brings issues of

“integrating different national cultural influences and establishing a globally uniform and binding corporate culture” (Müller & Müller, 2022, p. 80). The authors state that cultural aspects can lead to misunderstandings, and taking into consideration small, cultural groups or even those of many countries (depending on the size of the organization) can be too complex. With digital communication, technical abilities and similar lifestyles of Generations Y and Z, organizations can standardize internal communication for the whole, global company, as seen in the proposed framework in Figure 3. However, it needs to be noted that this framework is theoretical as it has not been otherwise explored nor confirmed possible.

Figure 3

Proposed Framework for Change in Internal Corporate Communication



Note. The upper part of the figure shows the standardized approach of corporate culture and internal communication in global companies. The lower part proposes using the culture and values of generations Y and Z leading to a new, global corporate culture and approach for internal communication. The cultures and values are not further defined in the article and the framework remains theoretical. From *Internal Communication and Culture: A Theoretical Framework* (p.88) by A. Müller and A. Müller, 2022, Springer International Publishing. Copyright 2022 by Springer International Publishing.

3. Mental Health

Mental health can have an influence on all aspects of an individual's life, and its effects can be intense (Beddington et al., 2008). Especially how mental health influences the workplace and employees has been of importance not just for researchers, but also for organizations. Keeping employees mentally well and happy is crucial for an organization's success (Taubman & Parikh, 2023). In internal communication practices, mental health and wellbeing is a topic that is often communicated (Gallagher, 2024). With Generation Z starting to work, their mental health and attitudes towards the topic are important to consider as well. Therefore, this chapter will introduce the topic of mental health, as well as the relationship between Generation Z and mental health. It will investigate the influence of mental health on the workplace, and how internal communication can communicate and engage with the workforce on this topic.

3.1 Introduction to Mental Health

Mental wellbeing, or often called mental health, is understood as the absence of psychological disorders (Adler et al., 2017; Keyes, 2002; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Just like physical health, mental health is a key part of the human health (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021; World Health Organization 2022b). However, mental health is not as visible or tangible as other diseases or injuries and therefore mental health illnesses often do not receive as much as treatment (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021).

Keyes (2002) defines individuals as either having complete mental health, who possess high levels of wellbeing, or having incomplete mental health, those with low levels of wellbeing. According to the World Health Organization (2022b), the mental state of wellbeing allows a person to deal with stress and live up to their abilities, be able to work and learn, and support the community they engage with. Similarly, Beddington et al. (2008) agrees that mental wellbeing means being productive, developing one's potential and being able to form relationships that are meaningful. Additionally, it is about experiencing positive emotions (Huppert, 2009; Keyes, 2022).

It is also related to having good physical health, showing flexibility, and being able to socialize (Huppert, 2009), while also being creative (Beddington et al., 2008; Huppert, 2009). Overall, mental wellbeing can be described as the ability to positively function well in everyday

life (Beddington et al., 2008; Huppert, 2009; Keyes, 2002). More precisely, wellbeing can be divided into three different key conditions according to Westerhof and Keyes (2010): (1) emotional wellbeing, (2) psychological wellbeing, and (3) social wellbeing. Emotional wellbeing describes the experience of happiness and life satisfaction, psychological wellbeing is for the individual to function well, and social wellbeing describes functioning socially in a community (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010).

Authors also argue that mental wellbeing and possession of mental illnesses are not always contraries (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021; Keyes, 2002). Mental health therefore can take on many degrees and faces, thus feelings of distress or unhappiness does not necessarily mean one is suffering from mental illness. However, these feelings “may result in a degree of mental distress or even a period of becoming mentally unwell and we may be perceived as 'unsettled” (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021, p. 3). Huppert (2009) also states that being mentally well does not mean that a person does not ever experience negative emotions, however these painful emotions are not consistently interfering with their everyday life compared to those with bad mental health.

Adler et al. (2017) agrees that a person experiencing mental disorders cannot be described as a mentally well person, yet they also state that absence of disorders does not guarantee mental wellbeing. That being the case, Thirunavuraka et al. (2013) proposes that instead of dividing mental health statues into just two, mentally ill and mentally healthy, four statues are more accurate for treatment. They propose the following statues: (1) mentally healthy, treatment focusing on continuing the wellbeing, (2) mentally not healthy, treatment focusing on minimizing the suffering, (3) mentally unhealthy, containing any damage, and (4) mentally ill, focusing on treating the individual.

Statistics show that worldwide, one in eight people is suffering from mental disorders, with increasing numbers especially in younger generations aged 15 to 29 years (World Health Organization, n.d.-b) Some mental health disorders are more common than others, which include depression, anxiety and panic, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Attridge, 2019; Huang et al., 2018; National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (UK), 2011; World Health Organization, 2022a). Anxiety is a group of different disorders or conditions, which can include general anxiety disorder, panic disorder,

social anxiety, and phobias (Attridge, 2019; National Institute of Mental Health, 2023a; World Health Organization; 2023b). Other common mental health disorders include schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and eating disorders (World Health Organization, 2022a), as well as phobias (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (UK), 2011).

According to the World Health Organization (n.d.-a), the most common disorders found in the worldwide population is depression and anxiety. Therefore, these two will be explained in more detail. Depression seriously affects the mood of those suffering from it, and is also affecting how one thinks, feels and behaves in daily life (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023b; Torres, 2020; World Health Organization, 2023a). Depression can also lead to a loss of interest in activities one previously enjoyed and negatively affect your daily life such as work and relationships (Torres, 2020; World Health Organization, 2023a). Symptoms of depression include feeling hopeless, low energy, having difficulty concentrating, suicidal thoughts, and sleep problems and many more symptoms (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023b; Torres, 2020; World Health Organization, 2023a).

The disorder anxiety is the constant and intense worrying and fear about certain situations, often leading to individuals avoiding those situations that can cause their worrying (American Psychiatric Association, 2022.; National Institute of Mental Health, 2023a; World Health Organization, 2023b), often also along with physical problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; World Health Organization, 2023b). Similar to depression, it can affect daily life of relationships or work (American Psychiatric Association, 2022; National Institute of Mental Health, 2023a; World Health Organization, 2023b). Most often, the fear or stress experienced gets worse over time and can last a long period of time (National Institute of Mental Health, 2023a; World Health Organization, 2023b).

Certain factors and situations of individuals can cause the likelihood of mental health problems (World Health Organization, 2022a). Specifically, the environment of individuals can influence their mental wellbeing (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021; Huppert, 2009; World Health Organization, 2022). Unfavorable situations of a person's environment can be poverty or violence (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021; World Health Organization, 2022a), but also factors such as unemployment, solitude and lifestyle habits (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021). Lifestyle habits that can lead to a poor mental health include smoking, alcohol consumption, obesity, and little

physical activity, among other habits (Velten et al., 2018). The study showed that for German students, factors like higher body mass index and smoking were significant for negative mental wellbeing. Instead, physical and mental activity can lead to positive mental health. For female participants, the study showed that an irregular social rhythm (such as irregular social contacts or irregular wake-up times) can lead to future mental health problems (Velten et al., 2018).

There have been also concerns about negative mental health impact from social media sites, yet research suggests that the use of social media cannot be divided into good or bad for mental health (Verduyn et al., 2021). Instead, it depends on how the user is interacting with the social media site and its content. When passively using the social networking site Facebook, research showed a decline in mental wellbeing, as users tend to feel envy and inferior due to social comparison, while using the site actively to engage and stay connected with friends can positively influence mental health (Verduyn et al., 2021).

It is overall important to understand what mental health issues exist, how they are caused, and how they can influence an individual, as this dissertation deals with the topic of mental health. With Generation Z struggling with certain mental health issues⁵, these terms and the overall context of what mental health is, needs to be understood and explained as a foundation to the topic.

Poor mental wellbeing is not just an individual issue, but rather can be found on many different levels of society, as local issues can influence families and communities, but also more global situations such pandemics, climate crises and other emergency situations can cause collective poor mental health of populations worldwide (World Health Organization, 2022b). While Huppert (2009) agrees that the circumstances of the external environment affect the wellbeing of individuals, she argues that “actions and attitudes may have a greater influence” (p.154). Therefore, positive attitudes and actions are important to improve mental health (Huppert, 2009), while building resilience to mental health problems can happen through education, good work and positive interactions and other factors (World Health Organization, 2022b). Overall, a healthy life is important for good mental health (Velten et al, 2018). Additionally, it is also important to consider the impact both poor mental health and good mental

⁵ This will be more explained in the following sub-chapter 3.2: Generation Z and Mental Health

health can have on individuals. While being mentally well can lead to things such as overall improved health and increased immunity, even fulfilling relationships and greater performance at work (Adler et al., 2017), poor mental wellbeing can decrease overall health and quality of life (Chadwick & Murphy, 2021).

3.2 Generation Z and Mental Health

Research has shown that Generation Z has a poor mental health state compared to other generations (American Psychology Association, 2020; Arora et al., 2022; Coe et al. 2023; Grelle et al. 2023). Further, their mental health is even worse compared to other health aspects, and has even declined over the recent years, with female Generation Z showing worse mental health than their male counterparts (Coe et al., 2023). Research done in the United States shows that this generation is most likely to experience symptoms of depression (American Psychology Association, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic specifically, Generation Z showed an increase in mental health issues, whereas other generations did not to such an extreme. During this time, Generation Z experienced more stress, while also showing higher levels of anxiety and depression (American Psychology Association, 2020; Grelle, 2023). Compared to other generations such as Generation X or Baby Boomers, they also experienced more intense feelings of loneliness (American Psychology Association, 2020; Grelle et al., 2023). Although the pandemic has passed, higher levels of stress and anxiety levels have remained for Generation Z (Deloitte, 2023). Now, this generation stresses about crises such as cost of living, politics or climate change, while also worrying about unemployment and finances, and the wellbeing of their friends and family (Deloitte, 2023).

Generally, this generation seems to care deeply about their mental health (Deloitte, 2023). While they show less stigma around the mental health of others, stigma against themselves when struggling with mental illness is still common. However, this does not stop them from talking openly about their own issues or stops them from accepting those with mental health problems (Arora et al., 2022). Vejan et al. (2021), who also investigated Generation Z from the Philippines and their attitude and help-seeking behaviour on mental health, state that they are very likely to seek help when it comes to psychological concerns and mental health matters, and

that they overall show awareness around mental health. Further, the research revealed the respondents generally believe that some authority and treatment should be given over mental health disorders and those struggling with them, while also accepting the opposite (not issuing control). They moderately accept that sympathy should be shown towards those with mental illness, but also fairly accept when not. Lastly, they fairly accept the need for caution when dealing with mental illness in one's social environment, but also moderately accept that one should not show apprehension.

Research by Dua et al. (2022) revealed that while many of this generation already report that they receive treatment, many are also worried about financing the mental health services. Further, when compared with older generations, those of Generation Z are also more likely to state that they are lacking accessible and affordable mental health services, when compared with older generations. According to Cohen et al. (2021), the most common treatment method amongst the generations X and Z is working with mental health professionals, while the majority of this research also uses multiple different methods. While many are not willing to use peer-counselling as a treatment method, non-traditional services are still considered by Generation X and Z. They would also consider using health care providers, self-care books or counsellors or online communities (Cohen et al., 2021).

Further, Coe et al. (2023) showed that Generation Z is also more likely than other generations to use digital wellness apps or other digital health programs. Cohen et al. (2021) also showed that apps and online communities are a popular resource for treatment methods. Yet, this research also showed that Generation Z perceives a higher barrier due to stigma compared to Millennials when it comes to using online communities as a treatment method. Coe et al. (2023) also revealed that Generation Z would like to continue using digital programs for mental health, however that other generations are even more likely to continue using them.

Research has also shown that this generation questions the impact of social media on their mental health (Deloitte, 2023), with some even believe that social media has a negative impact (Coe et al., 2023). When comparing with older generations, the believed negative impact becomes even more visible (Coe et al., 2023). According to the research by Deloitte (2023), four in ten Generation Z experience feelings of loneliness, and pressured to have a presence online. However, Berryman et al. (2018) showed that the use of social media does not influence

negative mental health. The research did reveal that using social media to vaguely indicate that they need help predicts loneliness and suicidal thoughts. The time spent online, and the importance of social media does not influence mental health problems. They conclude that “concerns about social media precipitating a mental health crisis may be unwarranted” (Berryman et al., 2018, p. 312). Likewise, this generation also notes a positive impact of social media on their health, as it allows them to be express themselves creatively to stay connected (Coe et al., 2023; Deloitte, 2023). Further, social media can also positively be used to find mental health resources (Deloitte, 2023; Grelle et al., 2023).

3.3 Mental Health in Organizations

Issues with mental health are often understood in the personal life, yet in the workplace the effects mental health problems can have are often invisible (Bolt, 2023). In the past decade, organizations have concerned themselves with the mental and emotional health of their employees, as changes in business models, technology, and economic disturbances have caused workplace issues and strains on the mental health of employees due to increased stress and burnouts (Bruce & English, 2020). The availability of technology outside of the workplace and the overload of it can cause disruptions in the private lives of employees, thus leading to stress and negative wellbeing (Tams et al., 2020). Additionally, with many organizations facing economic changes such as cost-reductions and subsequently having to lay-off employees, many are experiencing job insecurity, and the fear of losing one's job is harming employee's mental wellbeing (Shoss et al., 2022). In general, organizational changes, e.g. restructuring, can affect employee's mental health (Fløvik et al., 2019).

Organizations, governments and stakeholders are responsible to keep their workers healthy and safe and can overall improve their mental health by preventing risks that can lead to mental health issues in the workplace, advocate mental health at work, support those struggling with mental health issues and create workplace environments that allow change (World Health Organization, 2022c). If organizations understand mental illness and its management, they are more equipped to promote strengths of people with mental health issues (Hennekam et al., 2021). Overall, organizations have recognized the economic benefits of helping employees deal with their mental health issues, as they “have an economic cost to

employers in missed days, presenteeism, turnover and treatment costs” (Bruce & English, 2020, p. 199). These aspects considered, this sub-chapter will introduce the influence of mental health in the workplace, initiatives and actions organizations can take towards mental health in employees, and finally employee engagement, and internal communication related to the topic of mental health.

3.3.1 Mental Health in the Workplace

According Attridge (2019), most people suffering from mental illness still able to work, as most mental illnesses are mild in their impact and impairment of an individual. However, suffering from mild depression for example can lead to employees being unproductive or absent from work (Attridge, 2019; World Health Organization, n.d.-b). Severe depression can however lead to the disablement of an employee (Attridge, 2019). Due to mental health issues, organizations can suffer economic losses, while also having to invest money into solutions and implementations that can improve the workforce’s wellbeing (Taubman & Parikh, 2023). An industry that is known to have high stress-levels and greater mental health issues is the tech industry, specifically the information technology (IT) industry (Bryant, 2023; Padma et al., 2015; Rao & Chandraiah, 2012). With increased layoffs in this industry in the recent years and uncertainty about one’s jobs, reports have shown an increase in depression and anxiety of managers in the tech industry (Bryant, 2023).

While mental illnesses can influence the way an individual works, work can also influence the employee’s mental health. Research by Murphy et al. (2023) et al. showed that work generally has a positive impact on the mental health of employees, with only little of the research respondents noting that work has a negative impact. However, one important aspect that can negatively influence mental health of employees is occupational stress, such as more and intense work (Attridge, 2019; Fortes et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2023; Piao & Managi, 2022). Blanco-Donoso et al. (2023) also notes that feeling the pressure to work faster, experiencing stronger deadlines, and having to work multiple tasks at once, called work intensification, influences employees’ mental health and can increase factors such as depression or anxiety, and overall stress. This research showed that women more frequently suffer from worse mental health when experiencing higher work intensification.

Additionally, employees who have a higher stress tolerance and are more open to experiencing unknown or complex situations are also less likely to suffer from anxiety or depression even in intense work situations. Similarly, Fortes et al. (2020) also noted that optimism correlates to coping better with work-related stress. Stress levels of employees can be influenced negatively by managerial support (Piao & Managi, 2022). Support from friends, family and co-workers on the other hand is highly important to promote wellbeing of employees (Attridge, 2019; Piao & Managi, 2022). When employees identify their job as a good match, stress levels can decrease (Piao & Managi, 2022). Then again, experiencing a toxic workplace, which can be trauma such as bullying or harassment, also correlates to the wellbeing of the employees, and can ultimately lead to burnout, depression or anxiety (Attridge, 2019; Kundi et al., 2021; Piao & Managi, 2022; Rasool et al., 2021). Moreover, lacking job authority decision making abilities in the workplace can also lead to more stress and therefore increased risk of mental health issues (Attridge, 2019; Piao & Managi, 2022).

However, the factors influencing employees' mental health can also change over time. Piao and Managi (2022) conducted research over multiple years, which revealed that aspects such as job demand, support, or toxic workplace influence job stress can be negative influences at first, however they can also decline over years. Other aspects such as work-life balance, job authority and security stay significantly important even over time. Attridge (2019) notes that when employees feel discrepancies between the effort they put into their work and the rewards they receive, mental health risks can increase.

For German employees specifically, Kotera et al. (2021) showed that having self-compassion predicts lower mental health problems. At the same time, feeling shame about one's mental health problems and lacking motivation correlates to higher mental health problems in Germans. Further, this research also found out that intrinsic motivation, which was explained earlier as self-satisfaction, as well as work engagement is connected to lower mental health problems in Germans. Overall, this study compared German with South African employees, showing that German employees in general have lower mental health problems than South Africans.

Research on Generation Z and mental health in the workplace has also shown that this generation feel stressed and anxious at work (Deloitte, 2023). This generation's mental health

issues can also impact their work, as they believe they do not perform to their abilities, while also believing that mental health issues can impact future work opportunities (Dua et al., 2022). Similar to the research results mentioned above, Deloitte (2023) found that high work pressure leads Generation Z to experience signs of burnouts such as exhaustion, feeling mentally distant from work, or not working up to their potential. This generation is overall concerned about their mental health, and stresses about heavy workload, little work-life balance and toxic work environments, amongst other factors such as current and future finances (Deloitte, 2023). Hence it is no surprise that Generation Z places high value in employers who provide resources for mental health (Coe et al., 2023; Deloitte, 2023). At the same time, they also place value on resources for physical, social and spiritual health (Coe et al., 2023).

3.3.2 Workplace Initiatives for Mental Health

According to Taubman and Parikh (2023), it is highly important for workplaces to offer measures and initiatives to promote public health. They state that managers need to understand how to recognize distress individuals and how to communicate more effectively with them and guide them in the direction of resources that can help their mental health. In order to reduce the stigma around mental health, organizations need to promote initiatives centered around physical and mental health, demonstrate a positive attitude towards mental health topics and offer activities to reduce stress. When dealing with mental health problems, organizations normally provide a quiet workplace, or working from home if needed, and should excuse absences for employees to receive treatment.

Kent et al. (2016) also adds that a '*healthy organization*' has leaders that also practice healthy behaviours, have policies and practices in place which ensure health, actualize a healthy work environment and designate resources for sustainable programs about mental health. Leaders need to be trained to address workplace issues and should provide communication and channels through which employees can gain information about mental health benefits or other resources and understand the importance of wellbeing (Wu et al., 2021). Also, managers need to encourage their employees to include activities for mental health into their workday, to overall push the organization in the direction of including mental health in their norms. Managers give their employees flexibility when it comes to their working hours or days, adjusted goals when

needing more time or support, and overall support and steady communication about the need of wellbeing (Kent et al., 2016). This is all important, as including mental health in corporate leadership is the first step in helping destigmatize this topic (Wu et al., 2021).

More detailed, Taubman and Parikh (2023) introduce three different types of interventions for the workplace, differentiating between interventions for all employees, interventions for managers, and interventions for those with an increased risk for, or already struggling with, mental illnesses. For employees, it is important to improve the psychological work environment, educate on stress management and how to reduce work-related strain, and overall reduce the stigma around mental health. Managers and leaders need to receive training on how to reduce mental health factors related to work, as well as how to promote mental health within their workforce. Similar to above, leaders need to gain more knowledge and portray an attitude change, to foster a culture where mental health issues are accepted. For those employees already struggling with mental health issues, organizations should facilitate the access to treatment outside of the workplace, and help employees handle their illnesses and if needed, assist in returning back to work.

Leaders can bridge the gap between the available mental health resources for employees and the employee's needs. When employees show hesitation about discussing mental health struggles in the workplace, leaders should be able to adapt their approach to individual's needs, and proactively show desired behavior and support to ensure wellbeing of employees (Wu et al., 2021). For example, leaders can provide regular check-ins with their employees to have conversations about their mental health, while also addressing their own issues or communicate actions they take to prevent mental health issues (Greenwood & Krol, 2020). At the same time, it is also important that organizations include their employees in the process of choosing wellbeing offerings, in order to accurately match it to the needs of their workforce. Research showed the importance of involving employees to create a healthy culture, by incorporating leaders into gathering feedback but also being accessible to share thoughts. In this research, employees showed engagement with health programs when they matched their feedback and ideas (Kent et al., 2016).

Creating a workplace that promotes health starts with including it in the organization's mission and vision, policies and work activities (Kent et al., 2016). Workplaces that promote

health have a good work-life balances, internal challenges that promote wellness, or provide access or reimbursements to fitness facilities or gym memberships (Fonseca, 2023; Laker, 2022). Healthy work-life balances include policies with enough vacation days, being able to take sabbaticals, and flexible working conditions such as working from home (Fonseca, 2023). Through so called 'Employee Assistance Programs'(EAP), most organizations provide their employees the option to access counselling, referrals or other assessments if it is related to work or personal problems that could impact not just their performance in the job but also their wellbeing. These benefit programs also support employees when struggling with emotional distress or work-related stress, as well as family issues and more (Gartner, n.d.). Additional activities could include workshops on stress management or mindfulness, or providing mental health apps (Fonseca, 2023). For example, the consulting firm Ernest & Young introduced an app that informs their employees on how to deal with stress, and offers mental health-related articles and activities, while also offering other digital resources on how to improve their sleep (American Psychological Association, 2024).

In the light of the above, research has also explored employees' attitudes and behaviours when it comes to mental health support from their managers and organizations. Research done by Coppens et al. (2023) showed that many employees actually do not experience encouragement from their workplace in terms of their mental wellbeing, and that employers are lacking a clear strategy to reduce the stigma around mental health issues. Research has also shown that participants believe that managers play a significant role in promoting wellbeing in the workplace, however that many also do not implement interventions. It is believed that managers may not receive sufficient resources, capacity or training to promote wellbeing, hindering them in providing sufficient support (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). In order to encourage managers' participations in implementing mental health initiatives, participants believe managers need to be more informed on economic benefits of employee wellbeing, be shown successful implementations from others as well as being taught no time-consuming interventions (Coppens et al., 2023). Yet, Bruce and English (2020) state that not only support from managers but also their acceptance is crucial to properly implement mental health initiatives. Further, organizations need to connect their business to mental health in order to bring acceptance to mental health in the workplace.

Employees often also favor mental health support outside of their workplace (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). This is because employees do not feel comfortable accessing online tools through their work computer (Coppens et al., 2023), or they believe they do not have the time to do so during their working hours (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy 2023). Some would also like to get support in person (Murphy et al., 2023). Nevertheless, mental health support is still popular through online programs (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). Overall, employees want a separation between work and mental health support (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). Given Generation Z's preference in terms of technology and the internet, it brings up the question as to how they would like to receive and engage with mental health support in the workplace, and if these research results also apply to them.

The latest publication of a yearly survey by Deloitte (2023) has shown that currently, Generation Z generally believes that their organization take the mental health of their employees seriously. However, many of this generation also believes that talking to their employer about mental health is not an option, and that resources are not utilized properly. Similar to the research results above, Generation Z does not like talking to their manager about stress or anxiety, while also being hesitant to disclose absence from work due to mental health reasons. When it comes to initiatives and support from the employer, most offer paid time off, check-ins with manager on wellbeing as well as leadership support, with paid time off most often used by Generation Z. Additionally, according to the research, organizations also offer stress-reducing resources, digital mental health services and apps, meeting-free days and official therapy, however these options are often less used than the previous mentioned ones.

3.3.3 Employee Engagement, Internal Communication and Mental Health in Organizations

The previous subchapter already mentioned the initiatives and interventions an organization can follow when wanting to engage with their employees on the topic of mental health. Nevertheless, it is also important to understand the general relationship between employee engagement, a concept explained in the earlier chapter, and mental health in the workplace. Above mentioned was the influence of toxic workplaces for the mental wellbeing of employees. Rasool et al. (2021) explored how toxic workplaces influence employee engagement

and showed that a toxic workplace negatively influences employee engagement. The research also showed that employee engagement and employee wellbeing have a positive relationship, and that wellbeing is a positive mediator between a toxic workplace and employee engagement. The authors state that when working in a toxic workplace, employees are likely to spread negative emotions to their co-workers. Further, wellbeing of employees affects their behaviour towards their work and organization, therefore also influencing their level of engagement.

Although not directly related to employee engagement and wellbeing, there is also a relationship between work engagement and psychological distress that should be considered. Shimazu et al. (2018) showed that when employees feel low levels of work engagement, their psychological stress increases. Conversely, when engagement levels increase, psychological distress decreases. However, the authors also note that this could indicate a limit on the extent of which work engagement can influence mental health of employees. Further, research has also explored a connection between emotional stability, which is an important factor for wellbeing as it is connected to positive emotions and coping with stress, and work engagement (Kundi et al., 2021). On one hand, it was revealed that employees with low emotional stability have a harder time managing performance pressure, thus leading to a decrease in work engagement. On the other hand, it showed that those with higher emotional stability are more likely to perceive performance pressure as a positive challenge rather than a stressor, therefore increasing their work engagement (Kundi et al., 2021). Moreover, mental health is also indirectly related to work performance, as it is mediated by work engagement (Lu et al., 2020). It was already mentioned earlier that mental health can influence work performance, with this research confirm this once again, however also adding that work engagement is a positive link between the two constructs.

Overall, mental health and wellbeing has been a well communicated topic in organizations (Gallagher, 2022). However, there is little research on how organizations actually communicate internally on mental health. According to Walden (2021), organizations have started recognizing the possibilities of using internal communication to promote employee wellbeing, and how information can be used to critically shape the wellbeing of employees. However, it needs to be noted that when technologies of the workplace can be used outside of workhours, it could contribute to burnout, as the boundaries between workplace and work-free places such as the

home of employees become blurred. Yet, Qin and Men (2022) found that during the pandemic, the wellbeing of employees was not directly influenced by internal communication. Instead, the research revealed that internal communication can contribute to building a trusting relationship with employees, which in return can lead to wellbeing, showing an indirect relationship between communication and wellbeing, mediated by trust. Nevertheless, communication between co-workers that is supportive and informative, offers advice, assistance and recognition directly influences mental health positively.

Qin and Men (2022) also note that to promote trust, and in return wellbeing, organizations need to focus on communication that is centered around employees and allows for two-way communication, where employees have the feeling that their employers value their concerns and interest. They state that organizations need to allocate resources, choose technologies and offer trainings to build a communication system which promotes openness, opportunities to listen, exchange and involvement between organizations and employees. To show care for the employees' wellbeing, organizations need to use communication to deliver information that is timely and relevant, reduces uncertainties by discussing emerging, serious issues, which leads to employees understanding how the organization is changing.

Additionally, research on life satisfaction, which includes wellbeing, and internal communication, reported a positive relationship between the constructs (Sinčić Ćorić, et al., 2020). Satisfaction with information communication and the overall communication climate are the main predictors for life satisfaction, hence wellbeing. According to the authors, this means that organizations need to improve internal communication channels and the communication atmosphere (Sinčić Ćorić, et al., 2020). Research by Coppens et al. (2023) revealed that in the workplace, there is a need for information and resources on four main topics around mental health. First, respondents of the research would welcome information on creating mentally healthy working conditions, followed by understanding factors that can lead to stress and burnout. Then, they would like to know how to establish policies about mentally healthy workplaces, and lastly skills that are needed or should be strengthened to uncover and deal with mental health problems. This research shows potential topics around mental health that should be communicated within the workplace.

Likewise, Kent et al. (2016) showed that strategic communication in the workplace for mental health includes multiple objectives, methods and channels. By conducting field research with experts, they noted that most communication objectives for workplace health promotion are educating and creating awareness around health and promoting and motivating employees for wellness programs and building trust. To build said trust, the research indicates that celebrating achievements and successes of employees or departments is an often-used strategy, included in their internal communications. Consistent messaging about the benefits of a healthy workplace culture is important. Their research also showed that different channels can be utilized, such as e-mails, newsletters, and intranet, to connect with employees on the topic. They note that for reaching younger generations, social media and using game-like environments to engage can be successful.

Additionally, Kent et al. (2016) revealed that using either co-workers or other peers, such as advocates for wellbeing and wellness, are more suitable for communication and generally are better received than corporate emails from the organization, as they appear more relatable and personal. Similar to Qin and Men (2022), Kent (2016) also emphasizes the need for two-way communication. Organizations need to collect feedback and insights from their target audiences to learn about their attitudes, interests, needs and barriers to improving overall health in the workplace. According to best practices of the research, besides top-down communication such as newsletters, having feedback channels such as roundtables, surveys or meetings are important to improving any health-related programs in the workplace (Kent et al., 2016).

Lastly, communication campaigns about mental health can also encourage improved wellbeing of employees. These can include explaining the benefits an organization has to offer for mental health resources, and how to access them, or also communication from leadership roles on their own struggles with mental health or stress. This can counteract stigma around mental health and encourage employees to discuss their personal issues (Bolt, 2023). For example, biotechnology company 'Roche' introduced an internal mental health campaign with videos of senior leaders, talking about their own mental health. These videos were published on the company's intranet with the title '#LetsTalk'. In addition, the company also produced videos in which chosen '*Mental Health Champions*', trained to raise awareness of mental health, talked

about their experiences as well (Greenwood & Krol, 2020). Zambito (2023) adds that organizations need to have open and steady communication at all times, good or bad, to establish a feeling of community and safety. Different channels, programs and opportunities should reassure employees that they are of value, safety and can receive assistance when needed.

Part II: Empirical Study

4. Methodology

Following the theoretical framework and existing literature, the significance of the study is explained, as well as the research question this study aims to answer. This next part also delivers the methodological approach used for the research, and consequently how the data is collected, along with its sample size. Before the data is presented in the following chapter, this chapter explains the data analysis tools and methods used, and any considerations such as ethics, validity and reliability that should be noted.

4.1 Significance of the Study

Mental health in the workplace has become an increasingly important topic in recent years, as it has an immense impact on employee wellbeing, productivity and organizational performance (Taubman & Parikh, 2023). Thus, organizations are utilizing their internal communication department to address mental health concerns of employees, promote workplace programs regarding mental health, and educate on wellbeing through different strategies and channels (Kent et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the theoretical framework revealed that organizations often do not acknowledge the expectations and preferences of their employees, and thus fail to achieve their goals of supporting mental health in the workplace (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). Yet this is critical, as the mental wellbeing of employees is closely intertwined with employee engagement (Kundi et al., 2021; Lu et al., 2016). The technology industry, known for high-pressure work environments, often shows employees struggling with mental health issues (Bryant, 2023). For that reason, it is essential, especially in this industry, to communicate about mental health and ensure employees' wellbeing.

Likewise, Generation Z, those born between the late 1990's and beginning of 2000's, are increasingly struggling with mental health disorders such as anxiety and depression (Arora et al., 2022; Coe et al. 2023; Grelle et al. 2023). As they are still in the early stages of their careers, it offers organizations the opportunity to listen to these new employees on what they expect from their employer. They are already known for their new perspectives, preferences and expectations regarding work, communication, and wellbeing. Generation Z employees value mental health support from their employer (Deloitte, 2023) and a good work-life balance, while seeking transparent, supportive communication from their employers (Racolța-Paina & Irini,

2021; Silva et al., 2023). Research on this generation is limited, as is the experience of organizations in handling this generation. Given the importance of internal communication, the topic of mental health and its impact on this specific industry, and the value Generation Z puts on wellbeing, it shows the significance of this study and a clear research gap to be filled. Additionally, based on the earlier delivered theoretical framework, it can be assumed that there is currently a gap between the existing strategies in internal communication and the needs of this generation.

By investigating this topic, the study aims to contribute to new practical insights in the field of internal communication, mental health in the workplace, while specifically focusing on Generation Z employees in the German⁶ technology industry.

4.2 Research Question and Goals

Based on the significance explained, the main question to be answered by this research is the following:

"How can internal communication strategies be affected by the mental health needs of Generation Z employees in the technology industry in Germany?"

The main aim of this study is to investigate how internal communication strategies are influenced by the mental health needs of Generation Z employees in the technology sector in Germany. This is because the literature review revealed that internal communication strategies, including the choice of channels, should be based on employees' preferences (Welch, 2011, 2012). Additionally, it was also explained that employees often feel a lack of support or initiatives from their employer when it comes to mental health support in the workplace (Coppens et al., 2023). Therefore, the research aims to provide practical recommendations for technology companies in Germany, by examining current practices and also understanding the expectations of Generation Z, to adequately address and engage Generation Z through their

⁶ Germany was chosen due to the researcher's nationality and professional network.

internal communication on the topic of mental health. Accordingly, multiple research goals can be formulated:

1. To investigate current internal communication practices in the technology industry regarding mental health to build employee engagement amongst Generation Z.

This research goal aims at uncovering how internal communication about mental health takes place in the technology industry, as the literature review showed that mental health is a topic that is often communicated, while also being an important topic in the technology industry. Yet, how exactly organizations are communicating is often unknown. As internal communication and employee engagement are closely linked (Karanges et al, 2015; Welch, 2011, 2012), the research aims to uncover how internal communication on this topic can contribute to or hinder employee engagement among Generation Z employees from the organizational point of view.

2. To understand Generation Z's needs and preferences for internal communication and workplace initiatives on mental health and how these needs and expectations are currently met.

This goal emphasizes the need to understand the perspectives of Generation Z employees regarding internal communication practices related to mental health. The research aims to explore their satisfaction, attitudes and perceptions of existing internal communication efforts. The literature review identified that Generation Z has unique characteristics and communication preferences (Hee and Yi, 2023; Janssen & Cardini, 2021; Kick et al., 2015; Šakytė-Statnickė et al., 2023). Hence, the goal is to also examine if their needs and preferences regarding internal communication and workplace initiatives on mental health are met, or if this generation is expecting other approaches and strategies from their employer.

3. To uncover gaps between current internal communication strategies and the mental health needs and attitudes of Generation Z.

As stated, Generation Z is a very unique generation, and it can be assumed that there is currently a gap between existing internal communication strategies and the mental health needs and attitudes of Generation Z employees. By uncovering these gaps, the research can identify areas of improvements or adjustments in the internal communication strategies of technology organizations in Germany.

4. To contribute with practical suggestions on how to better meet Generation Z employees' mental health needs by creating internal communication strategies in the German technology industry.

This goal emphasizes the practical implications of the research findings. It aims to provide recommendations for creating internal communication strategies related to mental health based on the needs of Generation Z employees in the German technology industry.

4.3 Method

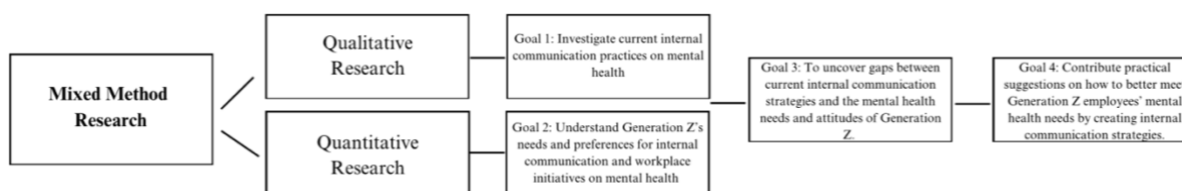
A mixed approach is used to “explore diverse perspectives and uncover relationships that exist between the intricate layers of our multifaceted research questions” (Shorten & Smith, 2017, p. 2). Hence the method most suitable for this research is a mixed method approach, due to the comparative nature of the question. When using mixed methods, both qualitative and quantitative research is conducted. This has the advantage of getting a better understanding of the relationship between the different types of data collected (Shorten & Smith, 2017). This research also follows a concurrent embedded strategy. Using this strategy, the researcher conducts both methods at the same time, which can save overall time in the typically lengthy research process of mixed methods (Creswell, 2009; Dawadi et al., 2021). The concurrent embedded strategy is also characterized by giving priority to one method over the other, as the secondary method might have a different research question or is supporting the main method. This is done so that research results can be presented either by comparing them or presenting

them side by side. Often, this method is also used when the research wants to study different groups, e.g. employees through one method and managers through another (Creswell, 2009). Given these characteristics and approach used with the concurrent embedded strategy, it suits the research goals, comparative nature and study groups of this dissertation very well.

Thus, overall primary data was collected through a main quantitative survey and secondary qualitative expert interviews as part of the embedded strategy. First, the survey gathered data from the target audience of Generation Z, to understand their expectations, experiences and attitudes regarding workplace communication on the topic mental health. Shortly after, while the survey was still collecting data, interviews were held with internal communication experts, to uncover internal communication practices and strategies around mental health. This is not typical for concurrent strategies, however conducting the interviews shortly after the survey was published allowed to integrate preliminary results of the survey and therefore create and adjust the questions and input during the interviews. This concurrent embedded strategy can be connected to the research goals explained earlier, and an overview of this research approach can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Research Approach



4.4 Survey

4.4.1 Design

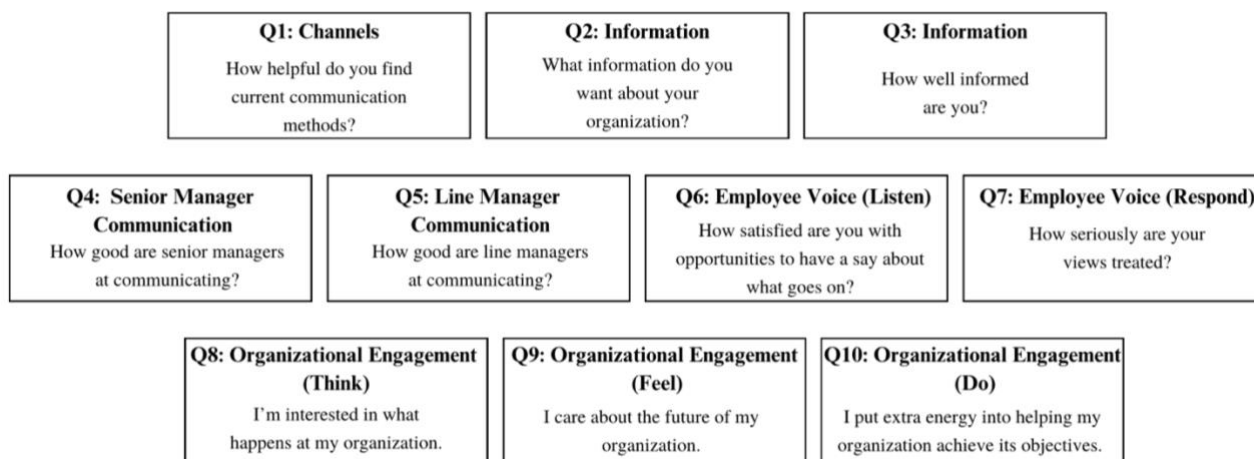
The survey collects data from Generation Z on the topic of internal communication, more specifically what information, strategies and initiatives this generation is encountering and wishes to encounter regarding the topic of mental health in their respective organizations operating in the technology industry. As mentioned above, the goal of the research is to uncover the current attitudes of this generation when it comes to mental health in the workplace, what

expectations this generation has when it comes to internally communicating and engaging around mental health, and their satisfaction with current efforts of their respective organizations.

To design the survey, the ICQ10 survey by Ruck (2022) was used as a guideline. This survey was selected as it provides a structured approach to gather feedback in organizations regarding internal communication and organizational engagement. The survey asks employees ten questions: (1) their preferred communication channels, (2) the information they might find interesting and (3) their knowledge of certain topics, (4) communication from senior managers and (5) their direct manager, (6) if employees are able to have a say and (7) if their voice is heard, and lastly their (8-10) organizational engagement, as seen in Figure 5 below (Ruck, 2022).

Figure 5

ICQ10 Survey Questions



Note. Own illustration adapted from ICQ10: Ten questions for Internal Communications, Surveys., K. Ruck., 2022, PR Academy (<https://pracademy.co.uk/insights/icq10-ten-questions-for-internal-communication-and-organisational-engagement/>). Copyright by Kevin Ruck.

These survey questions align with the majority of components of the theoretical framework presented earlier; however, the survey designed by Ruck (2022) is not used to gather feedback regarding a certain topic of internal communication. To better suit the research goals, the survey by Ruck has been adapted and customized in its questions, aligning with the topics

of mental health, internal communication and employee engagement, as well as other components considered relevant from the theoretical framework. For example, the survey by Ruck focuses on both line manager communication and senior manager communication, yet this research wanted to explore the internal communication department and their efforts from the point of view of Generation Z, rather than their attitudes towards senior manager communication. In addition, as one of the research goals is also to understand Generation Z's satisfaction, respondents were also mainly asked about their satisfaction with such as channels, information, and communication. Also, Generation Z often has a low attention span (McCrinkle, 2014; Munsch, 2021), therefore, they were also asked about how frequently they receive information, and how often they would like to in order for them to not feel overwhelmed and also hold their attention.

This adaption of the ICQ10 framework led to a survey consisting of 32 questions, including demographic questions, and sub-questions where needed. Most of the questions were quantitative, closed questions with multiple choice options based on the theoretical framework, or five-point Likert-scale questions for satisfaction or agreements. When being asked about frequency, a six-point Likert scale was used to offer more variety and options for frequency. As it is the case with this research, Likert scales are often used when measuring attitudes and values, and it can be continuously used in the questionnaire (Johns, 2010). Open-ended questions were used to gather additional information from the participants to gain a deeper understanding of expectations. The demographic information of the participants was gathered through questions about their age and working industry, to ensure the right audience participated in the survey. All questions and their scales from the survey can be found in Appendix A.

4.4.2 Data Collection and Sample

The survey was designed using Qualtrics, an online survey platform, as it allows for quick and easy data collection of large sample sizes as well as data presentation. The survey was available for nine weeks, from March 29th, 2024, to June 3rd, 2024. The survey included a short information text on the topic of the survey, while also specifying the criteria to participate in the survey, such as age, employment and location. Participants were also informed of the approximate duration of seven minutes to complete the survey. Initially, this duration was an

estimate from both the researcher and proposal duration of the program Qualtrics itself. After collecting first responses, this time was proven to be right.

According to statistics, around 14% of the population in Germany is Generation Z. This makes a total population of Generation Z of around 12 million people in Germany (Statista Research Department, 2024). However, not all of these Generation Z are working, as statistics show that 10% of Generation Z are currently not employed (Graefe, 2024). In addition, there are no statistics available that show how many of this Generation Z population are employed in the technology industry. However, in 2023, the total IT industry in Germany, across all generations, had over 1 million employees. Regardless, given the total population of 12 million Generation Z, and the number of total employees in this industry, the subsequent sample size is rather large. During the time of the survey being available, a total sample size of 192 answers were gathered, out of which 107 participants fit the criteria and finished the survey.⁷ If survey participants did not meet the criteria, their answers cannot be considered, and they were not able to answer the survey questions. The 192 participants were recruited by sharing the survey on networking platforms, forums and the researcher's network, e.g. work group chats of more than 250 employees at or under the age of 30.

As participants of the survey have to be part of Generation Z, as well as have experience working in the technology industry, the sampling technique used can be described as purposive sampling, as "a purposive sample is the one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study" (Andrade, 2021, p. 87). As mentioned earlier, demographic questions are asked first to ensure the right sample. Purposive sampling offers the advantage that the researcher can study only people of interest, however purposive sampling also limits validity of the study (Andrade, 2021). As purposive sampling and the above recruiting process proved itself to be rather difficult, snowball sampling was also used. Snowball sampling is a technique normally utilized for qualitative research and is also more of a convenience sampling method in which more participants are recruited through those who have already participated (Naderifar et al., 2017). Given the information text and clear instructions on who can participate in the survey, this sampling method was also chosen, hoping to avoid non-sample participants.

⁷ The next sub-chapter, data analysis, will cover more information on the participants and included responses.

4.4.1 Data Analysis

The data, which was collected through the platform Qualtrics, was exported in order to be able to use and analyze the data with the software SPSS. As mentioned earlier, a total number of 192 participants was gathered, while 159 participants matched the criteria, and 107 participants both matched the criteria and completed the survey. This means that almost 50 participants dropped out before completing the survey. To present the data in the results chapter, descriptive statistics as a data analysis method was used. Descriptive statistics summarizes important aspects of the data and most often, frequencies are used to present data either in percentages or numbers (Greasley, 2007).

After exporting all the data and uploading it to SPSS, the data was adjusted to include only the 107 participants previously mentioned. Furthermore, in order for SPSS to present the correct descriptive statistics, the measure section of the program was adequately set to ‘nominal’ for multiple choice questions and ‘ordinal’ for Likert-scale questions. This is needed as the survey contained these two different types of survey questions. Finally, the frequencies were analyzed using the descriptive statistics analysis of the program, measuring the ‘mode’ of answers, which is used to find the most frequent answers, from lowest to highest (Bhandari, 2023).

4.5 Expert Interviews

4.5.1 Design

For the qualitative part of this mixed method research, individual, face-to-face expert interviews are held. Interviews are one of the most common qualitative data collection methods (Jamshed, 2014). Interviews are useful when looking for specific details and insights from individuals (Gil et al., 2008). As part of this research, the interviews collect data from experts in the technology industry, and investigates how internal communication is used to communicate about mental health to Generation Z. The interviews are semi-structured, meaning that the questions asked are based on a guide, and questions are not asked in a particular order. Instead, questions can be asked and adapted based on the participant’s answer, allowing for more flexibility and exploratory results (George, 2023).

Semi-structured interviews often follow a pre-determined theoretical framework (George, 2023). Therefore, to design interview questions, the framework presented earlier on internal communication and employee engagement by Davadoorst and Javadi (2019) is used. The framework was chosen as it provides an overview of important aspects in planning and strategizing internal communications within organizations, ultimately leading to employee engagement. To be able to draw a comparison between the expectations of Generation Z and the reality of current strategies, the questions also have to align with the survey questions and the topic of mental health. Overall, the interview guide consists of personal questions about their person and job first, followed by six open-ended, structured questions that are asked to each participant in no particular order, as well as potential follow-up questions, given the semi-structured nature. The interview guide with questions can be found in Appendix B. Additionally, the interview also included preliminary results from the survey, e.g. Generation Z not wanting to discuss mental health with their employer, which was communicated to participants where it fit their input and answers.

4.5.2 Data Collection and Sample

To collect the data, interviews were held with chosen experts. Therefore, the sampling technique again can be described as purposive sampling, as the participants needed to have sufficient knowledge and experience on the topic of mental health in the workplace and internal communication, as well as needing to work in a technology organization that is located in Germany. Initially, participants were expected to work in organizations with a significant percentage of Generation Z employees. However, after contacting ten people of organizations with a large Generation Z base and either not hearing back or being rejected, this criterion was disregarded. Instead, a sample of seven participants was gathered through mainly personal contacts, fitting the main criterion mentioned above. Still, these organizations have Generation Z employees, with all of them offering opportunities such as internships, part-time work for students or study programs within the organizations.

This sample consisted of experts with positions in corporate, internal, change, and employee communications, as well as marketing and human resources, since internal communication can fall within those departments, as explained earlier. As questions are related

to mental health, a wellbeing coach was also included. All participants possessed work experience of five or more years in those fields to be called an expert. The companies were a mix of German organizations and international organizations. This decision was made as the technology and IT industry in Germany has many international companies operating in Germany (Scheuerer & Pfliegl, 2023). However, participants that were interviewed had to be responsible for the German part of the international organizations or, if they held a Europe wide position, were only asked about the German part of the organization.

The seven interviews were conducted either in English or German, depending on the participants' nationalities. As most of them were located in Germany, the interviews were done via the online meeting platforms Webex or Microsoft Teams. The interviews were conducted between April 16th and May 2nd, with the survey having been online for a couple of weeks to include preliminary input where appropriate. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes, depending on the availability of the interviewee as well as depth of sharing information and follow-up questions due to the semi-structured approach.

Before the interview took place, participants were sent a consent form, which also included information about the research itself, such as research questions and goals of the interview. Through the form, participants consented to the interviews being recorded and transcribed for non-public research purposes. Participants were also given the opportunity to anonymize their persona as well as their organizational information such as job title and company name in case of company policies, as they were also asked about internal information, e.g. initiatives and mental health information provided, of the company. Table 4 below delivers an overview of interview participants and their information such as company and title where possible, otherwise anonymized, and date and duration of interviews.

Table 4
Interview Participants

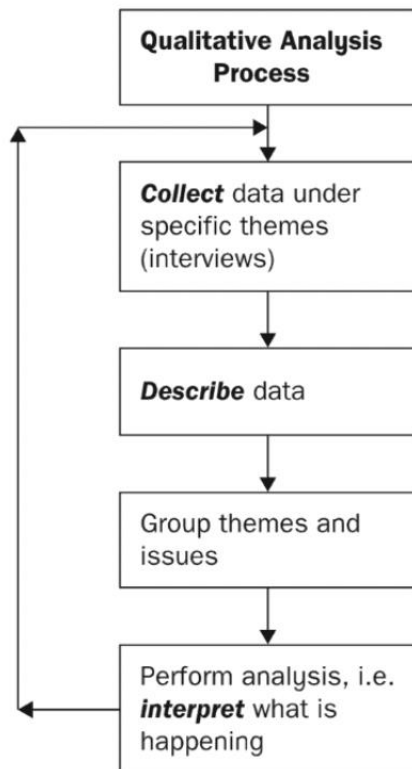
Name/Identification	Title	Company	Date and Duration
	Internal		
AA	Communication Manager Germany Director Corporate	Atos Tech Foundation	16.4 – 25 min
Johanna Fritz	Communications EMEA Central	ServiceNow	17.4 – 45 min
CC	HR Specialist	Anonymous: Technology and services provider	19.4 – 30 min
Lena Peller	HR Team/People Consultant, Wellbeing Lead	Cisco	23.4 – 35 min
NN	Internal Communication Manager	Anonymous: German system integrator and managed service provider	24.4 – 35 min
MM	Marketing Manager	Anonymous: Software communication company	2.5 – 25 min
LL	Head of Change, Marketing & Communications, Public Affairs Germany	Anonymous: Technology services and IT consulting company	2.5 – 30 min

4.5.3 Data Description and Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the interviews took place through meeting platforms such as Webex or Teams and were therefore automatically recorded and transcribed. However, as with any automatic program, these transcripts had to be reviewed and corrected where needed due to mistakes made by the program, as well as translated from German to English for consistency in the analysis process. The transcripts of each individual interview can be found in Appendix C. Biggam's (2015) qualitative analysis process suggest that firstly, the data should be collected based on specific themes. As this research used a theoretical framework for interview questions, the data was collected under the themes of the framework. The next step in the process is describing the data, as seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Qualitative Analysis Process



Note. From *Succeeding With Your Master's Dissertation: A Step-By-Step Handbook*, by J. Biggam, 2015, McGraw-Hill Education. Copyright 2025 McGraw-Hill Education.

The data description summarizes the topics and themes discussed during the interviews (Biggam, 2015). The first interview focused primarily on general health, and how the communication is mainly part of the human resources department. Mental health was the least discussed in this interview, as it was stated that it is not a priority, and the focus is on overall health. The second interview discussed in great detail what channels and initiatives can be found in the company about mental health. In this interview, examples of internal communication channels and texts were shown. Similar to the first interview, the third interview also focused mainly on health, and the offers the company has for their employees, as well as what role management has in terms of providing support for their employees. The fourth interview discussed in great detail the initiatives and workshops for employees and managers that are offered, and the importance of creating a culture of acceptance and support. In the fifth interview, the main topics discussed were channels, the main aspects discussed were channels, specific campaign examples as well as Generation Z specifics. The sixth interview mainly discussed the different types of information shared. The seventh interview covered all concepts, including strategy, channels, information, and initiatives, in great detail.

Following the initial description, the English transcripts of the interviews were uploaded in the coding software MAXQDA to be coded and grouped under themes, which is the next step in the data analysis process. Coding is a qualitative data analysis method, where the researcher divides collected data, such as texts, into different categories. Each category is then assigned a word or term indicating what topic the participant talked about in the interview (Creswell, 2009). This means that e.g. in this research, if an interview participant talked about the channels that are used to communicate internally about mental health, this specific part of the transcript is assigned the term '*channel*'. Besides assigning the codes to sentences or words next to the transcript text, different colours for each code can also be assigned to sort and organize the information based on the different codes (Creswell, 2009).

Different coding methods exist and can be differentiated between inductive and deductive coding. Inductive coding describes the process in which themes are assigned based on the data collected. Deductive coding, on the other hand, uses codes that are predetermined by previous research, knowledge or the interview guideline (Schreier, 2012). According to Creswell (2009), the most common coding approach is to use codes that emerge from the data collection.

However, when using deductive coding, most often a codebook or table of codes is developed to have a list of codes at hand (Creswell, 2009).

To analyze the interview data, both inductive and deductive coding methods were used. These deductive codes were assigned after the first initial read through of the transcripts. Four deductive codes were assigned based on the interview framework by Davadoorst and Javadi (2019), while the remaining five deductive codes were assigned based on interview questions asked as well as the theoretical framework presented in the earlier part of the thesis. Afterwards, inductive, sub-categorical codes were assigned based on the main deductive codes, e.g. looking at the deductive code of ‘*channels*’ again, inductive sub-categorical codes assigned were the individual channels such as Email, social media or others. All of the assigned themes can be seen in Table 5. A total of 396 codes were assigned.

Table 5

Deductive and Inductive Codes

Code	Type of Code	Source
1. Influence on Strategy	Deductive	Interview question
2. Channels Used	Deductive	Davadoorst and Javadi (2019)
2.1 Offline Channels		
2.2 Social Media		
2.3 Meetings/Events		
2.4 Chatbot		
2.5 Newsletter		
2.6 Chats	Inductive,	Interview
2.7 Calendar Invite	sub-categories	transcripts
2.8 Email		
2.9 Intranet/SharePoint/ Information Platform		
3. Other Initiatives for Mental Health	Deductive	Theoretical Framework

4. Communication and Content Shared with Employees	Deductive	Davadoorst and Javadi (2019)
4.1 Topic: Stress		
4.2 Topic: Burnout		
4.3 Topic: Resilience		
4.4 Topic: Becoming strong		
4.5 Topic: Care		
4.6 Communication Objective: Take Advantage of Offers	Inductive, sub-categories	Interview transcripts
4.7 Communication Objective: Raise Awareness		
4.8 Communication Objective: Educate Employees		
4.9 Type: Articles/Blogs		
5. Specific Campaigns for Mental Health	Deductive	Theoretical Framework
5.1 Wellbeing Week/Month	Inductive, sub-category	Interview transcripts
6. Frequency of Communication	Deductive	Davadoorst and Javadi (2019)
7. Feedback Possibilities	Deductive	Davadoorst and Javadi (2019)
7.1 Survey	Inductive, sub-categories	Interview transcripts
7.2 Direct Contact		
8. Managerial Support	Deductive	Theoretical Framework
9. Generation Z Specifics and Characteristics	Deductive	Theoretical Framework
10. Communication Style	Inductive	Interview transcripts
11. Technology Industry Characteristics	Inductive	Interview transcripts
12. Award: Great Place to Work	Inductive	Interview transcripts
13. Attitudes towards Mental Health	Inductive	Interview transcripts
13.1 Prioritizing Mental Health	Inductive, sub-categories	Interview transcripts
13.2 Importance of Mental Health		

4.6 Considerations

4.6.1 *Validity and Reliability*

Research and its results can be described as valid when it measured what it was supposed to measure (Middelton, 2023). Pilot testing is one method for ensuring qualitative validity (Creswell, 2009). The interview questions were pre-tested but not transcribed, with another fellow student researcher in both German and English to ensure accurate understanding of the questions, even for someone who is not an expert in the field. For the survey, a control question was asked to warrant that participants are paying attention, and to ultimately ensure validity. Control questions are asked to ensure quality control. In this case, participants were asked to select '*extremely happy*' at a later part in the survey, but normally control questions can also be related to the content or study itself (Thielsch & Hirschfeld, 2021). Although a handful of people did not respond correctly to the control question, after careful consideration and examination, their answers were still included in the results, as the remainder of their answers still provided valuable insights and results, according to the researcher. Reliability on the other hand defines the consistency or stability of results, and whether or not the same results could be reproduced with different samples, researchers or projects (Creswell, 2009). To ensure reliability, Middelton (2023) suggests planning data collection carefully, to ensure that methods are done consistently. Although interviews were done semi-structured, using the framework and interview guide allowed for questions to be asked consistently, in order to ensure reliability.

4.6.2 *Bias*

Whether it is qualitative or quantitative research, research brings mistakes and errors that can also influence the above-mentioned validity. Therefore, different forms of bias for different types of research need to be considered as well (Norris, 1997). Given the earlier stated number of participants that did not finish the survey, non-response bias is another one that is important to consider. Non-response bias means that those who responded to the survey, and those who did not or did not finish, might be different in terms of the answer that they have given. It would mean that the results could be different if everyone had finished the survey, and the results are therefore not representing the population accurately (Nikolopoulou, 2022). As described earlier, most of the interview participants were purposively chosen as they contain proficient knowledge

in the field of internal communication and mental health, while also coming from close contacts of the researcher. Considering this, self-selection bias could have also occurred. Self-selection bias describes how participants who voluntarily become part of the research could be different than those who do not participate (Costigan & Cox, 2001 as stated in Robinson, 2014). Specifically in interviews, this could lead to a sample of participants that show more interest, openness and patience. At the same time however, to ensure ethical research⁸, participation must always be voluntarily (Robinson, 2014).

4.6.3 Ethical Considerations

In any research project, it is crucial to consider ethical issues and follow ethical practices (Creswell, 2009). To protect participants' rights in both the survey and the interviews, all participants were informed that participation is voluntarily and confidential, and that their data is being collected and stored for research purposes only. Participants also gave their informed consent before taking part, by clicking "I consent" before starting the survey, while the interviewees were sent a consent form to sign before the interview took place.

⁸ Ethical considerations are discussed in the next sub-chapter.

5. Results

Following the data description and analysis, the following chapters will display the data results gathered from the quantitative survey and qualitative expert interviews, following the analysis methods explained earlier.

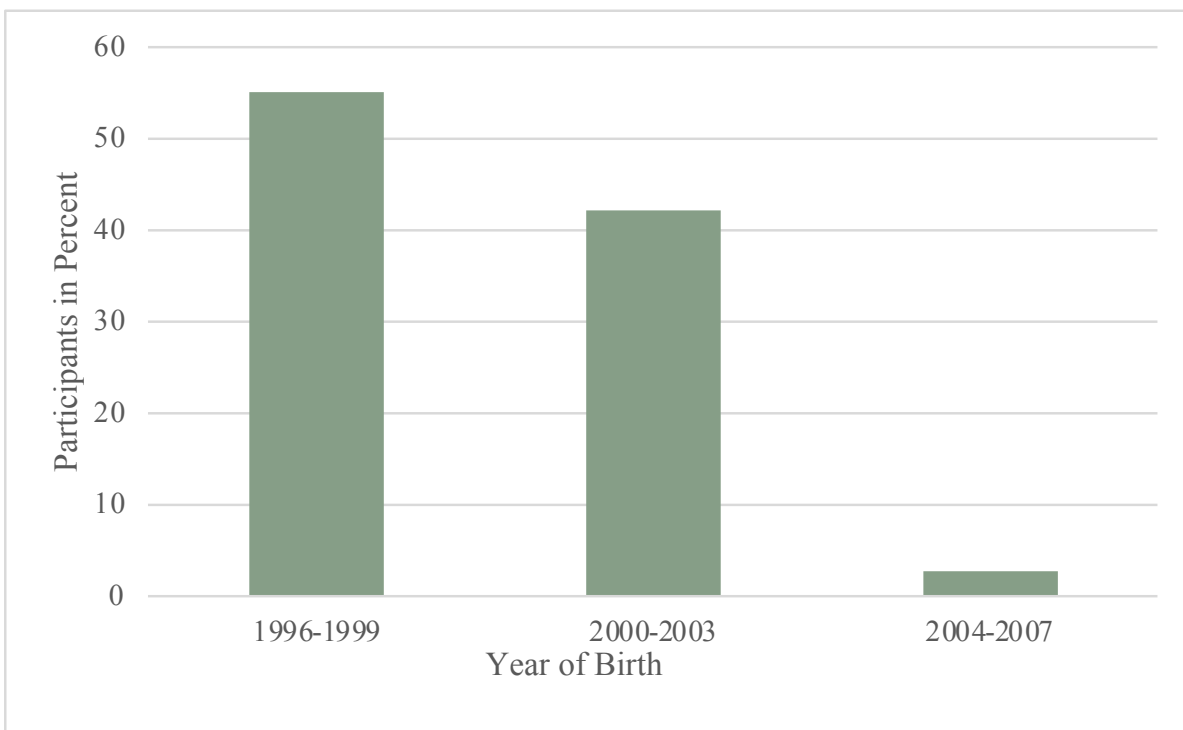
5.1 Survey Results

5.1.1. Demographics

The survey was completed by 107 participants (n=107) matching the criteria, as mentioned earlier. A majority of the participants are born between 1996 and 1999, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7

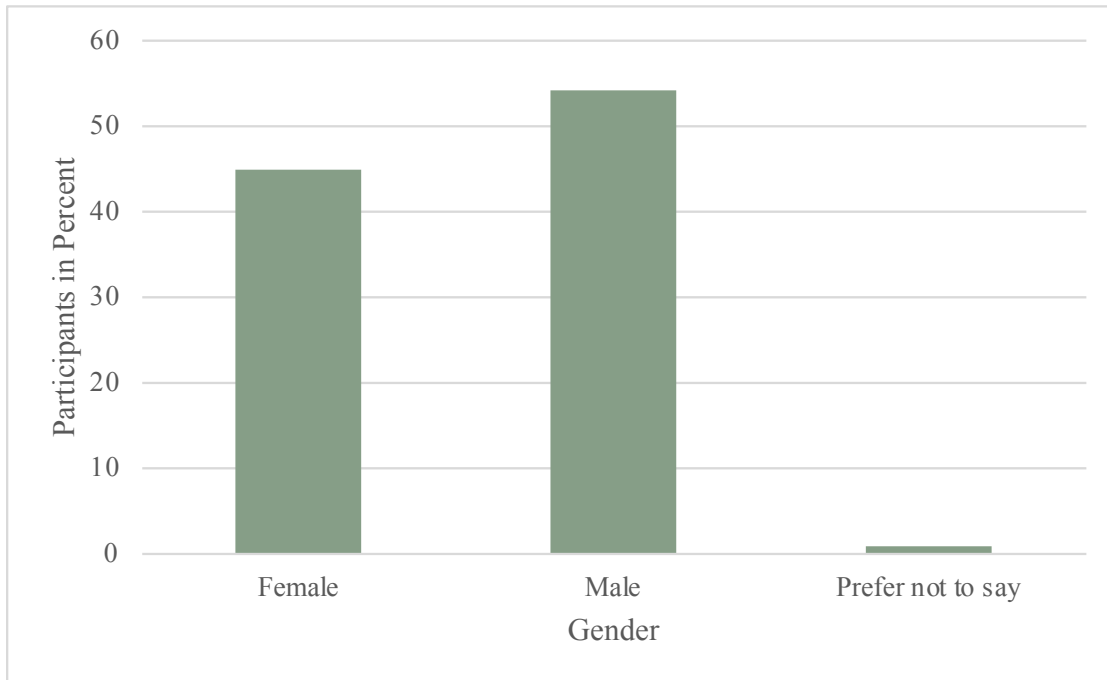
Birth Years of Participants



The demographic questions of the survey also revealed that most of the participants belong to the male gender, displayed in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Gender Distribution of Participants



When it comes to employment, 106 out of 107 participants (99%) are currently employment. In addition, 95 participants (88.8%) currently work in the technology and IT industry, with the remaining twelve participants (11.2%) having previously worked in the technology and IT industry. 78 participants (72.9%) work for organizations with more than 5000 employees, followed by 20 participants (18.7%) whose organization has between 100 and 500 employees, and lastly nine participants (8.4%) who work or worked in an organization with less than 100 employees.

5.1.2 Channels

The channels that are currently used in each organization for mental health communication are displayed in Table 6, showing the multiple-choice answers and how many participants selected each answer.

Table 6

Channels Used for Mental Health Communication

Channels	N	Percentage of Cases
Email	68	63.6
Intranet/SharePoint	60	56.1
Newsletter	58	54.2
Webinars	33	30.8
Team Meetings	33	30.8
Social Networks	23	21.5
Live Events	21	19.6
Blogs	15	14
I do not know of any channels	10	9.3
Info boards/Flyers in the office	9	8.4
Other	3	2.8

The channels that are being used by the organization almost aligns with the preferred channels by the Generation Z participants, as the survey revealed that newsletters (39 participants, 36.4%), Email (38 participants, 35.5%) and intranet (34 participants, 31.8%) are in fact the top three popular channels. This is followed by team meetings, which was selected by 32 participants (29.9%), webinars, selected by 22 participants (20.6%) and live events, selected by 20 participants (18.7%). The remaining channels are less popular.

Additionally, participants also selected channels that they would like their organization to use but is not currently using. The results are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Channels Currently Not Used

Channels	N	Percentage of Cases
Live Events	31	29
Team Meetings	24	22.4
Internal Apps	21	19.6
Social Networks	20	18.7
Blogs	15	14
Webinars	15	14
Info boards/Flyers in the office	15	14
Other	13	12.1
Email	10	9.3
Intranet/SharePoint	7	6.5
Newsletter	6	5.6

5.1.3 Initiatives

Participants were able to select multiple options of initiatives that are currently offered in their organizations, with the following results in Table 8.

Table 8

Initiatives Offered

Initiatives	N	Percentage of Cases
Flexible Working Conditions	79	73.8
Fitness challenges	51	47.7
Time-Off	49	45.8
Workshops	34	31.8
Resource websites about Mental Health	34	31.8
Access to Gym Facilities	33	30.8
Trainings on mental health and how to deal with it	33	30.8
Treatment options (e.g. therapist)	16	15
I do not know of any initiatives	14	13.1
Mental Health Apps	11	10.3
"No Meeting" Days	10	9.3
Reimbursement programs (for example for massages)	9	8.4
Other	5	4.7

Based on these, participants also selected which initiatives they have already used. The most commonly used initiative is ‘flexible working conditions’, selected by 51 participants (47.7%). The second most common answer was ‘I have not used any initiatives that are offered’, which was selected by 22 participants (20.6%). ‘Fitness challenges’ have been used by 20 participants (18.7%), while access to gym facilities was selected by 18 participants (16.8%), as well as ‘Time-Off’ by 16 participants (15%). The rest of initiatives showed small numbers of participants, between eleven and one.

Lastly concerning initiatives, the survey asked participants about the initiatives they would like to have in their organizations, but currently do not. The results from this part of the survey can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9

Initiatives Not Offered But Wanted

Initiatives	N	Percentage of Cases
Access to Gym Facilities	52	48.6
Reimbursement programs (for example for massages)	40	37.4
Trainings on mental health and how to deal with it	36	33.6
Treatment options (e.g. therapist)	36	33.6
"No Meeting" Days	33	30.8
Mental Health Apps	24	22.4
Time-Off	22	20.6
Workshops	21	19.6
Fitness challenges	20	18.7
Flexible Working Conditions	11	10.3
Resource Websites about Mental Health	5	4.7
Other	4	3.7

5.1.4 Satisfaction

The survey results showed that the majority of 42 participants (39.3%) are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the current channels their organization is using to communicate about mental health, with 39 participants (36.4%) being satisfied. Only a small amount of five participants are extremely dissatisfied (4.7%) or extremely satisfied (four participants, 3.7%). When it comes to initiatives, however, more people are extremely dissatisfied (seven

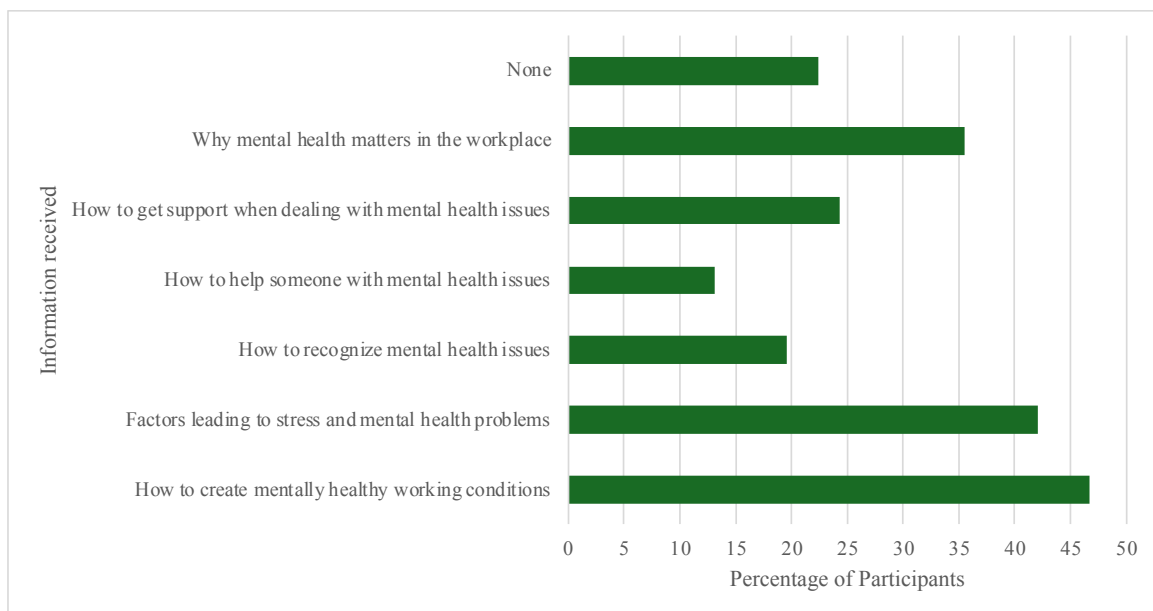
participants, 6.5%). Again, the majority of 38 participants (35.5%) is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Further, 23 participants (21.5%) are somewhat dissatisfied.

5.1.5 Information

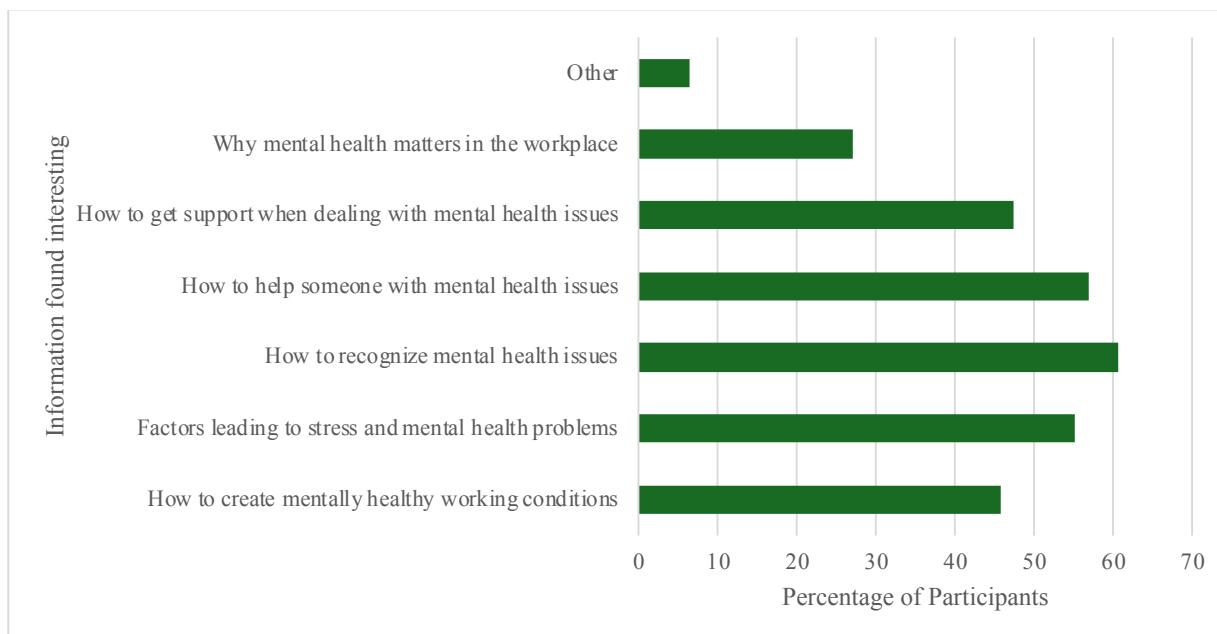
Participants were asked about the different information and topics they receive on mental health from their organization. Figure 9 shows the results from this multiple-choice question, revealing how many participants selected each answer.

Figure 9

Information Received on Mental Health



On the contrary, participants were also asked about what topic they find the most interesting. The results for this question are shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10*Topics Found Most Interesting*

When being asked about the amount of information they receive through their organization on the topic of mental health, the survey results indicate that most (43 participants, 40.2%) receive slightly too little information on mental health. 20 participants (18.7%) stated that they receive far too little. 36 participants (33.6%) again chose that they receive neither too much nor too little. Moreover, the survey showed that 34 participants (31.8%) somewhat disagree that they are well-informed about mental health resources and support within their organization. This is followed by 27 participants (25.2%) who somewhat agree, 22 (20.6%) who neither agree nor disagree and even 20 participants (18.7%) who strongly disagree.

When being asked about whether or not they feel well-informed on mental health through their organizations' communication, the survey showed that 33 participants (30.8%) again somewhat disagree with the statement. Second most selected was 'neither agree nor disagree', by 28 participants (26.2%). This statement revealed that while 21 participants (19.6%) strongly disagree, 20 participants (18.7%) strongly agree. Lastly, participants had to agree or disagree that they are well-informed on the impact on mental health on productivity and their workplace behavior. The results showed 33 participants (30.8%) somewhat agree, followed by 26

participants (24.3%) who neither agree nor disagree. 23 participants (21.5%) somewhat disagree, although 15 participants (14%) who even strongly agree. Lastly, 10 participants (9.3%) strongly disagree.

5.1.6 Frequency

In terms of frequency, according to the participants, the majority of 55 participants (51.4%) receive information on mental health every couple months. This is followed by 24 participants (22.4%) receiving information once a month, 12 (11.2%) who never receive any information and eight participants (7.5%) every two weeks. Only four participants (3.7%) receive it once a week. Likewise, when being asked about their preference in frequency, it showed that once a month is the most popular option (66 participants, 61.7%). More frequently is less popular, as every couple months was selected by 18 participants (16.8%), every two weeks selected by 13 people (12.1%), once a week by five people (4.7%) and daily by only one (0.9%).

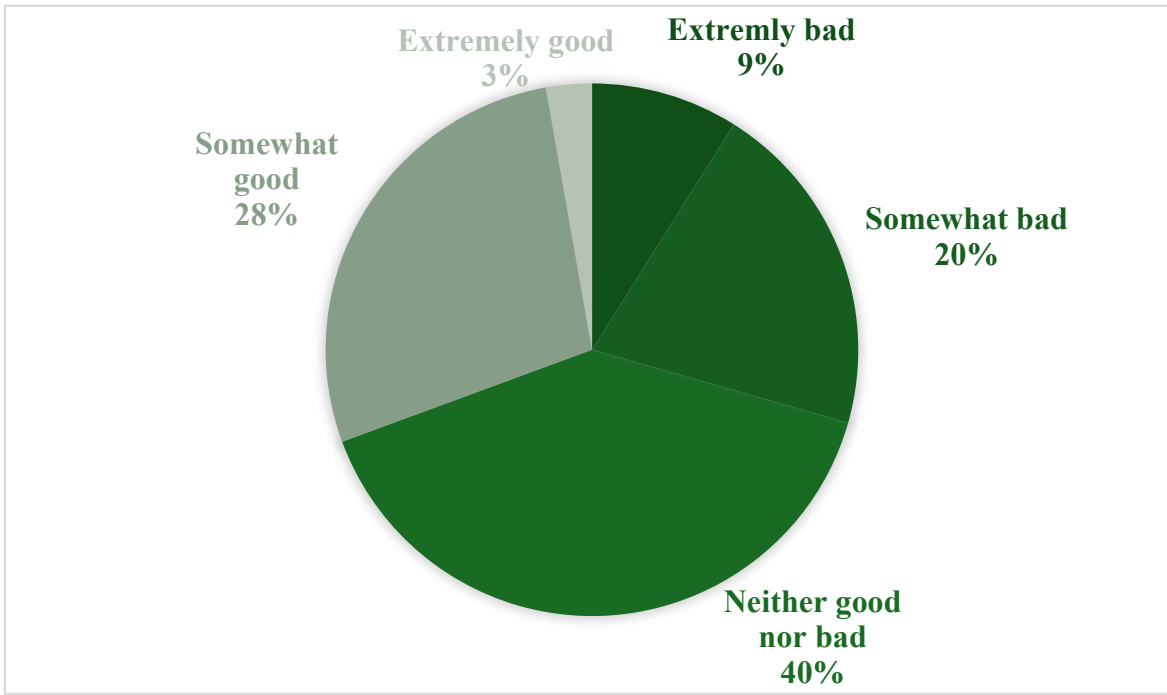
5.1.7 Communication

The majority of 40 participants (37.4%) neither agree or disagree that their communication department sufficiently addresses and understands the employees' mental health needs. This is followed by 24 people (22.4%) who disagree that the communication department does this sufficiently, and 18 (16.8%) somewhat agreeing and 17 who (15.9%) strongly disagree. Only eight participants (7.5%) strongly agree.

Additionally, Figure 11 shows the participants' ratings on the internal communication department in conveying the importance of mental health, which shows that besides "neither good nor bad", the majority of 30 participants (28%) believe them to be somewhat good.

Figure 11

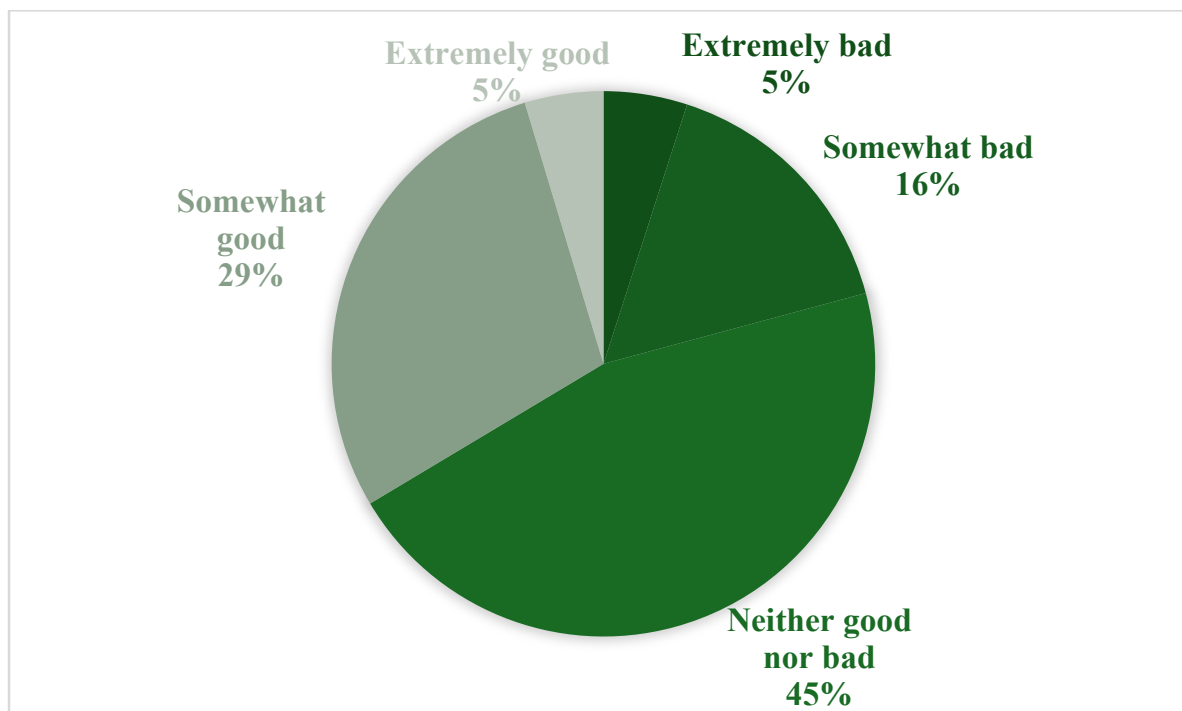
Rating of Internal Communication Department on Importance of Mental Health



The survey also asked participants about the rating they would give their internal communication department when it comes to encouraging sharing and interaction among employees. It was revealed that the majority neither finds it good or bad (49 participants, 45.8%), and 31 participants (29%) find it somewhat good, while 17 participants (15.6%) also believe it to be ‘somewhat bad’, amongst other results as shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Rating on Encouraging Sharing and Interaction



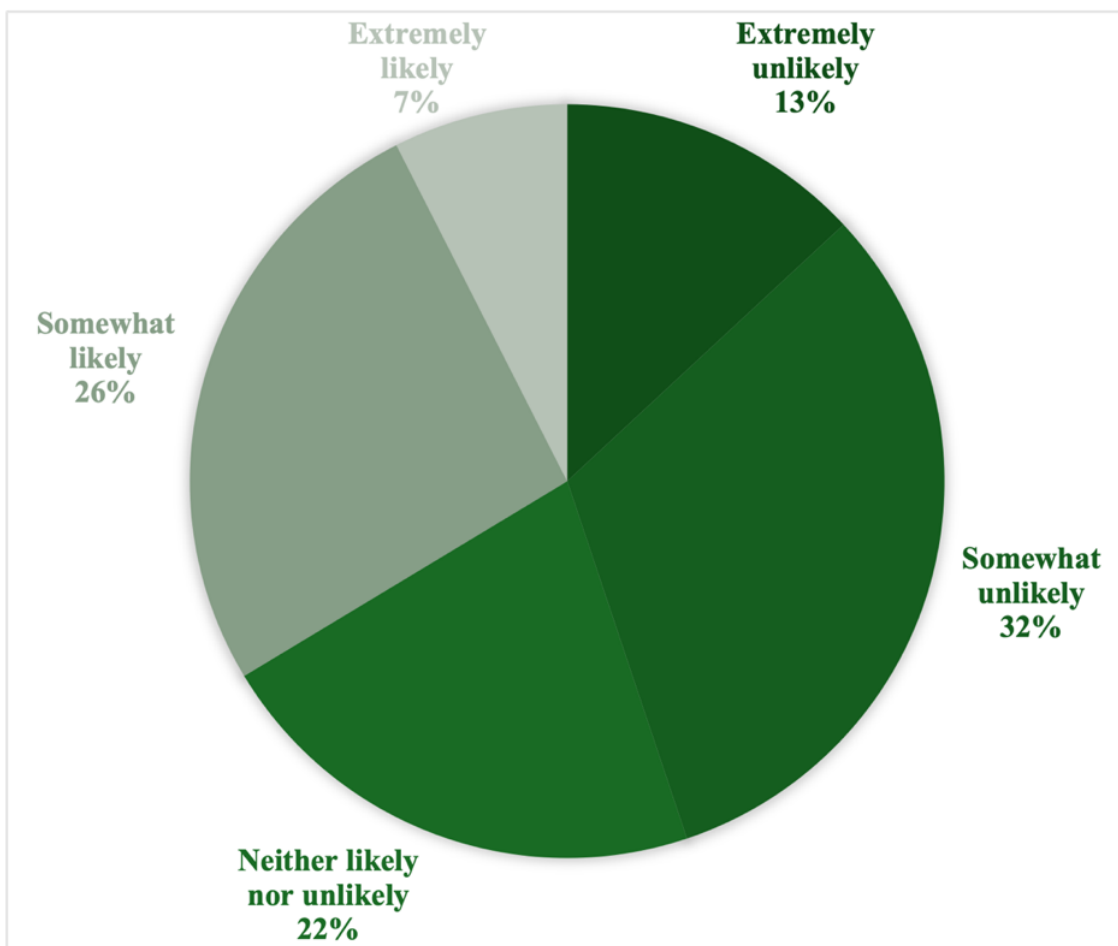
When participants were asked about their manager's communication as well as ability to address and support mental health needs, the survey showed that most (32 participants, 29.9%) believe their manager has somewhat good communication about mental health concerns and the availability of resources. At the same time, 24 participants (22.4%) believe their manager to be somewhat bad, and 13 (12.1%) even believe their manager is extremely bad. More importantly, eleven participants (10.3%) believe their manager to be extremely good. Furthermore, the results showed 32 participants (29.9%) somewhat disagree that their manager has sufficient knowledge and information on mental health to support their employees, while at the same time 31 participants (29%) somewhat agree. Strongly disagreeing are eleven participants (10.3%), but nine participants (8.4%) strongly agree. The remaining 24 participants (22.4%) neither agree nor disagree.

5.1.8 Employee Voice

When being asked about the likeliness of providing feedback on their own mental health and wellbeing, the majority of 34 participants (32%) said they are somewhat unlikely to disclose to their organization how they are feeling. On the contrary, 28 participants (26%) believe they are somewhat likely to provide feedback, as seen in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13

Likeliness of Providing Feedback



The survey also showed that 31 participants (29%) are very rarely given the opportunity to provide input on mental health policies and initiatives. 29 participants (27.1%) rarely get the option to do so, followed by 21 participants (19.6%) who occasionally provide input. Yet, ten participants (9.3%) never get this opportunity. 14 participants (13.1%) are given this opportunity frequently, with two participants (1.9%) even very frequently. At the same time, 35 participants (32.7%) feel that their mental health-related feedback is taken into consideration by their organization. 26 participants (24.3%) feel that this is rarely the case, as well as 16 participants (15%) very rarely experience this, with 15 participants (14%) never feeling this way. Ten participants (9.3%) and five (4.7%) feel this way frequently, with the latter feeling this way very frequently.

5.1.9 Employee Engagement

The most popular answer when being asked about whether or not their organization prioritizes mental health communication for employees was ‘somewhat disagree’, which was selected by 35 participants (32.7%). The second most popular answer was ‘neither agree nor disagree’, selected by 30 participants (28%). While 20 participants (18.7%) somewhat agree that mental health communication is prioritized, 17 participants (15.9%) strongly disagree. The smallest number of five participants (4.7%) strongly agree. The 35 and 17 participants who did not agree in some ways were additionally asked why they believe so. It was revealed that many do not receive communication on this topic, or that it is not communicated frequently, while some also note that it gets drowned in other communication or that other topics are perceived to be more important. Some of the more detailed answers include:

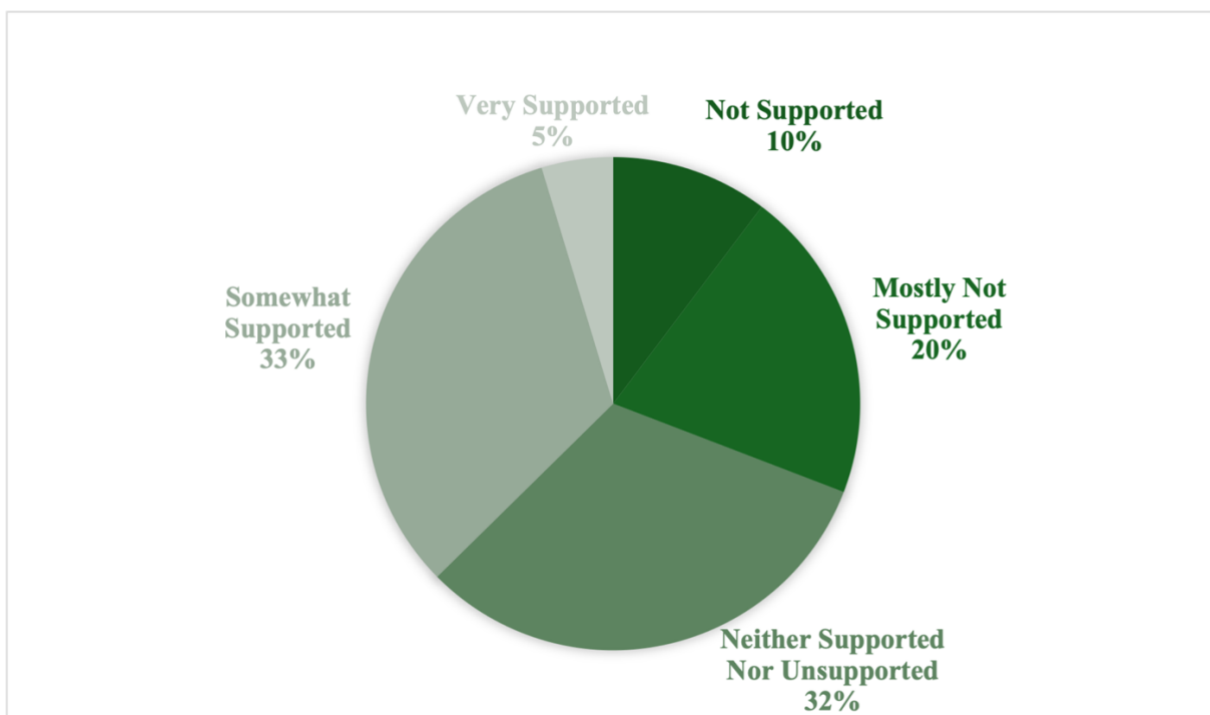
1. They don't listen to feedback or concerns from their employees, they seem to fake that they're concerned about mental health of their employees to make themselves look better.
2. Not enough initiatives, mainly connect to physical health or only focus on top level understanding and only using buzzwords like "work-life-balance" without going into details or providing resources.

3. The things that are communicated are most of the time the default ones. If you are having problems, tell somebody about it - don't overdue yourself - etc.. Nothing dedicated for this workplace specifically. Additionally, the work atmosphere the company creates does not actively prevent issues about mental health.
4. Most of the time it is about how bad mental health affects productivity and not about "how we can help each other and solve problems". Feels like "we need you to feel good, so you are better to us" and not as if the company is really interested in how I am as a person.
5. The organization shares their interest in mental health, when it is "mental health day" or other similar to promote the image externally. There are no trainings provided for our line manager to be well informed and use this information on initiatives to help their employees.

Considering this feedback, almost 33% of participants feel somewhat supported by their workplace in terms of mental health resources, while 10.3 % also feel not supported, as seen in Figure 14.

Figure 14

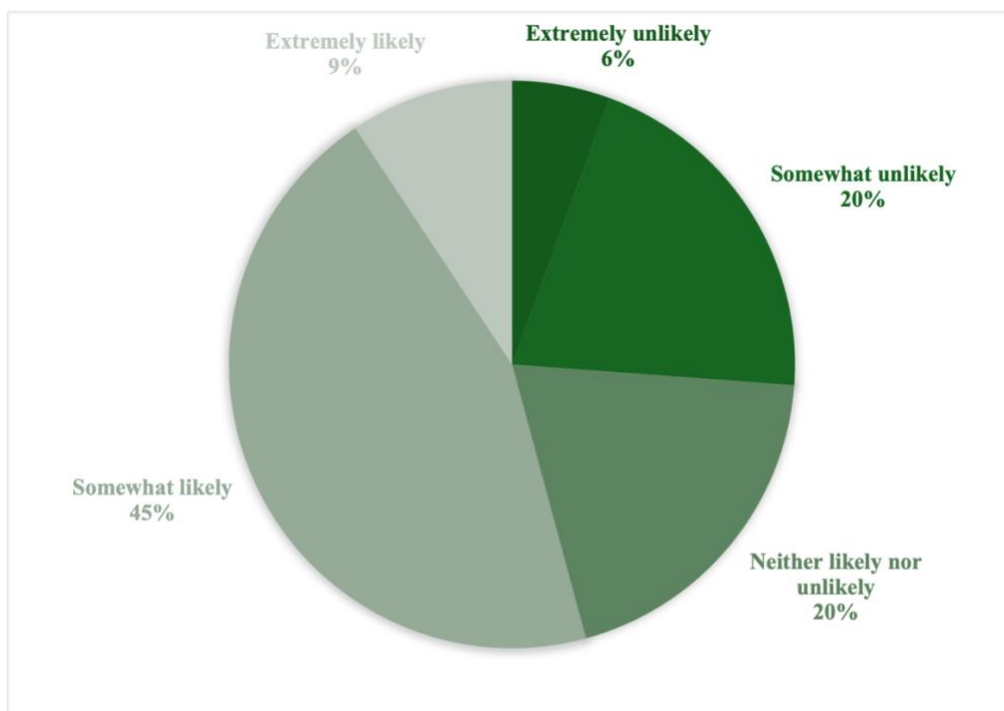
Feelings of Support Amongst Employees



In order to find out why those 10% and also the 20% who feel mostly not supported feel that way, the participants were asked the open question as to why. The most common reason was that there, again, is no communication or information available, e.g. the following: “No idea where to get information”, “Because it is not communicated”, or “too few offers and too rare communication”. Others have also noted that mental health is just not a topic that is prioritized or paid attention to, as some of the statements that were made were: “I feel like the communication is mostly about physical conditions or if it is about mental health, then only in relation to being productive as a working individual which does defeat the purpose for me” or “No general awareness of the company for mental health issues, there is a general HR communication for all workplace related issues, but mental health does not take precedence” and “No offers of support considering mental health. No communication about it. The topic is not important for the company”. More importantly, these three were the most expressive statements made:

1. We are given random blog posts about mental health and how to take care of it (rather frequently). But when you actually burn out or get close, nobody cares. They send you on PTO. In a large corporation like mine, you are just a number at the end of the day.
2. I feel like mental health is mainly used as a kind of "greenwashing" your organization into a good place to work with small (in my opinion almost irrelevant) 15min events for mindfulness and awareness. Sometimes I get the feeling that my feedback e.g. surveys is not taken into consideration at all and when it comes to the real deal (support with mental health in the day to day business, talking openly about it, having options to pause for a minute and not only 15min meetings about mindfulness (often even in break/lunch times and/or after working hours at like 6-7PM!) etc. there is less upper management support.
3. In our business time is money, so whenever I attend a workshop or get myself informed about mental health initiatives, then I am not earning any money for the organisation, and this affects my goals negatively. We are working mostly completely remote, which affects the personal life, friendships within the company and the relationship to the line manager. When there cannot be built trust, which is way harder remotely, people don't share their mental health issues and do not ask for help.

When being asked about the likeliness of participating in activities, the majority of 45% said they are somewhat likely, as seen in Figure 15 below.

Figure 15*Likelihood of Participating in Activities*

Those who selected extremely unlikely (6%), or somewhat unlikely (20%) were additionally asked why they said so. These answers can be grouped into four main reasons: (1) privacy concerns, (2) time concerns, (3) no mental health issues, and (4) no activities are offered. More specifically, for each of those three groups, the following open answers as seen in Table 10 were given.

Table 10*Reasons for not Engaging in Activities*

Reason	Example Statements
Privacy concerns	<p>“This means that you have to admit to the other participants that you personally are not doing well. This can also be seen as a weakness. My personal health is part of my privacy, and I only want to open up about it to people I trust and feel comfortable with.”</p> <p>“High barriers to engage with this topic in the workplace, it might be easier to do that privately.”</p> <p>“I'm not sure if this is a topic I want to talk about with colleagues and superiors, or if it's too private for me”</p>
Time concerns	<p>“Feels weird, my manager would not appreciate it because I am not working productively in that time and cannot invoice my hours”</p> <p>“I don't want to use my free time for it”</p>
No mental health issues	<p>“Even though I think they are interesting, as I am not struggling with mental health I am not privatising going there over work or other events”</p> <p>“Simply because I am not interested in that topic. And my mental health is in very good condition at the moment.”</p> <p>“I feel mentally very well and do not need support in that right now. But I would like to have the opportunity if I would need it one day”</p>
No activities offered	<p>“Because there are none offered that I know about”</p> <p>“Because we don't have any offers”</p>

5.2 Expert Interviews Results

5.2.1 Strategy and Attitude

When being asked about how the topic of mental health influences the internal communication strategy within their organizations, different answers were given. For NN, for example, mental health is a very important topic to them in the organization. For AA on the other hand, it is not a topic that has a specific focus, but rather they work closely with HR who provides information or services on this topic, and not the internal communication department. Similarly, CC also mentioned that mental health is more a topic of Human Resources than the communications department, but that their strategy is mostly influenced by the aspects that actually concern their employees. LL also describes mental health as a topic that they often take into consideration when planning their internal communication activities, as the company does have an internal health management, who also participates in the editorial content planning meetings of the communication department. Therefore, the health management has the opportunity to include any health, and mental health, related matters in the internal communication content plan.

Johanna also describes the topic of mental health and wellbeing as a key component of their internal communication strategy. Additionally, she mentioned that their communication strategy is also overall influenced by the strategy of the leadership, who has been prioritizing this topic as well. She also stated that just communicating is not enough, but rather that business and leadership also have to align and invest in the wellbeing of their employees. In return, it is the communication that makes sure that employees are aware of what leaders are doing for the wellbeing of their employees, and to communicate it properly. Likewise, MM also agrees that just communication is not enough if what is said is not being implemented. She believes that communication can only help when the organization offers services that can make a difference and help the employees with their mental health.

It should be noted that mental health also influences the way internal communication takes place overall according to two interviews. Both NN and Lena mentioned that the organizations try and take away further stress from their employees, e.g. by offering recordings of live events afterwards:

It's flexible; they can access most of the content remotely to suit their schedules. They can listen to recorded Q&A sessions and submit questions in advance if they can't attend live. We want to ensure flexibility that aligns with their needs. (NN, Pos. 32)⁹

Our Town Hall sessions are adjusted, or there's two sessions happening [at different times] ... We're working a lot more with recordings. We're also being a lot more encouraged to, within Webex, record a small, short summary with your slides, etc., so that we take a little bit of that catching up burden away from employees. (Lena, Pos. 8)¹⁰

Besides the influence of mental health on the communication strategy, different attitudes towards the topic of mental health and wellbeing also became evident during the interviews. Mostly talked about where the importance of mental health as well as how this topic should be prioritized within the workplace. For example, both MM and Johanna expressed that happy and healthy employees are important because their organizations acknowledge that this can contribute to achieving the goals of the company. Johanna explicitly stated that

It's the belief that our employees are our best asset. And from that perspective, the management says, "if my employees are not fit either physical or mentally, then they won't be able to do their best job", which means sooner or later it will have an effect on my business. It's pretty simple. (Pos. 52)¹¹

Likewise, NN addresses that as an employer, they care that their employees are doing well, which also includes mental health. So much so, that they have included it in the values of the company, communicating in writing that it is important to them to have employees that are not only physically healthy, but also mentally, and ensuring that they are protected from work overload. LL also acknowledges that especially transformational processes can heavily influence the employees' mental health. Further, Lena also noted that content is nowadays more often focusing on care and mental wellbeing, and that overall mental health is more talked about than it used to. Another participant, AA, agreed that the organization needs to ensure that their

⁹ Appendix C, p. 217

¹⁰ Appendix C, p. 200

¹¹ Appendix C, p. 187

employees have social contact with other employees, to not only be productive but also for a healthy working environment.

Four interviewees also addressed a difference between discussing mental health in German workplaces versus discussing it in American workplaces. (MM; NN; Lena; Johanna), with all of them agreeing that it is still a topic that is less discussed and prioritized in Germany than in the United States. In addition, three people (MM; NN; Johanna) also mentioned that if you want to receive an award called ‘Great Place to Work’, taking mental health into consideration is highly important.

5.2.2 Communication and Channels

In some cases, participants were also asked about the type of content and information they share on mental health and wellbeing with their employees, either through written communication or other activities. The interviews revealed four different types of topics that are most commonly addressed, namely stress, burnout, resilience and becoming strong. Resilience and stress are the most popular topics of internal communication when looking at the number of times it was mentioned. Table 11 below displays the different topics mentioned by each interviewee with the adequate quote.

Table 11*Internal Communication Topics*

Interviewee	Quotes	Topic
MM	<p>“And at the same time, tips were given on how to better achieve balance.” (Pos. 10, p. 224)</p> <p>“Beat Work from Home: Burnout Tips and Strategies for Balance.” (Pos. 12, p. 224)</p>	Stress, Burnout
NN	<p>“Resilience is already the top theme.” (Pos. 22, p. 218)</p> <p>“How do I get through stressful phases, through demanding phases well. And how do I come out of them stronger?” (Pos. 10, p. 215)</p> <p>“We provide information every day, covering topics like ergonomic work practices, the importance of movement, stress management techniques, and so on.” (Pos. 32, p. 220)</p> <p>“For example, for the big information session, we do that here with our company medical service, with whom we have agreed that they will offer two information sessions on resilience and stress” (Pos. 28, p. 219)</p>	Stress, Resilience, Becoming Strong
CC	<p>“But then we also receive dates for stress awareness, which are often shared trainings where we can do stress management and such.” (Pos. 26, p. 198)</p>	Stress
AA	<p>“Especially in times of Corona, it was different, also in the sense of strengthening, mental resilience, in the sense of not becoming vulnerable or how to get help if you have problems.” (Pos. 14, p. 174)</p>	Resilience, Becoming Strong
Lena	<p>“Resilience is a big topic and then just the classical mindfulness” (Pos. 14, p. 205)</p> <p>“We also had something around “What is resilience?”” (Pos. 14, p. 205)</p> <p>“How can you become mentally strong?” (Pos. 14, p. 205)</p>	Stress, Resilience, Becoming Strong

Based on these examples of topics and content about mental health and wellbeing shared with employees, three main communication objectives can be derived that the organizations aims to accomplish with their internal communication. These objectives can be described as:

(1) Raising Awareness, (2) Educating Employees, and (3) Taking Advantage of Offers. Raising awareness describes both communication about the topics described above, but also raising awareness on mental health initiatives and resources offered, whereas the objective on educating employees describes the communication that focuses more on providing information and input on the topic. Regarding the last objective, NN, LL and Johanna specifically point out that they use internal communication to remind employees to take advantage of what mental health-related resources the company has to offer.

During the interviews, participants were also asked about the channels that they use to distribute the above-described internal communication and content about mental health in their respective organizations. Table 12 shows an overview of the most mentioned and used channels.

Table 12

Channels Used

Channel	Mention
SharePoint/Intranet/Internal Platform	Lena, MM, NN, LL, AA, CC
Email	Johanna, NN, LL, AA, CC
Chats	Lena, Johanna, NN, LL
Newsletter	Lena, MM, AA, LL
Social Media	Johanna, LL, CC
Meetings/Events	Lena, Johanna, NN
Calendar Invite	Lena, Johanna
Offline Channels	LL
Chatbot	Lena

As seen from the table, the most common channels used are intranet platforms, such as SharePoint, as well as emails and chats. In addition to using intranet, social media-like platforms are also sometimes used, with both often used to provide information about mental health, updates on any initiatives that take place or contact information. When events are taking place, a calendar invite is sent directly to the employee in two organizations. Email was often described as a classic communication channel. NN states that “Just an email is enough when I want to inform, but if I want engagement, reactions, or to start a discussion, then it's mainly through a chat tool for us” (Pos. 36).¹²

More specifically, LL mentioned a chat for a ‘young professional community’ within the organization, but also other community channels, e.g. for managers, where health-related information can also be shared and adjusted specifically for these different audiences. Closely related, Lena mentions specific chat groups for wellbeing, e.g. a chat room called ‘safe to talk’ or ‘mindfulness and resilience room’, where mental health-related information and exchanges take place with and between employees.

In three organizations, events, such as all employee calls or staff meetings, are also used to mention or discuss the topic of mental health, and the offers the organizations has. For example, NN mentioned that they use companywide meetings to remind their employees that they can use the services offered. If an event takes places that is specifically related to mental health and wellbeing, which will be discussed in the next sub-chapter, a direct calendar invite is sent to the employee, so they are aware that these events take place in two organizations (Lena; Johanna).

LL also added that because the company is an IT and technology company, they tend to use different digital communication tools. At the same time, they were also the only participant to mention non-digital communication channels, as they are also communicating in the office locations through flyers in elevators, but also screens above them. Also only used once as a channel is a chatbot, mentioned by Lena, which is used to distribute global, company-wide messages.

¹² Appendix C, p. 218

Besides channels, it is also important to consider the communication style that is used within internal communication practices, which two interviewees gave examples of. By using a social media like internal channel, Johanna mentioned that besides providing information, their focus is on personal interaction and chats, and dynamic sharing. They want to inspire and engage their employees to participate in company initiatives, by using communication that is direct and simple, but not plain. She compares it with writing an advertisement, in the sense that it should be engaging and inspiring, to make the reader want to participate and be part of the initiative.

Likewise, LL described that for any internal communication, not just mental health, they have created guidelines to ensure that any communication is comprehensible and simple, while also following the same structure each time, e.g. that the main and most important facts are summarized and displayed first in an email before going into more detail. The communication style is described as clean and downsized, following the theme of 'less is more'. They focus on facts and key messages, delivering very clean communication, without wanting it to be boring and plain.

The frequency of which information and activities about mental health takes place varies between each organization interviewed. Most interviewees said that there is no defined frequency, as seen in Table 13 below, which displays the main statements about frequency.

Table 13*Frequency of Mental Health-Related Communication*

Interviewee	Statement on Frequency
NN	<p>“Of course, not every two weeks or so, but to remind people now and then, here is information on it, and use it [the services offered]”</p> <p>(Pos. 14, p. 216-217)</p>
LL	<p>“So, it can happen that for one or two months there's nothing about mental health.” (Pos. 36, p. 233)</p>
AA	<p>“This newsletter is sent out by email, this news summary, and it usually includes a health topic more often than not.” (Pos. 8, p. 173)</p> <p>“We always have these health topics once or twice a month on average.”</p> <p>(Pos. 14, p. 174)</p>
CC	<p>“So, the family service regularly sends, maybe once a quarter or something, an update, which then lists the upcoming dates, for example, in the near future. Probably even more often, I think they give out dates for about 2 months.” (Pos. 26, p. 198)</p> <p>“So, this comes regularly, and yes, she [colleague responsible for health initiatives] actually communicates quite a lot. I couldn't necessarily say once a week, but she communicates very regularly and yes, she also always looks for topics that she can pass on to us.” (Pos. 26, p. 198)</p>
Johanna	<p>“It's not like a once a month we want to do something, or we want to communicate, it [the topic of mental health] is something that we have at the back of our mind all the time.” (Pos. 34, p. 185)</p>
Lena	<p>“We offer monthly sessions. We offer special quarterly sessions.”</p> <p>(Pos. 12, p. 204)</p>

In addition to this frequency of communication and activities, some participants also gave more information on frequency for other important aspects. For example, Johanna also mentioned that every time an event takes place, they try to communicate a recap of what happened during the event. Also, LL explained that they have a biweekly content planning session, in which they also discuss the health-related topics and plan ahead for quarterly topics.

5.2.3 *Other Initiatives for Mental Health*

When being asked about other initiatives besides communication, such as events or activities on mental health and wellbeing, the interviews revealed multiple approaches in the different organizations as part of the internal communication efforts. Before explaining each one, a summary of all of them can be seen in Table 14.

Table 14

Initiatives for Mental Health Offered in the Organizations

Initiative	Mention
Talk with Experts	MM, LL, AA, NN, Johanna, Lena
Sport Initiatives	MM, LL, CC, Johanna, Lena
Workshops/Trainings/Sessions	MM, LL, AA, NN, CC, Lena
Health Management/Family Service/Insurance	MM, LL, AA, NN, CC, Lena
Mental Health Check-Ins	MM, Johanna, Lena
Apps	LL, Johanna, Lena
Coming Together in the Office	AA, Johanna
Time Off	Johanna, Lena
Communities/Networks	Lena

Most often, the organizations seek external help of experts when talking about health-related topics, e.g. during sessions employees have the opportunity to ask questions to experts (NN), talk to coaches or psychologist (Lena), or guest speakers on wellbeing (Johanna). Sports activities also often take place, promoting both general health as well as mental health. Amongst others are yoga classes (LL; CC; Johanna), step challenges with employees (LL; Lena; Johanna). However, it needs to be noted that in LL's organization, they are not always organized directly by the internal communication team but rather by employees, however they do get communication support from the department. To promote these fitness challenges, apps are often used to track progress on e.g. step challenges (LL; Johanna; Lena). Besides just step challenges, the app used by Lena's organizations offers even more input on wellbeing. She described the app as having four elements, or topics, called "Eat, Sweat, Think and Connect, so those four elements. And so, it has videos and recordings and recipes and, you know, all kinds of things. So, you can browse around and educate yourself." (Pos. 24).¹³

As part of employee assistance programs (EAP), employees can also receive discounts at local gyms (LL; CC). Additionally, through different services either by internal health managements or external health and services providers, employees have the option to talk to experts if they encounter any mental issues (MM; LL; AA; NN; CC; Lena). LL's organization also has two internal colleagues which are psychologically trained to help employees, NN's organization is working on providing the same. The external services are paid for by the organization, however the organization will not find out if an employee is using them as they are confidential. AA and Johanna also talked about the importance of employees coming into the office to promote mental wellbeing. More detailed, AA talked about their 'Back to Office' effort, as they would like employees to not be isolated at home but rather be with colleagues on site. Johanna also agreed that it is important for employees to spend time together, at lunch, or even at playrooms they have built at offices.

Lena mentioned that they offer short breaks of 30 minutes during the workday, where employees can take some time to calm down, through meditation. She also mentioned that it is more common to take time off for general health-related matters, but also that

¹³ Appendix C, p. 205

There is a growing awareness that [time off] can include mental health. I would say, structurally, that's not a problem because we have the ability to take emergency time off, et cetera. I think it's more of a barrier in our own mindsets. (Pos. 36)¹⁴

Johanna also mentioned that within her company, it is acceptable to take time off, sometimes even months, to focus on one's mental health. Moreover, organizations check in with their employees on their mental health, either through surveys (MM; Johanna) or also through polls in sessions (Lena). Lastly, Lena also mentioned specific communities and resource groups, such as the 'mindfulness and resilience community'.

Two participants (Lena; Johanna) were also able to give specific examples of internal campaigns about mental health, in addition to NN and CC mentioning general health-related campaigns, and LL generally mentioning awareness months for certain specific themes such as Mental Health Awareness Month. Lena described their "Blue Monday initiative", where the company offered different events for a week in January to combat feelings of sadness amongst employees, which is what the blue Monday stands for. Additionally, Lena also mentioned a 'wellbeing week', not only focusing on mental wellbeing but also other aspects of life, like "financial wellbeing, which I think was interesting, because that can be a big source of stress and anxiety" (Pos. 40). Johanna also mentioned an annual wellbeing week, where activities like yoga were offered, amongst other things.

NN described their health month, where the company offers different trainings, activities and information sessions on health-related matters for a whole month. As mentioned earlier, these topics can include stress management or breathing techniques. CC also mentioned a weekly 'Healthy Friday', where different themes are covered each week. CC said:

We cover various topics: Exercise themes. This morning, we started with a 20-minute yoga session. There were further sessions today, so today's theme was movement. When you have a 40-hour workweek and spend a lot of time sitting, what can you do for yourself, how can you mobilize your back? Such topics take place. But there are also nutrition topics" (Pos. 14)¹⁵.

¹⁴ Appendix C, p. 207

¹⁵ Appendix C, p. 192

All participants, besides LL, acknowledged that there are no specific activities or communication focusing only on Generation Z, but rather all employees. Johanna said this is because they “try to reach everybody in an equal way. I think it would be very difficult for us to adjust by age” (Pos. 44).¹⁶ Lena did comment that their audiences vary, although not on purpose, but that often participants tend to be older, unless the event is taking place in the office, when it tends to be younger people. AA specifically mentioned that offers for Generation Z are currently not available, but rather for older employees and age-related illnesses rather than mental health. While NN also mentioned that they provide opportunities for all employees, they did acknowledge the growing opportunity of engaging with just Generation Z specifically; however, the resources are currently not available.

All interviewees mentioned feedback opportunities on activities offered, with four of those interviewed (MM; CC; Lena; Johanna) describing feedback opportunities also on the employee’s mental health and wellbeing, some of which were already mentioned earlier. In general, feedback can be directly given to those responsible for initiatives, e.g. HR or communication department, with Lena also distributing official post-event surveys to collect feedback.

5.2.4 Managerial Support

In four out of seven interviews, the role of managers was mentioned. Johanna and Lena both mentioned the role managers play in providing good support, and how the global or local leaders show that the topic of wellbeing is important to them, and how, as a result, it is also prioritized as an overall topic within the company, as mentioned in the earlier results. The interviews also showed that managers often receive additional or separate trainings, for example they might receive training on “handling difficult situations with themselves and with employees” (NN, Pos. 26).¹⁷

¹⁶ Appendix C, p. 185

¹⁷ Appendix C, p. 216

The communication and content for managers about the topic of mental health and wellbeing are also different from those for regular employees, e.g. as mentioned by LL, in order for managers to be sensitized to the topic and to be able to deal with mental health situations within the workforce they manage. According to NN, in essence they want managers to understand how and why they should identify issues before they the situations gets out of hand. Lastly, LL and Lena acknowledged that managers also need to take care of their own mental health and be self-reflective about it in order to not neglect their own wellbeing, as it is often expected of managers to take care of others.

5.2.5 Specific Characteristics

Specific characteristics about Generation Z as well as the technology industry were mentioned by some of the interview participants. In terms of Generation Z characteristics, MM mentioned their perception of Generation Z setting more boundaries in the workplace and wanting more work-life balance, in addition to not wanting to work for organizations that might be considered toxic. NN agrees, as they mentioned that their company sees a generation with a different focus, who portray a healthy attitude of seeing more in life beyond work. Lena also said that she has noticed that Generation Z “are being much more open with their mental disorders”, (Pos. 44),¹⁸ such as anxiety or similar. On the other hand, AA believes that there is this perception of younger generations being stronger and more stable than other generations.

Specific behaviour in the workplace was also addressed by four participants, specifically when it comes to reaching this generation with information. NN, as well as LL and Johanna mentioned that this generation is best reached through chat channels in the workplace. LL believes this comes from “a subjectively perceived stronger digital affinity than in other age groups” (Pos. 32).¹⁹In LL’s organization, they see more regular and faster interaction in different community channels than with other generations, as older generations are more easily reached by meetings or phone calls. They also perceive a need amongst their younger employees for more personal communication and exchanges.

¹⁸ Appendix C, p. 208

¹⁹ Appendix C, p. 230

Hence, many mentioned that Generation Z wants to come together in the office, especially for events. Lena specifically called it a ‘myth’ that younger people generally do not want to work in an office setting. LL and Johanna both mentioned that they not only see a need amongst their younger employees to come together in the office, but that their Generation Z employees have explicitly expressed that they want to go. Finally, Johanna even mentioned that the office location plays a crucial role in targeting young talent and new employees, as younger employees prefer to have a central office location in the city, with restaurants or other stores near-by, which is why the organization decided to move one of their German offices from a more decentralized, unpopular location to one directly in the city center.

In addition, Johanna also mentioned specific characteristics of the technology industry in relation to mental health and wellbeing. She addressed that many organizations operate virtually, as they have employees all over the world. Without having to come to the office and being able to employees face-to-face, it is harder to notice mental health issues because normally

You would notice very quickly from the body language of somebody that something is not right. Nowadays, many people would just turn off their camera, which is easy in their right to do so. And you don't notice and it's very difficult to tell if people have a problem or not (Pos. 52).²⁰

Further, CC also mentioned that the technology and IT industry is fast paced, with a lot of pressure being put on employees.

²⁰ Appendix C, p. 187

6. Discussion

The qualitative research results, namely the interviews, are used to discuss the first research goal: *To investigate current internal communication practices in the technology industry regarding mental health to build employee engagement amongst Generation Z.*

Primarily, it is important to note that organizations do not differentiate between Generation Z employees and other employees of other generations, but rather address all employees with their communication and initiatives²¹. If anything, focus is put on older employees who struggle with age related illnesses. Most acknowledged that there are simply no resources to differentiate between generations. While this is understandable, aiming at reaching multiple different generations with different characteristics and needs with just one communication strategy might not be effective, and therefore employee engagement amongst specific generations might fail. Focusing on older generations and age-related illness also shows a priority for physical health rather than mental health, however with older generations soon retiring and more Generation Z in the workforce this might change in the future.

When it comes to mental health, the theoretical framework showed that many organizations have put emphasis on mental health as it has economic benefits (Bruce & English, 2020). Similarly, two of the interviews (MM & Johanna) revealed that these specific organizations also have realized that employees' mental health is important to do a better job, and therefore ultimately achieve the desired business goals.²² These results indicate an important connection between providing mental health support and a healthy environment and broader organizational strategies and success. Further, the interview with NN also revealed that their organization has put health and mental health in the value statement²³, indicating that mental health is a crucial part of organization's identity, similar to results by Kent et al. (2016). While this underlines the importance of mental health for the organizations, simply stating that

²¹ Chapter 5.2.1: Strategy and Attitude

²² "It's the belief that our employees are our best asset. And from that perspective, the management says, "if my employees are not fit either physical or mentally, then they won't be able to do their best job", which means sooner or later it will have an effect on my business. It's pretty simple." (Johanna, Pos. 52)

²³ Appendix C: 5th Interview

they care is not enough, but rather organizations need to actively provide a healthy working environment.

Moreover, the interviews revealed that almost all of the organizations interviewed communicate about mental health internally, with some organizations prioritizing this topic more than others. At the same time however, when asking about frequency, it became clear that mental health is not yet a regular topic, but rather communicated when it is needed. This shows that while it is considered important, it has not yet been incorporated into the main internal communication strategy. It should also be noted that those participants with a who displayed a more positive attitude towards the topic and acknowledged the importance of mental health in the workplace also prioritize this topic more, discussing more communication efforts and mental health initiatives in the interviews than those who did not. This brings up the question whether or not the strategy behind the topic of mental health is influenced by personal attitude of the internal communication professionals.

As seen in the interviews²⁴, the communication is most often about different topics such as stress or resilience, while also providing useful tips or exercises on these topics. It is no surprise that this are the topics that are most communicated, as research has also uncovered that the most important and common topics on mental health revolve around healthy working, factors leading to stress and burnout, policies and dealing or strengthening mental health (Coppens et al., 2023). Further, the interviews showed a clear focus on encouraging employees to make use of the mental health benefits the organization have in place or how to participate in them²⁵. While this shows a motivating approach and wanting to provide a healthy workplace with much support, if organizations are only communicating about it but not getting employees to actively participate, the wrong approach might be used. Different employees might be motivated through different reasons, and organizations therefore need to properly understand their employees' motivation to ensure participation.

Currently, the most common channels used internally to communicate about mental health topics are intranet platforms such as SharePoint or others, followed by email and chat channels

²⁴ Appendix C

²⁵ Chapter 5.2.2: Communication and Channels

(Table 12)²⁶. These channels are often amongst the most common internal communication channels, as intranet platforms and email can be useful to provide information, and chats can help interact with employees more actively. While live broadcast videos or and apps have been described as popular channels within the recent years (Gallagher, 2024), these are not really utilized by the interviewees for communicating internally, especially considering mental health, which is surprising as the technology industry is known for leading in innovation (Gomez & Forbes Technology Council, 2023). Yet, this could mean that while these channels are useful for other topics, mental health is not one of them. Further, it could also mean that not all companies have the resources to provide live broadcast or apps, or that they believe that their employees are not accurately reached through these channels.

Some interviewees also discussed using internal channels similar to social media. Using internal channels that are adapted to the likes and preferences of this younger generation was also previously mentioned in literature (Kick et al., 2015). These adjustments can help organizations reach Generation Z more efficiently and effectively, while again proving that they are not only adaptable but also leading current trends. Overall, the investigation into channels revealed that all utilize different digital channels, as using new technology within internal communication can have a big impact on employees (Gallagher, 2024). Offline channels are rarely used (Table 12)²⁶, which shows that internal communication channels nowadays have evolved to more digital communication, especially in hybrid working environments. At the same time, utilizing digital channels might also be due to the fact that the organizations interviewed are technology companies, and as LL stated, their technological nature is one of the main reasons they utilize digital channels.

Interaction and involvement is one of the most common goals amongst interview participants, indicating that internal communication is no longer just about providing information, but rather engagement. LL specifically stated guidelines about internal communication, explaining that the most important information should be displayed first²⁷. Although the communication is directed at all employees, this could specifically be helpful to

²⁶ p. 102

²⁷ Appendix C, 7th Interview

reach more Generation Z employees, as their short attention span might require more direct and short information (McCrindle, 2014; Munsch, 2021). Adapting to the communication style of this generation is not only helpful to ensure that information is well-received, but also shows that organizations understand the special characteristics and needs of their employees.

Besides communication, workplaces need to offer initiatives that promote both physical and mental health (Taubman & Parikh, 2023). Almost all interviewees mentioned sport initiatives, such as step challenges, or meditations, as part of their activities offered for physical and mental health (Table 14)²⁸. In practice, it shows that organizations are now blending mental health with physical health to ensure that employees are overall healthy, while also providing a large variety of activities so that employees can participate in those that fit their liking. At the same time, it helps employees get together outside of business context.

To educate and inform employees on mental health, six out of seven interviewees have expert talks in place (Table 14)²⁸. It could be interpreted that with health-related topics such as mental health, organizations want to provide truthful and accurate information which can be ensured by using experts. These experts might be perceived as more trustworthy by employees. It should be noted that Taubman and Parikh (2023) state that the initiatives offered can help organizations reduce stigma around the topic of mental health, while the organizations also need to portray a positive attitude towards the topic. As mentioned earlier, most organizations interviewed are doing so. This underlines the fact that those who prioritize and promote mental health also have more initiatives in place to be able to do so.

Further initiatives included workshops or trainings on mental health, including mindfulness or stress workshops, as well as health apps (Table 14)²⁸, aligning with recommendations made in previous research (Deloitte, 2023; Fonseca, 2023). The literature additionally explained the concept of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), a concept that also was often mentioned by the various internal communication experts during the interviews. These programs allow employees to get access to mental health or other issue-related resources outside of the workplace (Gartner, n.d). Similarly, the interviews mentioned close collaborations with outside services (Table 14)²⁸, which can help internal communication delegate health-

²⁸ p. 107

related topics to experts, while also establishing anonymity for employees but still offering support. While Fonseca (2023) mentioned that employees should be able to take time-off for mental health-related matters, this was revealed as a rare opportunity within the organizations interviewed. This shows that mental health is not yet weighed equal to ‘regular’ health matters in organizations.

Additionally, interview participants also discussed the role of managers²⁹, indicating that having managers and leaders who prioritize mental health and understand its importance can lead to the topic being more discussed in the company, similar to results by Kent et al. (2016). Therefore, they also receive separate training and communication, which include trainings on sensitization, identifying and dealing with mental health issues. This aligns with Taubman and Parikh’s (2023) research, who stated that managers need to recognize distress, learn how to communicate with those individuals struggling with mental health and how to provide resources. Previous literature (Greenwood & Krol, 2020) also mentioned providing check-ins between managers and their employees to discuss not only the employee’s mental health, but also for the manager to be open to discuss his own mental health status with his subordinates to destigmatize this topic in the workplace.

Likewise, the interviews revealed these check-ins also take place in three organizations that were interviewed (Table 14)³⁰. However, these check-ins do not necessarily take place between employees and managers but rather through companywide through polls or surveys. This hints that managers are not currently used to gather insights from the employees on their mental health employees. At the same time, this is also a missed opportunity to establish a more stigma-free working environment around mental health.

Lastly, interview participants expressed their perception of Generation Z and their unique characteristics, which showed that they are indeed often described as transparent (Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021), while wanting a positive work-life-balance and avoiding toxic workplaces (Deloitte, 2023; Imagen Insights, 2023; Silva et al., 2023). Further, some participants also noted that interactive and fast technology such as chats is the right way to reach this generation,

²⁹ Chapter 5.2.4: Managerial Support

³⁰ p. 107

aligning with the remark that Generation Z show better technological performance than other generations (Bencsik et al., 2016).

In order to fulfil research goal two, *understanding Generation Z's needs and preferences for internal communication and workplace initiatives on mental health and how these needs and expectations are currently met*, the quantitative survey was conducted. This revealed multiple, important findings.

When it comes to channels used to communicate about mental health or related activities about mental health, the majority of participants is 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'³¹. Email is still amongst the most common used, and also preferred, channels (Table 6 and text below)³², aligning with previous results by Janssen and Cardini (2021). Yet, the survey results also show that newsletters and intranet are also amongst the top three preferred channels, unlike the research results by Šakytė-Statnickė et al. (2023), which showed that these written channels are not effective in reaching Generation Z internally. These results also indicate that organizations are currently somewhat utilizing the right channels to reach their Generation Z employees, with room for improvement.

As shown, the initiatives that are offered to the participants also align with those they have already used in the past, however some also indicated that they have not used any (22 participants, 20.6%) or that they do not know of any (14 participants, 13.1%), seen in Table 8 and subsequent text below³³. This could mean that these specific organizations either have no initiatives in place, or that they are lacking promotion and available information for the initiatives. At the same time, looking at the previous results of channels, it could also mean that the offers are not communicated through the right channels, and therefore employees are lacking awareness that they are taking place.

The most common initiative offered according to the participants of the survey is flexible working conditions (Table 8)³³, which has also already been used by 51 participants (47.7%). Other research (Imagen Insights, 2023; Racolța-Paina & Irini, 2021) also confirmed that Generation Z prefers flexible working conditions overall, therefore it is no surprised that this is

³¹ Chapter 5.1.4: Satisfaction

³² p. 83

³³ p. 85

most often used. Research results by Deloitte (2023) also showed that organizations frequently offer paid time off, like vacation days, as a mental health benefit, which according to the research is also most often used by Generation Z. The survey results (Table 8)³⁴ also show that 49 participants (45.8%) have this initiative offered in their organization, however it has only been used by 16 participants (15%), which could indicate that time off is not really used for mental health problems, as also noted in the interview discussion by Lena. Yet, Johanna said that taking time off for mental issues is encouraged in her organization. Given the survey results, organizations need to actively communicate that this is an option for employees so that they take advantage of this offer.

It should also be noted that almost a third of participants selected '*access to gym facilities*' as an offer that is currently not in place at their organization, but they would prefer to have (Table 9)³⁵. Again, this shows that organizations are generally offering a good variety of initiatives that are wanted but could, at the same time, be improved. However, the question remains whether or not these Generation Z participants actually consider working out as something that can help them with their mental health, or if they just consider access to a gym facility as a general benefit.

The survey showed that the topics Generation Z finds most interesting are currently not communicated within the organizations. '*How to help someone with mental health issues*' or '*how to recognize mental health issues*' were the main selected topics that they find most interesting (Figure 10)³⁶, whereas '*how to create mentally healthy working conditions*' is most often communicated about, followed by '*factors leading to stress and mental health problems*' (Figure 9)³⁷. This indicates that there is a clear lack of communicating about topics that are actually wanted. While research by Coppens et al. (2023) showed that workplaces need information on four main topics mentioned earlier, only the last topic of '*skills to uncover and deal with mental health problems*' has been proven as preferences of Generation Z.

Further, this generation would also prefer to receive more information on mental health than they currently do. This does not necessarily mean more frequently, as many already receive

³⁴ p. 85

³⁵ p. 86

³⁶ p. 88

³⁷ p. 87

information once a month³⁸, which they expressed they like. Instead, organizations should focus more on quality, rather than quantity, and provide in-depth information. Again, these results align with Generation Z wanting to avoid an overload of information (McCrindle, 2014). Further, participants ‘neither agree nor disagree’ that their communication department understand their mental health needs, with the majority overall leaning towards disagreement. This indicates that communication departments might not gather enough feedback from their employees on what information they would like to receive or initiatives they are interested in, therefore leading to a mismatch between what Generation Z needs and what the department things they need. Positively, the communication department is sufficiently addressing why mental health matters (Figure 11)³⁹, however as indicated by the results, it is not just about communicating and providing initiatives, but also living up to them through a positive, healthy company culture.

The survey also showed that while some participants were likely to disclose and discuss their own mental health concerns in the workplace, others did not (Figure 13)⁴⁰. Many acknowledged that mental health is a private matter to them, something they do not want their workplace to know about, aligning with research by Deloitte (2023). At the same time however, some expressed interest in topics mentioned earlier, such as ‘*how to help someone with mental health issues*’, while also expressing that they are overall missing adequate initiatives in their workplace or not receiving enough information. This aligns with previous literature and research results, indicating that Generation Z is concerned with the mental health of others and mental health in the general workplace (Deloitte, 2023), but still showing stigma about struggling with mental health themselves (Arora et al., 2022).

These findings also suggest that some of the companies, where these Generation Z participants work, could have a more open culture towards the topic of mental health, leading to these employees being more likely to give feedback on their own mental health. For instance, as already mentioned, the interview with NN showed that mental health is an integral part of the organizational identity and overall strategy, by including this topic not only in the mission of

³⁸ Chapter 5.1.6: Frequency

³⁹ p. 90

⁴⁰ p. 92

the organization, but also into trainings of younger employees. By actively including mental health and wellbeing into different aspects of the workplace, employees might perceive their workplace as more attentive to mental health. It could also suggest that some companies need to work more on destigmatizing the topic of mental health, as already mentioned by Coppens et al. (2023).

On that note, research has also shown that employees would prefer to access mental health support outside of their workplace (Coppens et al., 2023; Murphy et al., 2023). While the survey showed that over half of the participants is ‘somewhat likely’ or ‘even extremely’ to participate in initiatives offered (Figure 15)⁴¹, there are still some who are hesitant. The reasons mentioned included not wanting to admit to colleagues or managers that something may be wrong, but also concerns that they do not want to use their free time to join activities or be seen as unproductive during their working-hours (Table 10)⁴², agreeing with research by Coppens et al., (2023) and Murphy (2023). Therefore, it would be beneficial to make Generation Z more aware of opportunities outside of the workplace, some of which were already mentioned in the interviews, e.g. therapy services that are paid for by the company but done externally. Based on the survey, however, it seems to be the case that many Generation Z employees are only aware of internal opportunities, which do not provide the desired distance between workplace and private life.

Taking the above into consideration, it is evident that the survey and interviews provided further results *to uncover gaps between current internal communication strategies and the mental health needs and attitudes of Generation Z* (research goal three). These gaps are then used *to contribute with practical suggestions on how to better meet Generation Z employees’ mental health needs in the German technology industry by creating internal communication strategies* (research goal four).

Gaps were uncovered in several different aspects that were inquired about in the research: (1) topics of information, (2) channels, (3) initiatives, (4) managerial support, (5) feedback options and lastly, (6) engagement, which are presented first before providing practical recommendations.

⁴¹ p. 96

⁴² p. 97

The experts interviewed described multiple different topics that are communicated within the organization, showing a strong focus on the topic of resilience, stress and becoming strong. Yet, as mentioned earlier, Generation Z is interested in other topics, such as recognizing mental health issues and learning how to provide help and support (Figure 10).⁴³ This is not the only clear gap between the topics considered relevant by the organizations, and those Generation Z wants. Based on the topics communicated, the interviews hinted that the communication objectives are mainly raising awareness, educating employees and encouraging them to participate. Still, the survey revealed that these objectives are not currently achieved, as it showed that almost half of the respondents are not well-informed about mental health resources and support within their respective organizations,⁴⁴ indicating that they are not actively being encouraged to participate in activities, or potentially there is not enough awareness about them.

The survey also revealed that half is somewhat being educated about mental health within their organizations, while the other half is not.⁴⁵ At the same time, results from the survey also showed that the majority is informed about the impact of mental health on productivity and workplace behaviour, therefore educating and awareness is taking place about this topic. However, this result is no surprise, as many respondents said that understanding the impact of mental health is a common topic (Figure 9).⁴⁶ Overall, these results show that organizations need to shift their focus from resilience and stress to topics that are more interesting to Generation Z, while also putting more emphasis on communication objectives such as education and taking advantage of offers. As also mentioned in the interview results, many organizations try to engage with their employees and encourage interaction, however Generation Z employees showed a mixed response to these aspects in the survey. Hence, communication department should find more engaging ways than those currently in place to improve on these results.

These topics and information are often shared through everyday channels, such as intranets, emails and chats (Table 6 and 12)⁴⁷. Out of these three, intranet and email are useful to reach Generation Z internally, but channels such as chats are not fully to their liking when it

⁴³ p. 88

⁴⁴ Chapter 5.1.5: Communication

⁴⁵ Chapter 5.1.5: Information

⁴⁶ p. 87

⁴⁷ p. 83, 102

comes to internal communication on mental health. Instead, the survey showed that team meetings are also a good channel to discuss mental health (Table 7)⁴⁸. Although the topic of mental health is overall considered as highly relevant by most of the interview participants, information on mental health is not regularly shared (Table 13),⁴⁹ but rather when it is needed, e.g. as a reminder, when activities are taking place, or during certain campaigns such as ‘*Mental Health Month*’, indicating that it is not an integral part of the internal communication strategy.

To further engage employees on the topic of mental health, different initiatives are offered. Yet, participants of the survey expressed that they do not feel comfortable accessing mental health resources through their organization, as they perceive of lack of anonymity (Table 10)⁵⁰. Coherently, many of the interviewees described initiatives that do not provide anonymity, such as workshops or similar (Table 14).⁵¹ The survey showed that some initiatives that are currently not in place but would be preferred by Generation Z employees are reimbursement programs and trainings on mental health and how to deal with it (Table 9)⁵². Likewise, the expert interviews did not mention any reimbursement programs, however they did explain trainings on health-related matters and expert talks. Additionally, both the interviews (Table 14)⁵¹ and the survey (Table 8)⁵³ showed that many organizations provide fitness challenges, e.g. step challenges or similar, to promote both mental and physical wellbeing. Simultaneously, the survey also revealed that while Generation Z does sometimes participate in fitness challenges,⁵⁴ they would much rather have access to fitness facilities such as the gym (Table 8)⁵³.

The interviews demonstrated that many technology organizations provide separate trainings and information for managers on how to deal with mental health in the workplace⁵⁵. At the same time, the survey revealed that many Generation Z employees experience quite the opposite, believing their manager to be bad in communicating about mental health.⁵⁶ Participants also believe that their managers are also lacking knowledge and information on how

⁴⁸ p. 84

⁴⁹ p. 106

⁵⁰ p. 97

⁵¹ p. 107

⁵² p. 86

⁵³ p. 85

⁵⁴ Chapter 5.1.3: Initiatives

⁵⁵ Chapter 5.2.4: Managerial Support

⁵⁶ Chapter 5.1.7: Communication

to support employees with their mental health. However, it should also be mentioned that some believe their manager to be quite good at this. This could indicate that some organizations already recognize the importance of managers, but that other organizations need to provide more information and useful tips for managers on how to support their employees. These results align with existing literature (Taubman & Parikh (2023); Wu et al., 2021; Kent et al., 2016), while Coppens et al. (2023) or Murphy et al. (2023) also presented that managers often lack sufficient support for themselves to provide mental wellbeing.

Literature such as Qin and Men (2022) or Kent et al. (2016) stated the importance for organizations to listen to their employees about their concerns and interests, and that activities should be chosen based on employee preferences. Yet, both data showed that there is a clear lack of feedback opportunities. The survey results expressed that some of the Generation Z employees feels that the little feedback they can give to their organizations is not taken seriously, and that often times organizations do not seem to prioritize or care for their employee's mental health in general, while others believe their feedback is taken seriously. These different experiences indicate that some organizations do a better job in listening to their employees than others. At the same time, the interviews revealed that many organizations generally provide feedback opportunities, but most often simply encourage their employees to reach out to HR or the internal communication department to provide feedback. Not only is this not a proactive approach from the internal communication or HR department, but it also shows that they are often lacking official feedback surveys that ensure anonymity of the employees. This was clearly confirmed through the survey, as almost half the participants of the participants showed that they are lacking the option to provide feedback.⁵⁷ Considering all this, it is also no surprise that the results also showed that some internal communication departments are not addressing and understanding the employees' mental health needs properly⁵⁸, as they are not asking their employees about their mental health status or experiences around the initiatives offered.

Most importantly, while many organizations from the interviews stated and showed that mental health is an important topic not only for communication, but also the overall success of the organization, the survey displayed opposite results, aligning with Coppens et al. (2023), who

⁵⁷ Chapter 5.1.8: Employee Voice

⁵⁸ Chapter 5.1.7: Communication

showed that many employees do not feel supported in their mental health from their employer. As mentioned, the survey results showed that almost half the participants do not believe that their organization prioritizes mental health, and some also do not feel supported by their organization as concerns or feedback are not taken into considerations, as seen in Figure 14 and the text below.⁵⁹ Contrarily, research by Deloitte (2023) showed that Generation Z believes that organizations take the mental health of their employees seriously. As the research by Deloitte was globally done, and not in a specific industry, this could indicate that in the Germany technology industry, mental health is not as an important topic as elsewhere.

Lastly, the same research (Deloitte, 2023) also mentioned that Generation Z believes that resources for mental health are not utilized properly. Similarly, through open answers of the survey, participants explained that they believe that some resources such as blog posts or even events are not helpful as they are not providing in-depth details or dedicated information for the specific workplace.⁶⁰ Overall, there seems to be a tendency towards believing that organizations do not actually care for the mental health of their employees, but rather do it because they have to or make themselves look good to potential new employees.

To improve internal communication strategies based on the above-mentioned results from both the survey and the interviews, the following practical suggestions are made: In terms of topics, the survey revealed a clear focus on '*wanting to help each other out*' within the employees (Figure 10).⁶¹ To be able to help out others, it is also important to educate on topics such as '*what is mental health*', or '*signs or symptoms of someone struggling*'. Additionally, Generation Z would like their internal communication departments to stay clear of generalized information that could be applied anywhere, and instead would rather receive information that is relevant for the workplace they are in.⁶² This could mean that if there are lay-offs and therefore also stress, how can that be dealt with in this specific situation. Further, to match with Generation Z's preference of images over text (McCrindle, 2014), mental health information should therefore also steer away from simple blog posts or newsletter with just texts, but rather

⁵⁹ p. 94

⁶⁰ Chapter 5.1.9: Employee Engagement

⁶¹ p. 88

⁶² "We are given random blog posts about mental health and how to take care of it (rather frequently). But when you actually burn out or get close, nobody cares."

also focus on images, e.g. infographics or also videos, which can also help avoid a communication overload and make the information more engaging.

As already mentioned, there was an overall match of channels used and the preferred ones of this generation, however some are not currently utilized in all organizations (Table 6 and 7).⁶³ Therefore, internal communication department should try and adapt these channels to better share relevant mental health information. For example, as newsletter was selected as preferred channel, a dedicated mental health newsletter could be put in place. Further, Generation Z also expressed liking channels such as team meetings and internal apps to distribute relevant mental health information (Table 7).⁶⁴ New internal communication strategies should also incorporate mental health information as a regular, monthly topic, as the survey showed that Generation Z employees want to be informed about mental health regularly.

When it comes to initiatives, resources and activities, organizations should consider providing spaces where employees can anonymously participate, e.g. online events where employees can join without having to provide their personal information. Some participants of the survey also acknowledged the lack of available time to join such initiatives, either because they are taking place after working hours, or because they are not allowed to take the time to participate during their working hours.⁶⁵ If organizations want their employees to actively participate in such activities they need to reconsider the timing of when they take place. If possible, they also need to make it more acceptable that employees are allowed to participate as part of their daily work, and not as an '*outside of working hours*' activity. Additionally, as already mentioned, initiatives such as reimbursement programs, gym access or more intimate, useful trainings on mental health should be provided as they fit the preferences of Generation Z (Table 9).⁶⁶

Previous literature have stated the ineffectiveness of one-sided communication (Welch, 2012; Dahlman & Heide, 2021). It is therefore crucial for organizations to provide better

⁶³ p. 83, 85

⁶⁴ p. 84

⁶⁵ "Sometimes I get the feeling that my feedback e.g. surveys is not taken into consideration at all and when it comes to the real deal (support with mental health in the day-to-day business, talking openly about it, having options to pause for a minute and not only 15min meetings about mindfulness (often even in break/lunch times and/or after working hours at like 6-7PM!)"

⁶⁶ p. 86

feedback opportunities for employees to not only share their input on mental health activities, but also the status of their mental health. This would help organizations to better understand their employees and their mental health, and ultimately tailor their communication and initiatives to the needs of their employees. Internal communication department should also communicate about their strategy on how they will include feedback and therefore support their employees and their mental health.

Further, internal communication need to provide dedicated trainings for managers, which should be a common standard within all organizations. This is because a gap was discovered between the offered training, mentioned in the interviews, and the perceived support from managers shown in the survey results. Previous research has stated that managers need to understand the economic benefits of employee wellbeing, be given examples of successful implementations of mental health support and be taught interventions that are less time consuming (Coppens et al., 2023). Other training aspects can include communication skills or support strategies. Managers should also provide regular check-ins, not only to discuss their employees' mental health, but also to deliver input on their own health, as this allows for trust and open communication. Open discussion on and with leaders' mental health can also help provide an environment where mental health is openly discussed.

In summary, what needs to be improved on for Generation Z to feel engaged on the topic of mental health is authenticity, meaning organizations need to live out that mental health is not just another item on their agenda but rather an important part of their business strategy. This can happen through integration into values, but also in daily business, by providing mental health-related time-off, open spaces to discuss mental health and truly check-in with their employees on their wellbeing. It also means adapting to the preferences of Generation Z not only in terms of internal communication channels but also in the topic area. Feedback opportunities and open communication about how feedback is implemented, how strategies are adapted to the mental health needs of employees and what plans the organization is pursuing to improve mental health are therefore of great importance in convincing this generation. It is up to internal communication not only to provide suitable initiatives and relevant information, but also to pass on the importance of mental health to other levels such as leadership and management, so that everyone can work together to support the mental health of employees.

7. Conclusion

The literature review has shown that Generation Z is a generation full of special characteristics, not just in everyday life but also in the workplace, that have to be explored in more detail, as they are not fully integrated into the workforce just yet. Existing research, such as the one by McKinsey (2023) or Deloitte (2023), has additionally shown the importance Generation Z puts on mental health support by their employer. Some authors, such as Piao and Managi (2022) have also explored the overall mental health needs and attitudes of employees, while others, e.g. Kent et al. (2016) or Murphy et al. (2023) investigated how companies communicate and support their employees on mental health. Overall, however, the literature review concluded that limited research is available connecting all topics, especially considering Generation Z. Therefore, this dissertation aims to provide new insights into how internal communication can support the mental health needs of Generation Z.

Thus, based on the theoretical framework, the following research question was constructed: "How can internal communication strategies be affected by the mental health needs of Generation Z employees in the technology industry in Germany?". Through a mixed method approach, quantitative and qualitative data were collected, to uncover any similarities and differences between the results. A quantitative survey investigated the attitudes and preferences of Generation Z when it comes to internal communication strategies on mental health, such as their preferred channels, topics of information, their ratings on the internal communication and manager in terms of mental health communication and support, and the initiatives they would participate in. The qualitative data was collected through interviews with experts in departments of internal communication, marketing and HR in global technology organizations, who were asked about their internal communication strategy on mental health, including channels and initiatives, feedback opportunities, as well as topics and content. Both the survey and the interview questions were designed based on main theories and other information collected during the literature review.

The collected data concluded that internal communication strategies can be affected by Generation Z's needs in key areas: topics, channels, initiatives, managerial support and employee engagement. The results of the survey and thus the attitudes of this generation have shown that the right channels are already utilized, however, the topics communicated are not

considered important by Generation Z. More focus needs to be put on how Generation Z employees can support others struggling with mental health. While most companies utilize channels that are to the liking of this generation, depending on the resources, newer, more engaging channels should be used. Additionally, while many of this generation already have made use of the initiatives offered by their respective organizations, employers should offer more resources that are tailored to Generation Z's preferences. Lastly, the survey indicated that managers and internal communication departments need to gather more insights into their employees' mental health to be able to support them through accurate feedback mechanisms, while also providing an environment that puts the mental health of their employees first in their overall strategy and daily workplace. Managers can play a crucial role in not only providing a safe working environment that discussed mental health, but also provide the right support to their subordinates. Overall, the results indicate that internal communication in the German technology industry has sufficient strategies in place, with clear room for improvement for this new generation soon taking over the workforce.

This research has contributed to academic knowledge of Generation Z, their attitudes and needs when it comes to not only internal communication practices but also mental health, by delivering both, new insights and alignments with previous research. More importantly, it can help organizations in the German technology industry understand what they are doing well, and where they can improve, by conveying key statements from survey participants and an overview of their needs and wants in key aspects of internal communication to build employee engagement. Further, the expert interviews allow organizations to draw a comparison between their own internal communication strategies and those of others, while also gathering inspiration.

At the same time, this research also has certain limitations that need to be taken into consideration, especially when wanting to give directions for future research (Greener, 2018). Primarily, the small sample size and therefore low return rates in both the quantitative survey as well as the interview participants limit the research (Price & Murnan, 2004). Moreover, the lack of existing instruments for mental health and internal communication meant that the survey, both in its questions and scales, had to be created based on existing framework and literature, which ultimately limited the study's validity and reliability (Price & Murnan, 2004). Even

though the survey investigated the German technology, questions were still asked in English, which can lead to misunderstandings for those who do not understand English well enough to answer questions, therefore potentially guessing answers (Price & Murnan, 2004). Conducting interviews also brings limitations with them, such as issues with replicability and transparency (Knott et al., 2022). This means that interviews are hard to replicate because they “are dependent on contingent interactions” (Knott et al., 2022, p. 13), while interviewees could potentially be withholding truthful and authentic answers because of the research context.

For future research, multiple suggestions can be made. Firstly, as the research already focused on a comparison between internal communication managers and employees, a case study for a specific organization could be of interest to be able to draw more accurate results that can precisely point out flaws and gaps between strategies and employee attitudes. Secondly, as the sample size is quite small, a larger sample should be gathered in the next research when possible. The research has also shown that some do not care for the topic of mental health because they themselves are not struggling with it. Therefore, future research could investigate differences in internal communication needs on mental health between those who do not struggle mentally, and those who do. Lastly, as the research focused on the German technology industry, future investigations could be made into different industries or countries and comparing them with this existing research to uncover any effects culture or even organizational culture, can have.

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Appendix A
Survey Questions and Scales

1. What year were you born in?

- 1996-1999 (1)
- 2000-2003 (2)
- 2004-2007 (3)
- 2008-2012 (4)

2. How do you identify?

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Prefer not to say (4)

3. Are you currently employed?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

If: Are you currently employed? = Yes

What industry is your organization in?

- Manufacturing (1)
- Automotive & Transport (2)
- Technology & IT (3)
- Education (4)
- Agriculture (5)
- Health (6)
- Retail (7)
- Hospitality (8)
- Banking (9)
- Not listed (10)

If: Are you currently employed? = No

Or: What industry is your organization in? Is not = Technology & IT

Have you ever worked for an organization operating in the technology/IT industry?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

4. Is your organization located in Germany?

Yes (1)

No (2)

5. How many employees work in your organization?

Below 100 (1)

100-5000 (2)

over 5000 (3)

6. Through which communication channels do you receive information about mental health in your organization? Select all that apply.

- Newsletters (1)
- Intranet/SharePoint (2)
- Email (3)
- Blogs (4)
- Social Networks (5)
- Webinars (6)
- Live Events (7)
- Internal Apps (8)
- Team Meetings (9)
- Info boards/Flyers in the Office (10)
- I do not know of any channels (11)
- Other (12) _____

7. Which channel is your preferred channel to receive information about mental health in your organization? Select all that apply.

- Newsletters (1)
- Intranet/SharePoint (2)
- Email (3)
- Blogs (4)
- Social Networks (5)
- Webinars (6)
- Live Events (7)
- Internal Apps (8)
- Team Meetings (9)
- Info boards/Flyers in the Office (10)
- Other (11) _____

8. Through which channels, that your organization is currently not using, would you like to receive information about mental health? Select all that apply.

- Newsletters (1)
- Intranet/SharePoint (2)
- Email (3)
- Blogs (4)
- Social Networks (5)
- Webinars (6)
- Live Events (7)
- Internal Apps (8)
- Team Meetings (9)
- Info boards/Flyers in the Office (10)
- Other (11) _____

9. What initiatives does your organization have in place to promote positive mental health? Select all that apply.

- Workshops (1)
- Fitness challenges (2)
- Access to Gym Facilities (3)
- Mental Health Apps (4)
- Flexible Working Conditions (5)
- Time-Off (6)
- "No Meeting" Days (7)
- Reimbursement programs (for example for massages) (8)
- Trainings on mental health and how to deal with it (9)
- Treatment options (e.g. therapist) (10)
- Resource Websites about Mental Health (11)
- I do not know of any initiatives (12)
- Other (13) _____

10. Which initiatives have you used in in your organization? Select all that apply.

- I have not used any initiatives that are offered (1)
- Workshops (2)
- Fitness challenges (3)
- Access to Gym Facilities (4)
- Mental Health Apps (5)
- Flexible Working Conditions (6)
- Time-Off (7)
- "No Meeting" Days (8)
- Reimbursement programs (for example for massages) (9)
- Trainings on mental health and how to deal with it (10)
- Treatment options (e.g. therapist) (11)
- Resource Websites about Mental Health (12)
- Other (13) _____

11. Which initiatives would you be interested in that your organization currently does not use? Select all that apply

- Workshops (1)
- Fitness challenges (2)
- Access to Gym Facilities (3)
- Mental Health Apps (4)
- Flexible Working Conditions (5)
- Time-Off (6)
- "No Meeting" Days (7)
- Reimbursement programs (for example for massages) (8)
- Trainings on mental health and how to deal with it (9)
- Treatment options (e.g. therapist) (10)
- Resource Websites about Mental Health (11)
- Other (12) _____

12. How satisfied you are with the current channels used to communicate about mental health in your organization?

- Extremely dissatisfied (1)
- Somewhat dissatisfied (2)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- Somewhat satisfied (4)
- Extremely satisfied (5)

13. How satisfied are you with the current initiatives about mental health in your organization?

- Extremely dissatisfied (1)
- Somewhat dissatisfied (2)
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (3)
- Somewhat satisfied (4)
- Extremely satisfied (5)

14. What information does your organization normally communicate on mental health?

Select all that apply.

- How to create mentally healthy working conditions (1)
- Factors leading to stress and mental health problems (2)
- How to recognize mental health issues (3)
- How to help someone with mental health issues (4)
- How to get support when dealing with mental health issues (5)
- Why mental health matters in the workplace (6)
- None of the above (7)
- Other (8) _____

15. What information do you find most interesting? Select all that apply.

- How to create mentally healthy working conditions (1)
- Factors leading to stress and mental health problems (2)
- How to recognize mental health issues (3)
- How to help someone with mental health issues (4)
- How to get support when dealing with mental health issues (5)
- Why mental health matters in the workplace (6)
- Other (7) _____

16. Please indicate the amount of information you get from your organization about the topic mental health.

- Far too little (1)
- Slightly too little (2)
- Neither too much nor too little (3)
- Slightly too much (4)
- Far too much (5)

17. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I am well-informed about the mental health resources and support available within my organization.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

18. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I am well-informed about the topic mental health through communication by my organization.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

19. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: I am well-informed about the impact of mental health on productivity and workplace behaviour.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

20. How frequently does your organization share information about mental health? Select one.

- Never (1)
- Every couple months (2)
- Once a month (3)
- Every two weeks (4)
- Once a week (5)
- Daily (6)
- Other (7) _____

21. How frequently would you like to receive information about mental health? Select one.

- Never (1)
- Every couple months (2)
- Once a month (3)
- Every two weeks (4)
- Once a week (5)
- Daily (6)
- Other (7) _____

22. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The internal communications department of my organization sufficiently addresses and understands my mental health needs as an employee.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

23. How would you rate the internal communication department in conveying the importance of mental health awareness?

- Extremely bad (1)
- Somewhat bad (2)
- Neither good nor bad (3)
- Somewhat good (4)
- Extremely good (5)

24. How would you rate the internal communication department in encouraging knowledge sharing and interaction among employees?

- Extremely bad (1)
- Somewhat bad (2)
- Neither good nor bad (3)
- Somewhat good (4)
- Extremely good (5)

25. How would you rate the communication of your direct manager in addressing mental health concerns and resources available?

- Extremely bad (1)
- Somewhat bad (2)
- Neither good nor bad (3)
- Somewhat good (4)
- Extremely good (5)

26. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My manager possesses sufficient knowledge and information about mental health to support employees effectively.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

Please select "extremely happy" if you are still paying attention.

- Extremely unhappy (1)
- Somewhat unhappy (2)
- Neither happy nor unhappy (3)
- Somewhat happy (4)
- Extremely happy (5)

27. How likely are you to provide feedback on your mental wellbeing to your organization?

- Extremely unlikely (1)
- Somewhat unlikely (2)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
- Somewhat likely (4)
- Extremely likely (5)

28. How often are employees given the opportunity to provide input on mental health policies and initiatives?

- Never (1)
- Very Rarely (2)
- Rarely (3)
- Occasionally (4)
- Frequently (5)
- Very Frequently (6)

29. How often do you feel that your mental health-related feedback is taken into consideration by your organization?

- Never (1)
- Very Rarely (2)
- Rarely (3)
- Occasionally (4)
- Frequently (5)
- Very Frequently (6)

30. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My organization prioritizes mental health communication for its employees.

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Strongly agree (5)

If: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My organization prioritizes mental health... = Strongly disagree

Or: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My organization prioritizes mental health... = Somewhat disagree

What makes you believe that your organization does not prioritize communication about mental health?

31. How supported do you feel as an employee when it comes to mental health support and resources provided by the organization?

- Not Supported (1)
- Mostly Not Supported (2)
- Neither Supported Nor Unsupported (3)
- Somewhat Supported (4)
- Very Supported (5)

If: How supported do you feel as an employee when it comes to mental health support and resources pro... = Not Supported

Or: How supported do you feel as an employee when it comes to mental health support and resources pro... = Mostly Not Supported

Why do you feel not supported by your organization?

32. How likely are you to participate in mental health initiatives (for example workshops) offered by your organization?

- Extremely unlikely (1)
- Somewhat unlikely (2)
- Neither likely nor unlikely (3)
- Somewhat likely (4)
- Extremely likely (5)

If: How likely are you to participate in mental health initiatives (for example workshops) offered by... = Extremely unlikely

Or: How likely are you to participate in mental health initiatives (for example workshops) offered by... = Somewhat unlikely

Why would you not participate in initiatives offered by your organization?

Appendix B
Interview Guide

Theme	Interview Questions
Communication Strategy	1. How does the topic "mental health" affect your internal communication strategy?
Communication Mode	2. What communication channels and initiatives do you use within your organization to communicate about mental health? Potential Follow-Up Questions: Who is responsible for the communication about mental health? Are there specific channels you believe to work better for Generation Z employees?
Communication Frequency	3. How frequently does your organization communicate about mental health and support for employees?
Communication Content	4. Can you describe the content of communication related to mental health within your organization (what information do you share about mental health)? Potential Follow-Up Questions: Is there any specific campaigns that makes your organization stand out in terms of mental health support in the workplace? How does your content align with the mental health needs of your employees, specifically Generation Z?
Communication Quality	5. How do you ensure that messages are easily understood and relevant? Potential Follow-Up Question: How do you ensure that the information shared is truthful?
Communication Direction	6. Are Generation Z employees encouraged to give feedback, and if so how?

Appendix C

Interview Transcripts

1st Interview: AA

1 Julia Starke:

Thank you for joining me today for this interview. I will tell you a little bit about what I'm doing in my master's thesis and what I'm studying, and then it would be super helpful if you could tell me again exactly what you're doing at Atos. Then I would go over to the questions, if that's okay with you. I'm studying strategic communication, I also studied communication in my bachelor's degree and now I wanted to specialize a bit in internal communication in my master's degree and then I chose the topic of mental health in it, industry or tech industry for my master's thesis and what does Generation Z really want? I am now conducting expert interviews with various internal communication managers, but also HR managers in different companies in Germany and at the same time I have a survey running where I am asking Generation Z for their opinion on topics such as which internal channels do they want to use to communicate? Or what information do they want to receive on this topic? What appeals to them, e.g. exactly what work stores or other opportunities do they expect from their employer on the subject of mental health? Now you could briefly explain what exactly you do.

2 AA:

I'm in the Corporate Communications and Marketing team at Tech Foundation Germany and I'm actually 99% responsible for internal communications, which is what I do for the most part. This includes the media mix, everything is internal with us, SharePoint, e-mail and so on and so forth. I've been doing this for 10 years now with an internal focus and before that I was also involved in external communications and press relations.

3 Julia Starke:

Good, thank you. I would also jump straight into the interview and the first question would be how does the topic of psychological or mental health affect your communication strategy?

4 AA:

I'll be honest, we don't have a specific focus on mental health, but we work closely with HR, with the colleagues there who provide health or health services for employees in general. We don't have a specific focus on mental health for employees and certainly not for a certain

generation in the sense of young people, but if we do, then there are offers that are aimed at everyone or there are some offers for older people, not with mental health, but then classic age-related illnesses, which are then the issue.

5 Julia Starke:

And when you work with HR, are there any particular initiatives that you implement?

6 AA:

Yes, well, there is an HR employee at the Tech Foundation Germany who deals with these issues on behalf of HR. The health topics and the offers of the health topics are often linked on the SharePoint by HR via the company health insurance fund, for example, or the BAD. You can find the offers there.

7 Julia Starke:

And the communication that these offers existed, do you communicate that via email or is that linked in the SharePoint itself?

8 AA:

Yes, yes, so we communicate in two classic ways. One is that we place these topics on our SharePoint of Tech Foundation Germany, where all corporate messages are, as we receive them from HR, i.e. preparation, content and coordination with the specialist department, always done by HR, even if it is the Siemens company health insurance fund or an external provider, for example, when it comes to other health offers for fitness, food or similar. Our HR team doesn't do that itself; we have external service providers and if they provide us with an offer, we communicate it once it has been approved by HR. And then perhaps we use SharePoint first, our news page in SharePoint, and once a week there is a newsletter. This contains all the information that has been collected on this SharePoint over the course of a week. This newsletter is sent out by email, this news summary, and it usually includes a health topic more often than not.

9 Julia Starke:

Would you say that SharePoint and email are the channels that appeal to younger employees?

10 AA:

Well, let's just say that more social media things would perhaps be more appealing in terms of usage habits, but with social media we have the fact that many channels are also external, and

we have no influence on who has access to them afterwards or only to a limited extent. That's why these topics, health or internal company topics, are only ever communicated in this way when they are still relevant. What we sometimes do in addition are other formats. We have had Atos Live before, which is a streaming session on other topics that also had an internal focus, but in principle we use this SharePoint 1:1 and then distribute it via newsletter for these things that are really about binding offers, whether health, mental or others.

11 Julia Starke:

You had said you share these newsletters once a week, but yes not always with a focus on mental health.

12 AA:

Exactly.

13 Julia Starke:

You already said that mental health is not the focus of your communication. But if you were to communicate more on this topic, would you think once a week or once a month would be appropriate or what would be the frequencies?

14 AA:

Yes, so basically, we always have these health topics once or twice a month on average. Especially in times of Corona, it was different, also in the sense of strengthening, mental resilience, in the sense of not becoming vulnerable or how to get help if you have problems. But that's also what our health and social services are there for, which you can turn to if you have mental problems. But it's not specifically tailored to one generation. Because I think many people, even people my age, tend to believe that young people perhaps have more strength in them and are therefore more stable. So, I think that at some point we will focus on a topic like this, especially for young people.

15 Julia Starke:

Is there any other content besides what you offer, where you can sign up for sports programs or whatever. Are there any other specific mental health topics that are communicated about, for example, how can I support someone who may be suffering mentally?

16 AA:

About us at the moment, I would have to lie, no. But as I said, that's why we have the social service, the health service. We used to have our own colleague who did that. But now we also have our own pages in SharePoint, with HR, and the contact persons are also named there. These are external people with a medical background, but also for emergency situations. There is then the option of contacting them.

17 Julia Starke:

And the experts will then probably also ensure that everything that is communicated on this topic is truthful and understandable?

18 AA:

Yes, that's right, it's already focused on our end users, i.e. on all employees in general.

19 Julia Starke:

Yes, all right. Are employees encouraged to give feedback on the initiatives that are in place?

20 AA:

Yes, so within my team, we actually always have the comment function open or request feedback too. HR does it this way too because they post a lot of news first and then we replicate it or edit it a bit, but they usually always do that.

21 Julia Starke:

That's good. You mentioned with Corona that there was of course a special focus. That's probably toned down a bit since then, hasn't it? Is there something like a Mental Health Awareness Month instead?

22 AA:

No, but we are promoting "Back to Office", in which we want to motivate people to come to the office more often on a voluntary basis, precisely from the perspective that it is important to be in contact with colleagues, even if it is only once a week or twice a month, and not just to sit within your own four walls. Because having this social contact is not only important for work productivity, but also for yourself. Indirectly, this also means that if you want to have a healthy working environment and don't just pay attention to office chairs, you also make sure that you have opportunities to communicate with your colleagues and don't become isolated.

23 Julia Starke:

Yes, that is a very good point.

24 AA:

That was this great danger, also due to the additional home office, that this isolation situation became even stronger in Corona times.

25 Julia Starke:

Yes, that's right, I actually started my internship back then in Corona times.

26 AA:

Yes, you were probably one of the unfortunate ones who slipped in at exactly that time, but of course it was the same for everyone else who started their careers with us or joined us as newcomers. Of course, they were all badly hit because it was really difficult to get along with each other at times. I just wanted to say that I was a little surprised when I first read your question or the topic of your master's thesis, because I then thought that it was really about Generation Z, those who are the newest and youngest on the labor market.

27 Julia Starke:

Yes. Exactly.

28 AA:

I questioned whether they already have mental problems, so it initially irritated me a little. Not because I don't believe that this can ultimately affect young people in exactly the same way, nobody is exempt from it, but I would have rather assumed that this is an area of investigation for people who perhaps already have fatigue or other symptoms due to their many years in the workplace, or due to their life circumstances in the sense that when you are older, you have different challenges than when you are young and perhaps approach things in a way that is a little too complicated or too cerebral. I was surprised that there was exactly this focus and then I thought yes, that's why I wanted to ask you, I'm sure you can tell me how it came to this cut.

29 Julia Starke:

Yes, I can explain that. On the one hand, it came about because McKinsey and Deloitte, for example, always do a Generation Z survey every year and last year, for example, both companies found that Generation Z is a generation that, unlike others, actually suffers more from mental health problems and also expects more from their employer when it comes to mental health, partly because they struggle more with mental health than others. And that's why I was a bit interested. On the other hand, because this is still a new generation that is only just entering

the job market, is this of course an opportunity for companies to say how can I really support these employees, who are my future, according to their need.

30 AA:

Mhm.

31 Julia Starke:

I've covered all the questions so far, is there anything else from your expertise that you would like to share?

32 AA:

Yes, my question, I've also asked it now, is how the topic will be tailored. Of course, the topic is certainly very tempting, because ultimately there probably isn't such a huge mountain of studies focusing on IT companies.

33 Julia Starke:

Exactly. And the IT industry is already more of an industry where mental health is communicated more than perhaps in another industry. Or what do you think?

34 AA:

No, I don't think it's communicated any more, but of course I don't have a comparison - that's really a gut feeling.

35 Julia Starke:

How so?

36 AA:

I can see from my work that this topic of mental fitness or, in addition to physical activation and sports activities, this topic of mental fitness, that this is not offered disproportionately in IT companies, I don't think so.

37 Julia Starke:

In addition to sport and health initiatives, do you also run workshops or similar activities as a communications team in the company?

38 AA:

I can't think of anything specifically on this topic, no.

39 Julia Starke:

And if this then runs via HR, what is the process like? In terms of communication. When there is news, does the planning of how this is communicated go to you or does HR already prepare something?

40 AA:

Well, they prepare the content. Often, something is already placed on their SharePoint and we duplicate it or adapt it a little to our own layout, but as I said, the content comes from our colleagues in HR. For example, the content might be classics or offers such as healthy eating or when and how should I get vaccinated?

41 Julia Starke:

Interesting. So, if there are no more topics or questions from you, thank you very much for your time and have a nice day.

42 AA:

Thank you, take care.

2nd Interview: Johanna

1 Julia Starke:

Thank you so much for taking the time today. before we get into the actual questions, I was just wondering if you could quickly introduce yourself, your experience, what you do right now in your daily job.

2 Johanna Fritz:

Yes, of course. So my name is Johanna Fritz. I am responsible for corporate communications at service now for the region that we call Central EMEA that includes Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Central and Eastern Europe. I've been with service now for five years now, and before that I worked on and in in PR, mostly on the agency side. in particular I was more involved in strategic communication on the external side, I would like to mention that in my current role, from, you know the point of relevance that you're having here I look after Employee communication, but most importantly from the perspective of how the leadership is interacting and communicating with our employee base. The accounts I worked with at the agencies were generally just technology companies, my experience is indeed mostly tech companies.

3 Julia Starke:

Awesome, thank you. And so let's dive right into the first question. How does the topic of mental health and mental wellbeing in the workplace affect your internal communication strategy?

4 Johanna Fritz:

Yeah. so it should be noted that in general, from my experience, American companies pay a lot more attention to the topic of mental health than I would say Germans. It's not negative. There is no negative connotation to this statement. It's just an observation that I've made. Having worked for both German and American companies, now at ServiceNow ever since I've worked here, this topic has always been a priority no matter the leadership. And it starts from the global leadership. So the interest in the employees wellbeing in general mental health in particular, no matter the age. So it's not just about the young ones. We care about both older, middle aged and young people as well, and it does effect on the one hand you know how the leadership interacts and cares and set up the business processes that affect the employees and also our communication strategy, meaning it has to reflect the communication, has to reflect the intent and the strategy of the leadership that we care and what is being done. That's even most

important, because, just to say, hey, employees, we care about you and you know, you should look after yourself is not enough. The business, the leadership at service now has been doing a lot, a lot to invest in the wellbeing and the health of our employees and it's always been important to make sure that the employees know about it as well. So to communicate it properly. it was even more important obviously during the pandemic.

5 Julia Starke:

For sure.

6 Johanna Fritz:

It shouldn't be a surprise that was probably the hottest topic on our agenda. at that point we even had a task force in the company, that was constantly coming together, discussing the situation, the status, how do we inform the employees? How do we keep them updated with what the rules are? The conditions, what the rights of our employees, we had those IMT, we called them. I'll have to think about what that stands for, international Monitoring Task force or something. So we had that for every country, Where, you know, people came together to discuss what is the status of the health and wellbeing of our employees. Now these are no longer very active, but I can say the mental health and wellbeing of the employees is a key component of our internal communication strategy.

7 Julia Starke:

You mentioned that it's not just about saying, oh, we care about you, but also showing, you know, communication.

8 Johanna Fritz:

Yes.

9 Julia Starke:

Could you give some examples of, the type of information that you share with the employees? Like what topics you communicate about?

10 Johanna Fritz:

Yeah, sure. So of a multitude I would say, and I think from my experience, we're really a champion at doing that. So in terms of channels, this is really valid not only during the pandemic, but in general we have several communication, but also interaction and engagement channels with the employees. So for example we have, in general, we have quarterly all hands,

for example, all hands meetings. These are for the whole company, so obviously being a big global company, we can't all come together, but it's taking place in, in hybrid formats. There are live events or live opportunities for people to come together in our offices across the world, and then it's broadcast live streaming of that of the main event, which is in our headquarter in Santa Clara. One thing that we care about very much in these days, even more than ever, is people to come together to the office. we're investing heavily in, in very nice, centrally located locations, office spaces. We just opened a new, bigger office in Munich last month. Just opened up new, bigger office in Dublin. It's constantly, we've been growing, and we've been growing our office space as well and we're whenever we have these events, we want people to come together now to not feel isolated. It's important also for mental health, important for people to come together, to have some nice, you know, lunch together after the event and nice dinner together afterwards.

11 Julia Starke:
of course.

12 Johanna Fritz:
We've got playrooms in our offices for people to spend some time together. So, the all hands events, then we have these all hands events at an EMEA level so Europe but also at country level. Again, same format, hybrid. we also want to be inclusive for everybody to have the chance to be part of the event in a virtual way but also to come in the office and meet the other colleagues and we found actually especially with the younger colleagues this is really a wonderful opportunity that they take advantage very much anytime we have internal events they want to be there they want to come Together. now I am not the youngest anymore, I am definitely not a gen Z and I live quite far from the office, but we have and we've gained a lot of young talent over the last couple of years that have told us we want to come to the office, We want to work in the office, we want to get together at the office. these events are one channel that we use from that perspective. We also have a Facebook for internal purposes. Not sure if you're familiar with that. So basically how the normal Facebook is for all of us externally, they also have a business platform. it pretty much looks the same as the normal one. It's like an intranet, but the traditional intranet is like a website where you post things we don't have that we don't use that, but we have this Facebook because for us it should be about information, but more

importantly about interaction and sharing. And this is another channel that we use. I can actually show it to you if you want to see what it looks like.

13 Julia Starke:

Oh, that would be perfect. Because I've I haven't heard of that before.

14 Johanna Fritz:

You haven't heard of it?

15 Julia Starke:

No, I think most people or companies either have their own intranet or it's a SharePoint.

16 Johanna Fritz:

When I first joined I also found it really cool. so, it has groups as you know in you know in your normal Facebook, if you are on Facebook, I learned that only parents are nowadays on Facebook at least that's what my daughter says. so, the normal Facebook has groups. And we also have groups, by country, by region, by business unit. So this is for example the group that we have for Germany and Austria and it's basically people posting. So it's not just the leadership, but it's really anyone can post. So we've got customer meetings, we've got you know people coming together. We've got, I don't know, some of these people are going on a trip together. we also have Information, we've got a new webinar, we've got a new training. Whatever updates from the leadership, this is, for example, the direct leader for Germany and every week, for example, he posts a huge update about what happened in the region that week. what we also have is "life at now". This is more just for people to people like more human things. we've got special groups for, you know, this is where people share coming together in our offices, this is what we did.

17 Julia Starke:

Yeah, that's really cool. And it looks the same as Facebook.

18 Johanna Fritz:

It does yes. And then we have a channel that is like the official channel for our top leadership where they post, you know, things that matter to all in the company, more of an informational channels. So for example, we have Earth Day coming up and we want to have an event for that. Or are the top news. It's something that is more trying to inform everybody at the same time.

“we are a ServiceNow” for example, this is another channel. We have groups for people with disabilities, women, families. I don't believe we have a Gen Z group, so we're not doing that.

19 Julia Starke:

Is there one channel for like health information or not? Not just mental health, but in general health activities or anything because you know, sometimes companies like to organize fitness month or challenges or similar. Is there anything similar to that or?

20 Johanna Fritz:

We don't have a channel for that, but what we do, we have loads of offers and programs for that and typically they are posted by countries and where they happen. So, I'll give you an example. In Germany we've got a function, just like I am corporate communications, we have a function called workplace services. I will find an example. So, this one here for example, she is my colleague. so, they organize lots of activities in the offices, for example. So for example, we had Valentine's Day. She posted what happened. She posted beforehand, inviting people and then images from that event we had for example, this employee kickoff. We have this event once a year where one day all the employees come together in offices or virtually and we have a full day of presentations, guest speakers, music, loads of stuff is like our kickoff. typically, you would have heard from other companies You would have a sales kickoff, which is all the salespeople get together in a physical location. in our case it's for all employees because it's much more than just the sales. in our case over 22,000 globally, it's quite impossible to bring everybody together. So, we have this kind of a hybrid. So this is when we had the in January and people came together in Frankfurt to watch the sessions, but also have some fun together.

21 Julia Starke:

That looks really nice.

22 Johanna Fritz:

this is for example wellbeing week. We have a wellbeing week in September every year. That's another thing that is offered and you see here every day all kinds of, you know, like yoga things. And they post here in Germany because they are for Germans and it's the details. A cool thing that started this year, we have every day we have massages in the office. It's really cool.

23 Julia Starke:

That's really fancy.

24 Johanna Fritz:

Yeah, yeah.

25 Julia Starke:

So would you say the wellbeing week is that like a specific campaign, for example, that makes you maybe stand out from other companies?

26 Johanna Fritz:

I don't know if we're different from other companies, but it's not just that week. we have loads of activities all through the year, but in that particular week, it's every day is something different. It's something that we, you know, organize or also inspire the employees to do. for example, something that I've taken part in is a steps challenge. We use an app called Virgin Pulse and over that app you can track your steps and many other things. We had a challenge amongst the employees, and we were stepping, we were walking for a good cause, so we raised money. We were walking and then we raised money, and that money went to a charity.

27 Julia Starke:

That's good.

28 Johanna Fritz:

I like that for example, that's nice.

29 Julia Starke:

Yeah, that's really nice.

30 Johanna Fritz:

One other thing that I can mention, sorry, I realized that I'm speaking without any structure, but I'm very passionate about these things because we do we, I mean as you see you know, I know the topic is communication. So, as you as you notice, this is a way to communicate what we're doing and it's not, as you notice we as a company do loads of things but is not just the job of corporate communications to communicate that. it's a shared responsibility of all the functions and the people involved in that.

31 Julia Starke:

No, no, don't worry. Yeah.

32 Johanna Fritz

That's important to note. While I am responsible for employee communication, I'm not the one communicating all these things. I help I give guidance sometimes, but it's really, you know, their responsibility now. It's very important, no matter who does it, it's very important that the communication strategy is very clear and aims to inform and inspire and engage the employees and to take advantage of these benefits and opportunities as well.

33 Julia Starke

Is there like a certain amount that you try to communicate about this or is it you know when something happens that when you communicate? Or do you try to include mental health specifically?

34 Johanna Fritz

I would say it's an ongoing topic. So you know, I showed you our Facebook. I told you about the events. obviously we have, you know, email, teams channels that we use to reach out to employees. it's an ongoing topic. It's not like a once a month We want to do something, or we want to communicate is something that we have at the back of our mind all the time. When we have, for example, our local town halls, you know, we try to highlight different things. So for example, holiday is a topic. for example, typically in in the last quarter of the year, you know people have lots of holiday, that maybe they didn't take. We highlight that, we make sure over email, in the town hall "Hey guys you have to take your holiday, It's about your health, You need a break. At the beginning of the year as well, make sure that you plan your holiday, that you take your breaks." We do highlight that quite a bit. maybe in Germany you don't need to do that cause people are very conscious about taking their holiday, but you'd be surprised. Even in Germany, you know, we realized that, it's a very fast-paced company. There's a lot of opportunities for people. A lot of growth opportunities, it motivates people. People are very happy. In Germany, we've been awarded as "a great place to work" again this year, one of the best employers in Germany, amongst others for these opportunities. But obviously people sometimes need to run and work goodbye and focus on career. And we're saying no, you have to take breaks, have to look after yourself. we have guest speakers, by the way.

It's another thing that has been happening, especially from the US, guest speakers on the topic as well, who try to inspire our employees to look after themselves and also how to do it. especially for younger people, They are yet to discover how to look after themselves.

35 Julia Starke:

Do you gather like any information from the employees if they are struggling with stress or burnout or something like that?

36 Johanna Fritz:

Yeah, we have a survey that we call an employee voice survey. used to be twice a year. Now we have it only once a year, and amongst others we do inquire how they feel about their wellbeing, about their mental health as well. And if we notice and obviously during the pandemic, this was a hot issue during the pandemic. I think we even had that quarterly. We had tiger teams, how we call them, coming together, putting together ideas, things, how can we do to support our employees and we do have that, and it's taken very seriously. Action has been taken if we noticed, for example, certain teams or certain regions having problems with this. It's being looked into and solutions are being sought after. During the pandemic, I was impressed with, to be honest, when everybody was shutting down the offices for obvious reasons, we chose not to close our offices because we had employees, amongst others, younger employees who asked us not to close the office. Because it was interesting for me as well to realize that it was the younger people that were living alone, first job, in a in a small apartment, maybe not the best Internet connection sometimes. And they their whole social life was relying on work, and they were like, I need to go out of my apartment. I need to go out to meet other people and so it was a big effort for us as a company. You know all the preparations you had to make for people to be able to come to the office was a huge effort. But we kept the offices open for those employees. Especially with a real focus on their mental health, it was their wish to be able to still be integrated into life. And so we did that and it paid off.

37 Julia Starke:

I think for some, for some people, it's probably also about structure. That you're going to the office, you're there, This is kind of your daily routine, and that was completely thrown overboard. I was one of those young people, I did my internship completely remote, and I actually didn't meet about 95% of my colleagues until after I stopped working there. But for me personally it didn't make much of a difference to work remotely because I still felt like I knew all my colleagues from the virtual, personal chats we were having.

38 Johanna Fritz:

I agree with you. For me working from home, having chats, personal chats, even with colleagues, is just as valuable or relationship as it is if I meet them in person face to face. Now it's certainly adding a different dimension when you get to have a glass of wine with somebody and have a dinner and have a heart to heart, face to face discussion it adds. But I can say the ability during the pandemic for people to even come together and even see other faces have a structure, as you said, it helped very much. Something else that it came to my mind is something that we did and I thought was really well thought strategy. When we moved our office in Frankfurt, when I joined, our office in Frankfurt was at the fair, which is, I don't know if you've been to Frankfurt, it's not outside the city, but it's at the entrance of the city and it's in an area that is new and fancy, but it's quite empty so to speak. It's like the big Frankfurt Fair exhibition area. There was a mall and a couple of restaurants, but not very socially oriented and we realized very quickly that we were looking to hire a lot. We were looking for new employees and mostly targeting young people and we realized that the young people that we were targeting were not willing to go to the office at the exhibition area. They wanted to be in the heart of the city. They wanted to come to the office, come to the office by public transportation, to be able to go out for lunch with their colleagues, to use the lunch break to do some shopping. You know, the usual things that a young person does who doesn't have the pressure "Oh, I have to be at 5:00 O'clock or three o'clock at home to pick up my kids". And so we made the decision to change our office and we moved offices in the heart of Frankfurt, downtown Frankfurt. We've got Zara in the in the basement, and then it's our office up there. We've got loads of, you know, restaurants and shopping opportunities and people can come by public transportation to the office. And we did that especially for the younger generation and it helped absolutely.

39 Julia Starke:

How many like younger generation employees do you have in Germany? Do you have like a rough number or like a percentage?

40 Johanna Fritz:

Wow, that's a good question. We have a good representation of all ages I would say. so, in the recent years we have hired I would say, mostly younger people. So I think we're even more than 50% would be younger people. And by young I mean until mid 30. The biggest representation would afterwards be middle aged people also because we have attracted a lot of Talent and

leaders from the industry. And those leadership positions are typically occupied by, you know, a little bit more experienced people, obviously. I would say maybe 60 or 70% are young people.

41 Julia Starke:

you said you have 20,000 employees, but that's globally. How many do you have in in Germany?

42 Johanna Fritz:

In Germany, we're now about 600.

43 Julia Starke:

Do you think it would, in your professional opinion, be worth it to also focus on communication channels that are more suited do the younger generation?

44 Johanna Fritz:

We try to reach everybody in an equal way. I think it would be very difficult for us to adjust by age. Also, because we're growing very much and very fast and it's very, very difficult to scale even from you know global to the local perspective to then be able to tailor everything by age. I can say that for the things that I'm responsible for and in general we do try to have a very young style of communicating, very simple, very to the point. I would say that is already adjusted to the younger generation kind of receiving information. so, as I said, we don't have an intranet which is, you know, the typical platform that an older person would be familiar with. we are very agile in our ways to communicate. We try not to use so much email as we do teams. For example, some more chatting, more personal, more interaction, and which is already a way to communicate with the younger people. very much more, more dynamic maybe.

45 Julia Starke:

That is true. Have you experienced any resistance from employees when it comes to the topic of mental health? I have heard from Generation Z that they don't want their employer to know about their mental health, and that they do not feel comfortable sharing.

46 Johanna Fritz:

So, one thing that I forgot to mention is that apart from that annual survey, we have a quarterly check in. So, every person has a quarterly check in with their manager. And one of the standard questions that are in that check in is the mental health and the wellbeing of the employee. And every employee is asked in advance in writing and also the discussion with the manager afterwards to say how do you feel about it? We ask it proactively and formally. From my

experience so far, our employees are quite open about this, and quite interested in what the company is offering.

47 Julia Starke:

Okay that's good.

48 Johanna Fritz:

You know, there are certain cultures, like the German one, where people tend to see these kinds of topics as very personal. But even in Germany I see our employees being very much influenced by the American culture. Now they don't go out and start crying in the middle of the office, but when the setting is given and you know when they have the opportunity, either with a small team or just with the manager, they do say "I'm sorry, I'm not feeling well" or "I feel it's too much" and it's taken very seriously about the manager as well.

49 Julia Starke:

The managers, do they get some sort of training or advice on how to deal with someone that might not be feeling well?

50 Johanna Fritz:

They do, they do. And if there is a situation, HR is also always involved and you know it's really looked into, I would say. Obviously, if there are situations where people have issues with mental health, burnout, things like that, as it can happen in all companies, obviously the communication is very private. We have to adhere to the rules that are set by the local legislation. A manager cannot start talking to everybody "oh ive heard your colleague is dead tired and going crazy". Obviously they cannot do that, so that's important and that every manager gets the right training for that.

51 Julia Starke:

OK, that's good. I think we covered most of the questions that I wanted to ask. I'm not sure if there's anything else that you feel is worth sharing about your communication within the company, but this was very, very helpful. I mean ive only done more interview for my thesis and that one was very different from the way you guys go about the topic of mental health. But again, I think it's like you said, the American companies focus a lot more on this topic than maybe European companies.

52 Johanna Fritz:

It's the belief that our employees are our best asset. And from that perspective, the management says "if my employees are not fit either physical or mentally, then they won't be able to do their best job", which means sooner or later it will have an effect on my business. It's pretty simple. To ignore it and not do anything about it is never a solution. I mean, we know it from our private life, and especially in the tech industry, the companies that we're talking about is a lot of virtual work. It's a lot of from all over the world working together. You don't get to see the people face to face so much, so you know it. If everybody were coming to an office, you would notice very quickly from the body language of somebody that something is not right. Nowadays, many people would just turn off their camera, which is easy in their right to do so. And you don't notice and it's very difficult to tell if people have a problem or not. Now that's from a colleague perspective, but also from a leadership perspective. I would say it is very important for us as a company to not only offer things but also make sure that people take advantage of it. I come back to close the circle that communication is not just blah blah we are the best company and we're doing this, and we care. We really do things and really follow up with the employees to make sure that they are aware that they do it, that they take advantage of those things. So as direct and simple communication is sometimes the best and the most effective, with we've learned.

53 Julia Starke:

Yeah. That's very true. Do you have one example of like this? If you were to communicate about next a workshop or something similar, how would you communicate about these mental health related topics so that you can ensure people participate?

54 Johanna Fritz:

So we would try to engage people in a very exciting way. Almost like writing an advertisement. So, it's not just the plain information about the event etc.

But really making it really cool, engaging, inspiring people, really making them to feel like, yes, I want to be there, I want to be part of that. There is a possibility to make an event on the Facebook, like set it up and invite people. For bigger events like this, even for the massages, by the way, which is a simple logical thing. But we realized that we were offering these massages in the office every Wednesday, and not everybody knew it. And what happened was we decided "Let's send them blocker to their calendar" so an invite to our employees that they have it in

their calendars. So every time the day comes, they know. The reminder is on Monday so they can think about that on Wednesday. We say "We've got the massages and, you know, get yourself on the list". There is like a list who can come at what time. It's also a means of communication, if you will. Because people that way are aware of that and can really take advantage of that. So yeah, I would say if we have an event, pictures are very important and also afterwards. So what we do very much is, yes, advertise for whatever is happening, but also after afterwards, after the event, after the campaign, after the program, or if we had a story for example, that was very impactful like a mental health perspective, , we try to communicate afterwards what happened. What was the impact of that? What are the learnings that we took from that? We've got people who decided to take three months break to focus on their mental health. That was fine. They could do it and some of them came back and said I want to share my story, I want to share what drove me to do it, what it brought to me. We are very open and allowing people to do that, so people feel safe.

55 Julia Starke:

Is this something you advertise the company with as well? When people are wanting to apply for a job, for example, do you say we're very mental health focused.?

56 Johanna Fritz:

I think so, yeah. I'm not entirely sure if we have a special mention in our job adverts, I would have to have a look. But I'm pretty sure that we do have a like, you know, a standard mention that we encourage benefits and encourage people with even disabilities. I don't know if we have a special mention of mental health in that, but I can say, for example, we have one of our blogs and on social media, on LinkedIn for example, we have a special handle called "Life at now" and on that, people who follow us will see what it's like to work at service now and from employees. You will see these stories from our employees, where it wasn't all roses when they started their career, but it developed, it changed, learnings and all that. So we do try to be very transparent. Now if we have employees, for example, that have had some issues in their lives, For example, we have a colleague in the UK, whose brother committed suicide couple of years ago because of mental health issues and it has also had an impact on him too. And he's been very open. He's an example of a guy who decided to make the story open, share it with his followers. And we as a company have nothing to do with that. That's a very personal thing. He

is a representative face of service now, so he does speak at events and all that for us as a company. The topic is important to him personally, but when he posts you will notice that he also talks about what we do for him, for his family, for in general, for the topic of mental health. We as a company do not get involved in what he communicates out there, but we don't do anything against it. So some companies may say, hey, it stop it, we don't. I was just reading before our meeting, our CFO in the US, just posted he does it by the way, all the time, whenever she takes the time to be with her family holidays, she posts on LinkedIn. Inspiring people to take breaks and she puts it in her post "Take breaks. Care about your mental health. be there with your family". Because she realizes that in her position as a CFO, as a mother, as a wife, she's a role model and she wants to inspire people and especially the younger generation of women in particular, to do the right thing.

57 Julia Starke:

Of course. That makes sense. We have talked for quite some time, so I think we have reached our end. Thank you so much.

58 Johanna Fritz:

I hope it helped.

59 Julia Starke:

No, this was this was really, really helpful. It was really, really nice talking to you. Thank you so much.

60 Johanna Fritz:

I'm glad.

61 Julia Starke:

And if there's anything you want from my side, any results let me know and I can send it over. And again, thank you so, so much for taking your time.

62 Johanna Fritz:

Thank you, Julia. Absolutely. Let's keep in touch. Take care.

63 Julia Starke:

Have a nice day. Bye.

64 Johanna Fritz:

You too. Bye.

3rd Interview: CC

1 Julia Starke:

I would like to ask you first if you could briefly introduce yourself, who you are, what your position is in the company, and what your experience are.

2 CC:

Okay, so I am CC, born in '66 and did my Abitur in '87, did some odd jobs before starting my apprenticeship in '88, specifically as a wholesale merchant, spent two and a half years learning in a company that was also already an IT service provider, and then went away for a while, so after my apprenticeship, I worked for a quarter of a year in a shipping company in Hamburg. And then I came back because I simply found the environment better, the technical conditions, the framework conditions, the people, it was all a bit more tailored and pleasant for my generation at the time, so to speak, and I've been with this company again for almost 31 years now. I started mainly with financial accounting and did payroll for Hamburg and Kiel for our branch, with, I think, about 500 people, and yes, of course, we continued to grow, also reorganized ourselves over the years, and therefore we also changed the distribution of tasks, and I then moved from financial accounting to personnel administration. I used to do everything about contracts, supplementary agreements, certificates, everything that was recurring administrative tasks. And then we also centralized payroll, so it moved out of the branches, and then you had to sort of see where you stayed, and then in 2001 I went on parental leave, 3 years, worked part-time in another area in between, and after my parental leave, I came back to the personnel department, with various titles. This is a bit related to the restructuring, and I have to say quite honestly, the title I have is not important to me, but simply that the work fits and yes that the team fits, and yes, by now we have about 8,000 employees in Germany, worldwide we say about 20,000, I think. So, my title is HR Specialist, and I am in what is still called the HR Help Desk today, but which we will rename in the future to the joy of some colleagues, because some don't quite understand the self-image, so to speak, so help desk that's always first-level support. And we don't exclusively do that. We have young colleagues in the team now who have not been with us for so long, and we have the old ladies who are predominantly there, actually mostly women, and there we have, I think, a handful of older colleagues, and that's a pretty good mix and we don't just do first-level

support, but each one for his or her topic what he or she does. Also, advice and support for our German employees and managers. So, we have divided ourselves a bit. We currently have a Hungarian helpdesk, which handles the rest of the world, and we in Germany actually do everything that concerns German employees.

3 Julia Starke:

Okay, and this is a British company if I understand correctly?

4 CC:

Currently yes, founded in Germany in the eighties. By a Jost Stollmann, who founded the company in the 1980s, also built it up relatively large, then merged with companies in Germany, and when they wanted to expand further into the world, they needed investors, so we first came to an American parent company, then we were sold in the early 2000s, 2002, and thus became part of an English parent company.

5 Julia Starke:

Do you know approximately how many young employees there are in Germany with you?

6 CC:

No, but I could try to find out.

7 Julia Starke:

Oh, no worries, I was just curious.

8 CC:

It's hard to say, so as I said, when I came back from the shipping company in the 90s, we were still relatively young, many in their twenties, single, no children, the first ones started having children and starting families, but this structure has of course completely changed, right? We also have quite a few now who have been with the company for over 30 years, but I would have to check to find out.

9 Julia Starke:

Don't worry. My first question would actually be, to what extent is the topic of mental health communicated in your company? Is it communicated, is it an important part of the company?

10 CC:

Yes, it is. So, we communicate a lot via email or through our internal platform, called Yammer, I'm not so sure now, but it's not specifically ours, it's from a provider.

11 Julia Starke:

Yes, I think that belongs to Microsoft.

12 CC:

Could be. In any case, we basically have our internal "social media" program, so to speak, where a lot is communicated, but also a lot through classic email. So, we address mental health, but we also do other things, like running programs, we have a "Healthy Friday", where we have a colleague who keeps an eye on it in collaboration with health insurance companies and other providers, where we try to address the overall topic of health. And we have an external provider, the PME Family Service, through which we cover life situations, coaching, and emergency situations, yes.

13 Julia Starke:

This "Healthy Friday", what exactly is that?

14 CC:

It is, depending on the current situation, we cover various topics: Exercise themes. This morning, we started with a 20-minute yoga session. There were further sessions today, so today's theme was movement. When you have a 40-hour workweek and spend a lot of time sitting, what can you do for yourself, how can you mobilize your back? Such topics take place. But there are also nutrition topics. On Monday, and I think tomorrow is vein day. So on Monday, we have the opportunity to participate in vein training because, yes, Saturday is not worked. As mentioned, running training can be organized. Yes, Healthy Friday is always a bit of a day where you simply try to remember certain topics related to health. Recently, there was a post on the topic of cancer in everyday life, so one of our colleagues in Germany is particularly concerned with these issues.

15 Julia Starke:

Oh, okay. Are there any other workshops on this topic? Not just Healthy Friday, but also something about "how can I get help if I'm struggling with mental issues?" Is there anything like that?

16 CC:

Well, we have additional support. In addition to the disability representatives, we have a team called Disability Management, which also supports employees with all these issues, including

reintegration measures. These can be various things, such as cancer, classic issues like disc herniation, or mental health issues.

17 Julia Starke:

And how often is this communicated? How can one participate, or do you have to report somewhere if you're interested, or is it communicated to everyone?

18 CC:

Yes, the appointments we offer are all communicated. And also, things offered by our external provider, the PME Family Service. Those are communicated to everyone, then we get suggestions for dates. Because everyone has their own issues, whether it's with young children, aging parents, and so on. And if you have stress or mental health issues, we have contact details for this PME Family Service, and anyone can turn to them. This is also independent; nobody from the company finds out about it. We have an access code through which we can contact them, because, of course, anything related to health and illness is none of the employer's business. We have that, and as I said, the training or workshops that are offered are usually communicated to everyone.

19 Julia Starke:

Do you get the feeling that people don't necessarily like to communicate with their employer about their mental or general health? Is that something they tend to keep to themselves? What's your impression?

20 CC:

I think it's really different for everyone. Especially since not everyone is informed about this whole topic. With the size we have, when someone is absent, especially for a long time, I think everyone handles it for themselves. My experience, especially in recent years, is that my managers have always been very cautious about the topic. It's not communicated either. Actually, in my team, we've had 2 colleagues with cancer, and there was no official announcement. We only found out later or maybe in conversation with the person. I think the important thing is that if you don't want someone to know, then nobody will know. For example, I certainly wouldn't broadcast it widely, but if I had something that would knock me off track for a while, I would at least communicate it within my team. I find it terrible, and I've experienced it, that you hear "the employee, the colleague is sick, and we don't know when

they'll be back yet," and it keeps getting extended month by month. Then everyone starts to speculate, thinking, "okay, maybe it's cancer or something." That's why I would always tell my team about the situation, so they know. Of course, I can only say this because I've never been in that situation myself. But I think there are teams where communication works very well, but with, I estimate, around 700 managers, not always the right people in the right place. Some have more empathy, some less, and in a company of this size, I think it's difficult to oversee everything.

21 Julia Starke:

Are there management equivalents of a semi-check where one can say this and that is due or mentally I'm not so good?

22 CC:

Yes, so fundamentally, we have, of course, a selection process for management. In the past, it was a classical assessment center. I haven't looked into it, and myself also have no ambitions nor somehow a management to become on my last years. But it finds so an Assessment Center instead. You must this management training go through and I'm not sure, whether one then always notices whether that now also someone is empathetic or not. So in my role get I for example more often in the aftermath then with, that between the managers and the employees somehow different viewpoints are and you just also noticed, so okay, everyone has so his theme and his perception and that covers itself naturally also not and then you notice already so yes, then ask oneself sometimes is the manager now also capable or how behaves he himself so that one also sometimes doubts has at the abilities of our managers. I believe, that is really a quite personal level am I now ready with my managers over my themes to speak.

23 Julia Starke:

Yes, because I also have a survey on the side currently, and it came out, for example, that many Generation Z say "my mental health is none of my employer's business". So that they don't necessarily want to talk about it, but yes, some are maybe much more open and say hey, I want support from my employer now, and others say no, I'd rather seek help elsewhere.

24 CC:

Those are two different things, revealing what is, is one thing and getting help is another. As I said, we have internally, that Disability Management with, from my point of view, very well-

trained employees who take care of it and who also have a bit of an eye on it. And the possibility to use the external family service, I think it is also regularly used, but also for different topics. So, do I need a nursing home for my mother who can no longer live alone, or such stories. Therefore, it is also difficult to judge. So, I am a person who has actually always had good relationships with the managers over the past years, whom I also trusted and with whom I also talked openly about my concerns, so I have less of a problem there. I sometimes think that also facilitates cooperation, if someone now knows, okay, when my parents died, of course, I didn't feel well, when my nephew had an accident, I didn't feel well either, if you then talk openly about it and have a topic there, there may also be an understanding on the other side.

25 Julia Starke:

Of course. Is it then always communicated when something is pending, or is it really addressed once a month that there is this support, regardless of whether it's from the employer or the agency.

26 CC:

So, the family service regularly sends, maybe once a quarter or something, an update, which then lists the upcoming dates, for example, in the near future. Probably even more often, I think they give out dates for about 2 months. As I said, this is not actually communicated through the family service itself, it is usually forwarded by our colleague who is particularly concerned with the topic of well-being, as we call it. So, this comes regularly, and yes, she actually communicates quite a lot. I couldn't necessarily say once a week, but she communicates very regularly and yes, she also always looks for topics that she can pass on to us. These are, as I said, sometimes related to the agency, such as the cancer theme. But then we also receive dates for stress awareness, which are often shared trainings where we can do stress management and such, and that is communicated to everyone within Germany.

27 Julia Starke:

And those are probably also topics that address several issues of the workers, it's already tailored to their needs, right?

28 CC:

Yes, indeed. Due to our technology, our technical background, being in the IT industry, it's very fast-paced and there's a lot of pressure sometimes put on the staff. So, we also look at what are actually the things that concern the employees.

29 Julia Starke:

Are there any feedback options where employees can give input like "I'm interested in this topic" or "I'd like to receive an offer on that"?

30 CC:

I'm not sure, but I assume we also express wishes, which we do as part of surveys. Last year, we had a survey on bullying and conflict resolution. And then we have regular employee surveys, I think the cycle is currently every 2 years, and then it's evaluated, and there you also have opportunities to say what are the issues that concern us. The survey is structured into various topics, of course, such as the work environment, the team dynamics, communication within the company, all sorts of things. But even there, there are opportunities to speak up and say where I see the need for action.

31 Julia Starke:

But every 2 years isn't very frequent.

32 CC:

Yes, no, maybe not, but I think those are already broad surveys and then, of course, these surveys are evaluated first, then it's broken down to individual countries, then to teams, and so on. And then you actually go into sessions within the team itself to look at which topics we actually need to work on. And that varies from team to team, so you might have a team where everything seems fine, so you might have less need for those topics, but still, if health-related topics come up, they are addressed. But it also depends on the specific situation, and I simply believe that we wouldn't even be able to look at which results to take and how to implement them once a year, for example, given the number of employees. So, in that sense, I think the 2-year cycle is okay for us.

33 Julia Starke:

Okay, my last question would be, is there anything you think you do that's special, so to speak, within the company regarding well-being, health, mental health, that other companies might not necessarily do?

34 CC:

No, I wouldn't necessarily confirm that. But maybe it's because I'm a bit accustomed to the workings here. I'm someone who's in this environment, so not everything is perfect, but there's a lot that I think is good. For example, voluntary mobile work, but only within the country, not abroad, due to tax and social security issues. So, it's not so widespread with us, and I don't think it will come anytime soon because the British say it's not necessary. I wouldn't say we stand out from others, but I believe we're aware that in times of skilled labor shortages, you have to somehow attract young talent, and I think it's the overall package. What I find good is that we always look for what else we can offer, for example, we have a bicycle program, we have job tickets, we have voluntary mobile work, so you have the option not to buy your bike right away but to lease it and pay your monthly installment through your payroll and then you can buy it or exchange it for a new one after 2 or 3 years. We have various benefits, like group accident insurance, we deal with the issue of company pension schemes. At the moment, we're working on that, but I don't know if we'll pull it off, making a contract with Urban Sports Club. We also have employee offers through our works council, which, in turn, has different options that the employer cannot initiate but the works council can. And I know there are various fitness centers available through the employee ID card that offer discounted rates. Overall, I would say we don't have any highlights, no specials. For example, we don't offer sabbaticals. Although we have mobile work, and I work only 20 hours a week, but I believe that sets us apart, for example, from other large companies. Because at the moment, we're not able to offer sabbaticals properly, nor part-time retirement. I work only 20 hours because I didn't increase my hours after my parental leave. A few years ago, we were offered the opportunity to take a sabbatical. This usually meant that someone worked full-time for half a year and received only half their salary, then took half a year off and received the second half of their salary, because these are also social security-related issues. You're only allowed to take a maximum of one month of unpaid leave, which means you have to receive some compensation to pay your social security contributions and such. And in that aspect, we're probably not as good as others. Upon request, you can take a combination of unpaid leave, annual leave, and a leave of absence for half a year. Some colleagues have already done this.

However, this leave of absence means you don't have a guaranteed right to your job when you return. Typically, the job is held open, but it's agreed upon beforehand.

35 Julia Starke:

And the whole health topic is generally more of an HR initiative rather than communication if you have something like that?

36 CC:

Yes, well, there are initiatives from other areas too. We also have a health circle, but I mean, mostly there are HR people in it, who also take a look at where are the issues that we need or that are important for the workforce. But actually, this whole topic is within HR. Maybe that's also a difference between us and the Americans. So, communication and marketing, that's more about external representation. But also internal communication, it's more about, let's call it, business topics. In March, we had a "Town Hall" meeting with our current German management. And that was also supported and somewhat moderated by Communications, but as I said, they have nothing to do with our HR topics and health topics. So there are always people from the business side who certainly also try to initiate initiatives or collaborate with us, but for the most part, it really runs through HR with us.

37 Julia:

Yes, fascinating. I think I'll find many different perspectives in my thesis as well. I think we are at the end now; I have asked all my questions and if you don't have any more I'm happy to end here since it's a Friday and all. Thanks again for taking the time, and I wish you a nice weekend.

38 CC:

Okay, Julia, you're welcome, and goodbye.

39 Julia Starke:

Goodbye.

4th Interview: Lena

1 "Julia Starke"

Thank you for being here today. I'd say we, we jump right in. , I'm just going to give you a quick overview of what we're going to talk about. , I'm going to tell you a little bit about what my thesis is about. Mm, hmm. And then maybe you could also explain shortly about yourself what you're doing. , why you think you're the right person to talk to about this topic? And then I have Around 5 main questions, and then a couple, you know, we'll see where the conversation goes. But that's just the structure of today. so my thesis is about internal communication on mental health for generation Z, , in the German IT / tech industry. So, my goal is to find out how do IT organizations communicate about this topic and then what does generation Z actually want from their employer? and that's why I'm conducting these interviews.

2 "Lena Peller"

Perfect.

3 "Julia Starke"

Can you quickly explain who you are? What you do?

4 "Lena Peller"

My name is Lena. I am a team consultant, or people consultant is my official title in human resources, which we now call people and communities. And I used to be a classical, , a generalist HR generalist. I'm now more working with teams, building trust in teams, change management with teams, conflict resolutions within teams. So having more of a facilitated and coaching role.

5 "Julia Starke"

And that is within Germany or is that a global role?

6 "Lena Peller"

That is an EMEA role, so across the entire region. And I think part of your question was also why I'm the right person to talk to you about this. I'm a regional Co-lead of the mindfulness and resilience community. In EMEA and that might be relevant for the topic perhaps.

7 "Julia Starke"

Very much so. you know, we're going to also talk a little bit about communication and so the 1st question would actually be, how does the topic of mental health influence the communication within the organization?

8 "Lena Peller"

So, the general communication I think it's being influenced in a way that we've become more conscious of being a global company and not an American company. I mean, it's always a little bit of a pendulum back and forth, but I think we've seen, for example, the times of our Town Hall sessions are adjusted, or there's two sessions happening, one in the early morning for early birds and the Asian Pacific population. So, there's options to participate. we're working a lot more with recordings. We're also being a lot more Encouraged to, within Webex, record a small, short summary with your slides, et cetera so that we Take a little bit of that catching up burden away from employees. So, I think there's more sensitivity around that topic. and also around, you know, be conscious with which channel you used to communicate, because there's a lot of chat Happening so people still use email. So, it's a little bit of a mess still, but we're trying, I think, to Raise awareness of what's the best medium to communicate because there's so many channels that you could potentially have to look after. but in terms of the content, I think what we've seen a bit more duty of care in terms of we realize, well-being is an issue, especially mental. there's from time to time, for example, 1 of the Psychologists might come on a global call, et cetera. I think you see those influences there.

9 "Julia Starke"

So, do you think that the, the topic mental health is prioritized within the organization?

10 "Lena Peller"

Well, I think it is prioritized. In terms of what we're doing. For it to raise awareness. To be entirely honest, I think there's a bit of a rift I think what we've seen in the past 5 years is enormously, you know, mental health has become very, very important, the stigma has been removed a lot. People talk more about it. You might find an employee talk about Their anxiety that they have, et cetera so that I've never heard that before like 15 years back. people Talk about this, so it's become much more acceptable and, you know, people are opening doors for each other by opening up the topic. So that's really positive. We have Like, a room for, which is called "safe to talk" where people are throwing things in, like, how they're doing today, or what they find difficult. So that is the 1 and I think it's Super positive and then on the other hand with restructurings and, you know, change and change. I think the tension level and the pressure has increased a lot as well. So There's the positive development on the 1 hand. and then there's the

detrimental development when it just becomes too much so I think employees are under a lot of pressure and there's a lot of talk about the mental load.

11 "Julia Starke"

So, how is that addressed? you mentioned the safety room, but is there other Communication or initiatives?

12 "Lena Peller"

I mean, the company is doing a lot so there's these employee resource groups or networks, depending on their size, or we call them "inclusive communities". I think there's a realization that work is a big pressure part, but also we have so much more in our lives than work. There's parents with children who have disabilities, or, you know, people are sick of serious diseases or their, their relatives or losing a relative, et cetera. So, there's a lot of these employee resource groups where they find peer to peer support for example Neuro diverse parents with neurodiverse children or, you know, that kind of thing. and then we have the mindfulness and resilience community where we offer monthly sessions. we offer special quarterly sessions. Then we have the well-being initiative where, you know, body mind, spirit relationships all is addressed. So, there's a lot of awareness creation, and also that peer to peer support, where you can just reach out to each other, which, I think is immensely helpful. and then there's like our community, we try to provide opportunities where you practically can actually take just 30 minutes out of your day. I personally usually offer a BI-weekly sessions for just 15 minutes of meditation on a Friday at lunchtime so we're trying to provide these opportunities where people can just find a little bit of quiete the problem is, I think, that sometimes it's preaching to the converted or to the choir because if you're already interested in that, you have to have to reach the point where, like, yes, I need that. But then there are People that tell us I'd love to join these sessions, but I'm just so busy. I can't even go to the bathroom between calls. I think it's just a lot. I'm a systemic coach, so I look at it from systems from a systems perspective. You have the world system where so much is going on that affects us. Then you have the national system of the Cisco system where so much is happening. You have your teams; you have your families. I think there's a bit of a crisis of orientation and overwhelm on all different kind of Areas.

13 "Julia Starke"

These workshops that you mentioned, monthly, quarterly, what are they normally about? What is it exactly?

14 "Lena Peller"

Yeah, so there's different topics, so from the health and wellbeing, that could be something physical. Like they're doing a step challenge or something or healthy eating. But from a mental health perspective, it could be the topic of resilience how to build resilience as a group, for example, was a topic. we had a panel discussion in our community recently for leaders which we call "how full is your cup". Because, you know, how can leaders care for themselves so that they can care for others? And just trying to have an exchange going and ask the audience, what are you doing and maybe give them some inspiration what they could do to build resilience. Also, we had something around what is resilience. People sometimes feel resilience is never falling down. No, it's actually getting up and learning from it. Becoming stronger. Its A mix of education and some practice, and maybe some inspiration of what people could try out. So, resilience is a big topic and then just the classical mindfulness for us where we just Actually do a meditation with people and say, okay, calm down. and the some of the other topics, we have a topic coming up for the health initiative, which Is "permission to ask", which I suspect is going to be asking for support, which is Difficult for many of us, I guess. I'm just thinking of previous topics. We had something just now, really good, which was more around the lines of self-care. a big topic you know, what could we do to do practice self-care. I did a session once I call it the mental gym. How can you become mentally strong? Gratitude exercises and meditation and different kinds of things of general, positive psychology things.

15 "Julia Starke"

That is very interesting. You mentioned that leaders or managers, they also get the opportunity to have, like, specific Workshops or initiatives. do you think that makes A difference for managers to understand, how can I not only support myself but also my employees?

16 "Lena Peller"

Yeah, I think it's a general phenomenon. It's interesting. I have another call today where we talk about Mother's Day. for the U. S. Mother's Day comes up. Caregivers, generally, I think, have a tendency to forget about themselves when they're responsible for others. We see it with nurses and doctors and whatever and and with parents, of course, and then, I guess leaders are similar,

they have to manage their business. They have to take care of their people. especially middle managers are, you know, being squashed from both sides, they need to manage up and down and Protect people from things, so I think they're under a lot of pressure and the company puts a lot on them because they need to take on a lot of Responsibility and tasks and oh, who could that do? Who could do this? Let's ask the managers to do this and Here's another thing. so I think That's why it's important to also look after them because they not take the time for themselves.

17 "Julia Starke"

When you do these Workshops or initiatives, how do you get people to sign up or to participate? how do you promote it?

18 "Lena Peller"

Very different channels. So sometimes it's via a general newsletter. If it's something Germany specific, it would be in a newsletter but then also sending it to different chat channels, like the coffee crew here in Germany, or You know, if we have the mindfulness and resilience room would send it there or also, if it's a mental health topic, also send it to the safe to talk space. , you know, cross pollinate with our Other employee resource communities, where we feel this could be of interest. If it's a huge thing, a companywide thing, sometimes it goes out via chat Bot Where you get like, uh, this is coming up, but that's only for the Highest-level things, and sometimes we still get calendar invite sent via email. So, if I'm part of the initiative, for example, and I've signed up with them I'm getting the calendar invites or the email where I can download the calendar anyway.

19 "Julia Starke"

What Audience do you normally have, is it mixed? Do you have a lot of young employees taking part in this?

20 "Lena Peller"

I would say it's mixed with a tendency to have older folks on there. , slightly older. especially and this is very interesting because when I do my meditation sessions usually have, like, 6 or 8 people. I had a session where it's all middle-aged men, for example, which I thought was super fascinating because That's not the 1st people I would think of when you say, come in. so I think, with the resilience topic, especially in stress management, you have to have reached a certain

level of desperation and need to actually go and get there and invest the time. That's how I explain it to myself. I must say if we're doing something in the office I think it's younger. So, you would see more young people come in in the office and meet up and, , contrary to the myth that young people don't want to come to the office anymore. I think they do come for these events for sure. I think generally it's a mixed, but it's hard to say because We are older on average, so I don't know what the statistical relevance is of that observation.

21 "Julia Starke"

Do you think there are certain channels that might work better for the younger employees to motivate them?

22 "Lena Peller"

I don't know, I'm not sure without Going into cliches. I know for example, I'm very frustrated with the app that we have, it's so hard to log in with 3-time triple security or something that I don't use it. So, I don't know if we put things on an app or something, if that would work better. It might be more a topical relevance perhaps. because, as I said, I think a lot of what we're doing is You know, you have children, you have more responsibility, you're being overwhelmed. The parents are getting old what do I do now so the overwhelm is getting worse Versus understanding what does the Gen Z, for example, need For the health perspective, is it more of a Anxiety thing, and, you know, more real mental health topics in terms of mental illness and things that show up, or is it cause we are more catering to the overwhelmed worker I guess in general.

23 "Julia Starke"

That's what I'm trying to find out. What does the app that you mention look like and what's on there?

24 "Lena Peller"

I look at it more in the web browser, because it's so much easier than the app. So, the four elements of the Pavelka house, which is our wellbeing initiative, that has eat,, sweat, think and connect.so those four elements. And so, it has videos and recordings and recipes and, you know, all kinds of things. So, you can browse around and educate yourself. my thinking, you know, that area in my mind, I want to improve some of that you can go and search around. But if we

do step challenges, for example, you would sign up on the app, register your team and the app, and then register your steps through the app.

25 "Julia Starke"

And that's open for everyone globally?

26 "Lena Peller"

It's open for everyone, and you can even invite 1 external person. So, a friend or whoever is interested.

27 "Julia Starke"

That's really cool. is there opportunities for employees to give feedback on these initiatives and maybe also say I want a workshop, or I want a mindfulness break on something else?

28 "Lena Peller "

Yeah, I'm not sure if they're aware of all the options, but, I mean, they can contact anyone. They can see who to contact from the sessions. Obviously we have a survey after sessions. I recently had an idea for a session, so I opened a case in our case management system and said Hey, I have an idea and then talk to someone about it.

29 "Julia Starke"

So, it's also a little bit tailored to the mindfulness or well-being needs of the employees?

30 "Lena Peller"

So, you can always come in and say, okay, I think this would be helpful or from the mindfulness and resilience. we asked them, you know, what else could be helpful do you have an idea? So, what I brought in for example, is because, We've gone through a round of restructuring and what's happening is that my role was impacted and I'm noticing in a lot of discussions I have with others is If your impacted, obviously you have a problem and you have to manage for that but if you're not impacted, you might have more work suddenly because you take what will work someone, or you're losing friends and you're losing colleagues that you really like so you have this survival syndrome. So a lot of mental issues can come up from that it's basically dealing with change and coping with change. So I thought that could be important right now to just gain more awareness of what's actually going on for me right now and how can we as always talk about it, voice it and then deal with it?

31 "Julia Starke"

Would you say there's more options to speak and get together rather than just information? Are these initiatives more about Bringing people together and having a conversation?

32 "Lena Peller"

A lot of the sessions are experts speaking at people, but then we're also using Audience involvement, like through surveys. it's actually lovely because you can see, you know, if we're starting a session, say, how are you feeling today and you see, like, overwhelmed tired. You're like all right. We're all in the same storm. so there's this community feeling already and then through chat and things, you can people interact with each other during the session. I told you, we have this session coming up with permission to ask and so I thought maybe have a follow up session Where we put people into breakouts of 4 people or so and then they can have a chat around it and just You know, get to know new people and exchanged a little bit on on the topic so there is this ability to talk to each other about something that interests them or moves them in a way. I mean, I'd say with my team, we used to talk a lot about these topics. but I know for a lot of teams, it's still business business, business, technical stuff. No check in on How are you doing today? What's going on for you? it takes time to get that into the culture, I'd say.

33 "Julia Starke"

I bet, you know, if somebody prioritizes mental health within Their team, even if it's a business team, then it will probably be talked about more because they care about it.

34 "Lena Peller"

Yeah, and I think the leader is such an important role in it by, you know, providing the space for what's appropriate and what isn't appropriate. And I've heard people voicing that in my team, we could never talk about this, you know, there's no space for it. I was doing a session, just to give you an example, where I was positively surprised, maybe taking back at first, but then positively surprised. We were doing a workshop and this young lady comes in and says I have my period, I'm mentally not well, I'm in pain, I'm going to go for a run and come back in 2 hours if I can and I was like, at 1st, Oh, uh, all right, but, you know, all of the Colleagues didn't bat an eye and said, you know, feel better and she went. I think that situation in a different team, maybe with middle aged, white men, I don't know, would be So different. And I was like, oh, she's actually asking for what she needs and she's taking care of her mental health and her physical wellbeing actually well done. So.

35 "Julia Starke"

That's how it should be because You're not productive either then. Are employees Encouraged to take, if they're not mentally feeling Well, can they take off a couple of days?

36 "Lena Peller"

I would say not specifically for mental health, but obviously you can always take days off when you're ill. and I think there's a growing awareness that that Can include mental health. I would say, structurally, that's not a problem because we have the ability to take emergency time off, et cetera. I think it's more of a barrier in our own mindsets. I think that'd be very interesting to learn If that's a generational thing. because for me if I was thinking "okay, I'm feeling down today I want to go back to bed". I would probably not actually do that that. but it's different than oh, I have the flu I go back to bed. Yeah, that's totally acceptable. Expected even. I think it's more of a mindset issue with people.

37 "Julia Starke"

And the acceptance probably as well. You don't have the physical injury or something that.

38 "Lena Peller"

Yeah, or they wouldn't talk about it. I mean, my go to would always be the migraine. I have a migraine, and it could be something else or something, because Then people are like "oh migraine Yeah That's bad". So you probably wouldn't. I think that's more acceptable.

39 "Julia Starke"

Is there any specific activities in Germany that you think is special that Cisco does may be compared to others?

40 "Lena Peller"

I wouldn't say special, but I think our general manager, or our VP is he's very grounded in terms of his family's important to him and, you know, being Not old world tough, you know, pull yourself together kind of communication. And I would say, which is not a German initiative, but we've been really good at doing it, for example, in January last year We had the blue Monday initiative. I think there's this Monday where most people feel really bad Worldwide or some statistical day I don't know. So, we did a really nice blue week or something where we had lots of things, I did my mental fitness talk there and we have I had other initiatives, which was really good. So, I think from time to time, we're really good in providing Really nice weeks and

initiatives. we had a well- being week where we focused on different kinds of wellbeing, especially also financial wellbeing, which I think was interesting, because that can be a big source of stress and anxiety. I think we're doing a good job in being holistic about it.

41 "Julia Starke"

That's very good. Is there any, like, written communication that goes out as well? In terms of Mental health information or support.

42 "Lena Peller"

Well, we have a SharePoint, a global wellbeing SharePoint. We have the safe to talk SharePoint. what is super super super good is we have the employee assistance program where you can call people for support, get real coaching and psychologists and everything. It's super good and then we have the family service, I think it now includes elder care if you need, like, a care placement. I think that removes a lot of the burden if you find someone to help with that. I used this with my son because he has a learning disability, and I noticed afterwards how much stress it cost me. And just having a place to go and then having a recommendation on a local place for me to go and getting me in the door Was such a relief, so I think these practical things are also very, very helpful. even if we don't talk about it or, you know, make it public, I guess we all do this thing, or many of us do this thing where you build up an issue, Unconsciously and then I phone call to the right person makes all the difference.

43 "Julia Starke"

Yeah, yeah, no, totally it's a great thing to have. my last question actually, if you still have time, If you're thinking about generation Z, do you think it's worth considering doing something special for the younger employees?

44 "Lena Peller"

Well, personally, I think it definitely worth it because what I've noticed is they're being much more open with their mental disorders you know, if you're having a anxiety disorder or something. We don't hear as much of those from older people, don't know, it's just maybe because we weren't diagnosed with them. We just dealt with it, , on our own. but I think this is where It might be worthwhile to have more education around those and more understanding so that everyone understands it. I sometimes feel that There's a generational gap opening up between boomers that are still here and then you have the gen X. so I'm between Millennial and

X. I can step into either of them. but I think especially from the boomer side, there's still a lot of judgment on putting yourself together. maybe more awareness for everyone would be helpful and then I don't know where to go from there. Whether there's something specific. I personally feel with the employee assistance program and the networks that we have, and all of that, they could be well covered. Yeah. Um, because they could also join the networks or other initiatives.

45 "Julia Starke"

I'm doing a survey at the same time with Generation Z. so I have 2 parts, my interviews, and I'm doing a survey and 1 of the questions I asked in the end is how supported do you feel by your organization? If don't feel supported, why do you not feel supported? And also, would you open up to your employer? And a lot of People say, oh, I feel like I would be judged, or they think I'm not productive. At the same time, the reason I chose the topic was because other McKinsey and Deloitte did surveys, and they found out the generation Z, you know, is a lot more open about Their mental health struggles, and they also expect a lot more from their employer. Yeah so that's kind of where the idea for my thesis came from. But I'm focusing on organizations in Germany and Deloitte and the McKinsey was very global. So, you can also kind of assume Cultural defense again that in Germany, it's not something that comes first or is talked about.

46 "Lena Peller"

I think there's a strong sentiment. I don't know if it's specifically in Germany, but a strong sentiment when I also talk to people is That talking about your difficulties means you're not productive. We don't know how productive this person is if they say they have this and that, and they struggle with this. It can still mean that in the time that they do work they are productive. and I always bring up the white, middle-aged leader that goes, you know, mountain biking, and then breaks his collarbone or something and can't work for 8 weeks. I mean, that's kind of acceptable, but saying, hey, I can't get out of bed today, I have a problem. Is not so acceptable. I'm like, isn't that a little Judgmental or, you know, maybe we should shift our mindset. So, I'm trying To take that perspective, but I think it's a way to go because we have still have this old mindset about work and, and lots of time means productivity. I think it's, it's a back and forth. I mean, I have alpha boys at home, in terms of generation, but, I would say it's a little bit of come on, pull yourself together and or take time for yourself and which 1 is the right. I think it's always needs to be a discourse and so that's what I'm looking at when I look at teams is, how can you

understand what everyone needs a little bit better so that we bridge these, these conflicts. I think especially the generational topic is I think we will see more and more, or like, okay let's understand each other better because we can benefit from All kinds of experiences, I think yeah, for sure.

47 "Julia Starke"

Thank you so much for your input. I think I asked all of my questions. Is there any questions that you have anything that you want to add on that maybe you want to mention?

48 "Lena Peller"

No, I don't actually. But I am really looking forward to seeing the results of your research.

49 "Julia Starke"

Thank you again for your time and contributing to it and have a good rest of your day!

50 "Lena Peller"

Thank you, you too. Bye

51 "Julia Starke"

Bye!

5th Interview: NN

1 Julia Starke:

Thank you for taking the time today to conduct the interview. So my master's thesis revolves around the topic of mental health and Generation Z in the German IT/Tech industry. My goal is to find out a bit about what IT companies in Germany are doing on this topic and what Generation Z really wants. I also have a survey running on the side that aims to find out what Generation Z wants, and with the expert interviews, I hope to find out the strategic side of things. I have a couple questions prepared, but first would like you to present yourself, what you do, why you are an expert. Just timing wise, I think the meeting will end after 40 minutes just so that you know.

2 NN:

Yes, good.

3 Julia Starke:

Could you please introduce yourself?

4 NN:

Gladly. I am NN, I am 42 years old, and I have been working at one of the leading independent system integrators and managed service providers in Germany since July 2023. I am a communicator responsible for internal communication within our company, which includes a range of tasks from classic internal communication, such as distributing information, establishing dialogue, communicating strategies within the organization, and even cultural work, which is also part of internal communication, but in our company, it's a bit more extensive. We have been recognized as a "Great Place to Work," and I manage this as an internal communicator.

5 Julia Starke:

And approximately how many employees do you have at your company?

6 NN:

We are now just over 950, I believe. So we are just about 1000 employees, growing, which means we will likely surpass 1000 this year, but we are definitely growing.

7 Julia Starke:

And young employees? How many of those do you have? Approximately, if you know.

8 NN:

I Don't know, but I can have it looked up for you. It might also be quite helpful to have as a basis. Of course, we are always getting more. We are a family-founded company with a very

clear value structure, values like reliability, respect, good interaction with each other, and care, which are very important to us and also lead to people staying with us for a very long time. Just two days ago, I shook hands with someone who had their 40th anniversary, yes, it's really great, but many young people also find their way to us. How many there are, I can't tell you, but I can look it up for you. We also provide training. We have dual students in training with us, we now have many young people through the career changer programs, some not Generation Z, some are, who have already, even though they were early in creative professions, said, yes, okay, I want to start something completely new now, even though I am only in my mid-20s, and switch to IT.

9 Julia Starke:

Yes, cool. I would start directly with my first question, which is how does the topic of psychological or mental health impact your internal communication strategy?

10 NN:

Yes, it is, so mental health overall is a big topic for us. I think, like almost every company nowadays, so we said, we offer extra training modules and self-study, but also accompanied learning, seminars especially on mental health. Both the aspect "how can I organize myself well," but especially the part resilience, "how do I get through stressful phases, through demanding phases well," and how do I come out of them stronger. And that is something we actively offer, we even have 2 modules coming up soon, which we also offer for the whole company and actually also have an extra block for our trainees, I believe, in the training because we also see that we receive more sick notes, for whatever reason, it can also be a physical illness, it is simply important to us that our people are doing well and that includes a large part of mental health. With us, everyone has the opportunity, not just Generation Z, but everyone has a help service that helps us, that helps employees, so they don't have to go through HR to say, "I have an issue, I need support." Instead, they go directly to a counseling service, can call themselves, and we never find out that they called there and can simply say "I need acute help." And then they get a quick conversation or very quickly places for psychotherapy or coaching or other doctors. But with mental health, there is often a different urgency behind it. When you are in a state of emergency, it is different than when you have a physical concern, say you need a dentist visit, either you feel bad and go to the clinic or you can wait a bit, but with mental states of emergency, it is not like that, you need help quickly and that is important to us.

11 Julia Starke:

Yes, I also noticed in my survey that many people naturally say they would rather not go through their employer because they feel it's none of their business, so to speak.

12 NN:

That is also understandable. I see that here with us too. We are, of course, neutral, and as HR, you work on it and treat it accordingly. At the same time, it can obviously be difficult if you know that the person opposite you has just gone through a tough phase. I think it can help, but I can also understand if someone affected says, I don't want anyone to know. Even though it's getting better in Germany, we are still far from the USA, where people discuss over lunch who the best therapist in the area is. Yes, it's still very stigmatized here, well, not very stigmatized anymore, but it still has a significantly different status than saying, I have a great orthopedist, I can recommend.

13 Julia Starke:

That's true. How do you communicate that there are these opportunities to get help through this program?

14 NN:

We do this in various ways. We have to cover both; we work hybrid. We have some colleagues who work exclusively from home, but we have hybridization, meaning many are home most days but also here in between. My department is almost always on-site. So, we do it both virtually and offline, in person. We have an intranet where you can get information about it. We regularly do this in a "BA-Talk," which is a CEO or management talk where everyone can come together virtually, aimed at the entire workforce. We also use this opportunity to repeatedly point out that we offer this. We also use staff meetings for this; we write in between, especially when there are changes, reminding them they have the right to this service. When we know that someone has a topic or we notice that someone is not doing well, we clearly say, please remember. I had a manager who contacted me and said, "I have a topic here, my colleagues in my team need something on the topic of resilience." That was at a time when we still had a standard module. I said we need a bit of time to organize it so you can use it, but until then, especially if you notice there is pressure behind it or it needs quick help, then please use it. We use all channels to distribute this, of course not every two weeks or so, but to remind people now and then, here is

information on it, and use it. After all, it is a service that costs us as a company, so it is all the better if employees use it as they need it and also recognize the advantage in it.

15 Julia Starke:

Besides direct dialogue on topics, are there other feedback options for specific topics they might want?

16 NN:

Exactly, they have the option to come to me, but also to a person in our company who is explicitly responsible for personnel development. We have the works council, with whom we work very closely. Of course, they don't come to us and say, "Someone approached me," but if someone approaches them and says, "I'm not doing well," then this person will be able to help them and direct them to the appropriate resources. You can always contact our functional mailbox, but we don't have an offline mailbox set up for anonymous feedback. However, you can always report anonymously through the works council.

17 Julia Starke:

The topics are then probably also tailored to the psychological needs of the employees?

18 NN:

Yes, exactly. We also want to have psychological first aiders in the company because the topic is so important now, just to have people who can help quickly and somewhat competently. Tailoring to the needs means focusing on resilience. The basic approach we try to convey to managers is that it's best to identify issues and pain points before they become overwhelming. This means looking at them carefully. I don't handle resilience as a remedy but as prevention. You don't have to be in an emergency to start managing it well. Instead, you need to think about how to handle it beforehand.

19 Julia Starke:

Stress is probably always an issue there too.

20 NN:

Yes, exactly. If you are already stressed, it's good to know you have tools, like breathing exercises or something similar, to deal with the stress. From small things to larger issues, these are topics we address.

21 Julia Starke:

Do you have other examples of topics you work on or communicate about?

22 NN:

Resilience is already the top theme; I haven't experienced it in the past at other companies in the form of intense focus, for example, on depression or similar issues. What's important is to acknowledge that mental illnesses are like physical illnesses, that they must be taken just as seriously and addressed accordingly. And it's also important to be sensitive to overload, to show that as a company, it's important to us that if we have colleagues who feel overwhelmed, that shouldn't be a permanent state. It can happen, but it shouldn't be permanent, and it shouldn't be with us. We've written this into our values, that it's important to us as a company that our employees are physically and mentally healthy and that we want to protect them from overload because it's an issue. But to specifically address other mental illnesses, I haven't focused on that before. However, for example, we have a health month in the fall where we focus on a healthy body and a healthy mind, both are important. I'm actually considering addressing the topic of stress and current scientific research on stress and how to deal with it during this time, and also talking about warning signs, when you're no longer just stressed but when you've reached a limit where you should seek help.

23 Julia Starke:

Perhaps it's also helpful to know how to help others who are stressed.

24 NN:

That's an important but also difficult point, especially as a manager. I once had an employee who had very severe mental health problems. And you have to proceed very cautiously and also know the boundaries, especially as a manager. Among colleagues, you notice it more; especially in our environment, it's very familial, we look out for each other, and my colleagues notice when something isn't right with me. They pay a lot of attention to that, and at the same time, it often makes it even more difficult to really address it, to express concern. Recognizing it in yourself but also in others is important, and having the courage to address it.

25 Julia Starke:

You mentioned that there are blocks for apprentices; are there also seminars for managers, perhaps to further train them?

26 NN:

We conduct seminars for every area; managers have separate training sessions on handling difficult situations with themselves and with employees. And then there are broad information offerings for employees as well as for individual teams. If resilience is super important for a team, then there are team workshops. We try to address every level in its situation.

27 Julia Starke:

And is this internal, or are there external partners who conduct the workshops?

28 NN:

Mainly external. Providing brief impulses, that can be done internally, but I'm not a psychologist. I do preliminary research, but then I pass it on to a colleague who is a psychologist, so she can say whether it fits. But anything beyond that, I think it needs to be supervised by a psychologist. And we can't afford that internally, so we seek external help for that. For example, for the big information session, we do that here with our company medical service, with whom we have agreed that they will offer two information sessions on resilience and stress, and for the workshops, we then seek external help.

29 Julia Starke:

And does this ensure that the information is accurate and easy to understand?

30 NN:

Exactly, that's super important. Especially when questions are asked, what comes as an answer must be reliable.

31 Julia Starke:

You mentioned that you have a health month in October, which sounds like a special campaign. Can you explain more about that?

32 NN:

Sure. We have several challenges that we've identified, which are also interconnected. As I mentioned, we're a "Great Place To Work," meaning the vast majority of employees genuinely enjoy working here. However, like in any company, there are always areas where improvement is needed. We've identified that while we have a very good team cohesion, there's still a need for more cohesion across different teams. Additionally, we've been fortunate to have relatively low sick days, but we've noticed an increase, particularly in sick leave due to mental health reasons. Therefore, we thought of combining both aspects because, as you said, there needs to

be someone who says "enough is enough," someone who recognizes when a person is doing too much, stuck in a rut, or in need of support. That's why we decided to have a month-long initiative, which we call the Health Month, culminating in a collective activity. We're a service-oriented company, so it's challenging for us to have just one day where everyone can participate because that would mean telling our clients, "Sorry, we're not available." Or it would mean excluding those who need to be available. Therefore, we opted for a month-long approach, which also allows us to involve experts. I can't go from location to location conducting training sessions. We simply don't have the capacity or the funds to do that. It wouldn't be appropriate to book a trainer for a whole day just for a one-hour session at each of our 16 locations. So, we decided on a weekly approach over a period of four weeks, and we might even extend it, with two sessions per week. We provide information every day, covering topics like ergonomic work practices, the importance of movement, stress management techniques, and so on. We want to educate our employees on cortisol levels, breathing techniques, the importance of movement, even if it's just going for a walk. We're offering a mix of activities and information sessions, along with Q&A sessions where employees can ask questions and have them answered by experts. At the end of the month, there will be regional activities where teams can come together and do something collectively. They can choose social activities like planting trees, volunteering at a school, or distributing food at a food bank. The main thing is that they participate in something. It's flexible; they can access most of the content remotely to suit their schedules. They can listen to recorded Q&A sessions and submit questions in advance if they can't attend live. We want to ensure flexibility that aligns with their needs. We don't want to add to their stress; instead, we want to say, "Participate when it fits into your day, and let's finish this journey together."

33 Julia Starke:

Sounds very intriguing, and it's great that it's spread out so people don't feel like they only have one chance to participate. How do you communicate this? Is it through the intranet or via email? And how do you motivate people to participate?

34 NN:

I use a mix of communication channels. We don't have SharePoint here; I've worked with it in the past. Instead, we use a wiki, but our colleagues aren't accustomed to checking it daily for

news updates. So, we use a combination of an initial email, creating a wiki page with updates using a connected tool, a blog tool for ongoing updates, and also through chat using WebEx and Teams.

35 Julia Starke:

Are there channels here where you'd say they work better for younger employees compared to older ones?

36 NN:

That's actually a big challenge I'm facing now. It wasn't like this before; we were all trained for years to use SharePoint, and that was our information channel. But it was also an international company, so we worked a lot with Engage because our international colleagues didn't use SharePoint; they were more active on highly-affine social media platforms in South and Central America, as well as Southern Europe, mainly using their mobile phones. They didn't like SharePoint, so we switched to Engage. Here, if I want to reach everyone, I can only send an email, even though I know the younger ones are much more chat-oriented, and I can reach them much better that way. But not the older ones. So, if I want to minimize loss, I have to send it out via email once, and everyone gets it. Then I selectively pick out what I'll use to tease further. Just an email is enough when I want to inform, but if I want engagement, reactions, or to start a discussion, then it's mainly through a chat tool for us.

37 Julia Starke:

Yes, that's true. Let me quickly check our time; I think we have about 5 minutes left. I've asked all my questions; is there anything else you'd like to address or ask me?

38 NN:

We don't actually do much specifically for Generation Z, which I find a bit unfortunate. But it's just a development we have to undergo. I'm curious about the results of your survey; it's really exciting. You see in daily life that information is spread about Generation Z, which I can't necessarily confirm; some aspects, yes, but every generation has its differences. Otherwise, I see very diligent individuals who have a different focus, who say there's a life beyond work, and that's perhaps a very healthy attitude. There's always a generation that goes overboard in some direction, and then there's a balancing one. It's a learning cycle through the generations.

39 Julia Starke:

Especially when everyone is working simultaneously.

40 NN:

Yes, but what applies to all of us here is flexibility. That helps tremendously. Being flexible about where you work, largely within the legal limits, of course, and when you work, that's really great. It gives you a lot of flexibility, which also helps you stay healthy.

41 Julia Starke:

Is that something Generation Z likes to embrace?

42 NN:

That's something everyone likes to embrace; it's a huge advantage. But Generation Z does use it very, very willingly, yes. It's important.

43 Julia Starke:

Great, thank you for your help; I am just looking at our time right now and I think we are running out. That was really helpful and interesting. I'll gladly send you the results as discussed. Thanks again, and I wish you a great day.

44 NN:

Thank you, you too, and good luck. Take care.

45 Julia Starke:

Thanks, bye!

6th Interview: MM

1 Julia Starke:

Thank you for taking the time for this interview today. I would like to briefly explain what my master's thesis is about, how everything will proceed today, and then we can jump directly into the first question.

2 MM:

Yes, great.

3 Julia Starke:

Currently, my master's thesis focuses on the topic of internal communication in the IT/technology industry and how mental health is communicated and how it fits with Generation Z. Whether it fits with Generation Z. I also have a survey running, aimed at Generation Z, which essentially asks about their perspective, like how do you find the channels currently used for communication? Is there anything you feel is missing? And then I conduct these expert interviews to talk to people in communication but also in HR to see what the strategy behind the whole topic is. I would like to start by asking you to briefly introduce yourself, who you are, what you do, and then I will start with the questions unless you have any questions for me.

4 MM:

No, that was very clear, and it's definitely a good topic for a thesis. So, I am MM, I am responsible for marketing in DACH, which is Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. We were just taken over, so there is currently a bit of a transition. We have to reposition ourselves now, I don't have a new title in my new position yet.

5 Julia Starke:

Okay, great, thank you. I would also like to start directly with the first question, namely, how does the topic of mental health strategically impact internal communication in the company?

6 MM:

Mhm, so we send a newsletter almost daily with the title Advocacy, and there are various topics in it, from business to all sorts of things, but there is always something at the end about health or mental health. There is then information like articles but also contact information for those I can reach out to if I have a problem. There are contact points, workshops where you can turn to if you need something or are interested in something at the moment.

7 Julia Starke:

Okay, can you give some examples of what kind of information is provided, for example, regarding workshops?

8 MM:

Recently, we shared something, it was not a workshop, but a podcast in which we informed about a contact point that you can reach as an employee via a link or phone number 24/7 if you are in any kind of crisis. Not only you as an employee but also family members, like having a caregiving situation. But you can also search for things like sports offerings, where is the nearest gym in my area, but also help like finding a hotel for a vacation if you didn't have time to take care of it beforehand. Or if you need childcare for your kids. We want to show that we as a company are mindful and have the mindset that we achieve our goals better when people in our company are mentally balanced.

9 Julia Starke:

Would you say this was different at your previous employer?

10 MM:

Yes, the prioritization in communication as it is here with the almost daily newsletters was not the case, instead of only once a week or once a month. For example, during the Christmas preparation period, when everyone is stressed, a dedicated newsletter came out, asking: How are you feeling during this time? Because we know baking cookies, buying gifts, that is stressful. And then the question that was also asked: Do you feel you have enough time to do that, or is it so that you say no, I am so busy with my work but I would actually like to bake cookies, for example, so how are you feeling about it? And then employees could participate in a survey several days before Christmas. And at the same time, tips were given on how to better achieve balance. Yes, start in the morning with what is on your heart now, do that first before you start working.

11 Julia Starke:

Besides these questions and surveys, can you give other examples of how mental health is communicated?

12 MM:

Wait, I'll look for examples from the newsletter. So, for example, here "Beat Work from Home: Burnout Tips and Strategies for Balance." And also "Mastering Work-Life Harmonies: Strategies for Balance." This is also sent more frequently in several newsletters. Not everyone

reads the newsletter daily, and so it is read more deeply the fourth or fifth time. But it is not always communicated, but in April, for example, the topic of balance was often pointed out.

13 Julia Starke:

Yes, and where does that lead? The information and resources mentioned there?

14 MM:

That is then a resource page where you can also find the number I mentioned earlier. But also other things like articles or tips on all kinds of topics, like burnout or "juggling family care." And then there are also contacts for "Trusted Advisor Professional Counselor."

15 Julia Starke:

Do you have a SharePoint or intranet or something like that where communication is also done besides the newsletter?

16 MM:

We have an intranet where the link to the page where you can find everything is also noted.

17 Julia Starke:

And would you say that such a newsletter is an appropriate channel for younger people?

18 MM:

Yes, I don't know to what extent young people have the issues that older people have who suddenly have families and are confronted with these topics because I believe, problems or simply load starts when you start a family, I can say from my own experience. You suddenly have completely different topics, yes, when you say you suddenly have children, the whole care, especially as a woman, you always have the double burden, but nowadays men too, you have completely different topics. I think very young people, what is important to them? Maybe rather, where do I find the next gym or so. I don't know if they are really already so much in this burden to say "I have burnout" although I am only 25. Firstly, I think A, still younger, and B today in this generation, I believe that young people also set boundaries much more than we did back then. So I see, for example, I have two children, they are not as willing today, I believe, to work as we did back then. That is a change. I think we were more in this "function" mode, yes, that's what we learned in our generation. Young people today approach it differently and say I need my work-life balance.

19 Julia Starke:

You just mentioned the gym, which might be interesting for Generation Z, but you also said that one can get information about family problems or parents who are perhaps getting older. Would you say that these offerings are tailored to the needs of employees?

20 MM:

Yes, because if, for example, a young person comes and has a very personal family problem, a parent is seriously ill and just wants to talk, doesn't know where to go now. Then of course they can go to this 24/7 line where you can always call, both in German and English, then a young person can also go there and say I have a problem, where do I go now? Can you help me find a therapist or support? And then they help. So that is definitely, I would say, for people of all ages, yes.

21 Julia Starke:

And the newsletter that comes, does it come only in English or also in German?

22 MM:

It comes only in English, yes.

23 Julia Starke:

And this is probably at the EMEA level, or is there something in German as well?

24 MM:

At the moment it is in English, yes, but as I said, the websites where you can seek help are also in German. And also the webinars on the site on the topic are in German. So that one learns how it actually works. And then you can always also contact HR, yes, if you have certain topics you can always get in touch with HR. But this special platform is already in German, yes.

25 Julia Starke

Are the info in this newsletter or the website easy to understand?

26 MM:

Yes, if you speak English, it is easy to understand, yes. Regarding content, I am personally involved in the topic, especially the topic of balance, how do I get myself into balance, I practice that myself, yes, and now it may be that things are easier for me to understand.

27 Julia Starke:

I think I have actually asked all my questions at the moment and don't want to take more of your time, we are already a bit over. I don't know if you want to add anything else or have any questions for me?

28 MM:

Yes, I only have one question about your general master's thesis. You are very focused on Generation Z. Do you have the impression that Generation Z does not fit well into today's working life and therefore feels less accepted because they are so different? Or what is the reason why you are focusing on this generation?

29 Julia Starke:

So I thought for a long time about what topic to choose for my master's thesis. For me, it was clear that I wanted to focus on internal communication because my master's studies revolve a lot around that. And you always have to find a niche in your research that maybe doesn't exist yet, and with Generation Z, two topics came into play. One, of course, is that we are often described as job hoppers, meaning that we don't necessarily stay long with a company, changing jobs more often. But I didn't know how much communication can contribute to that. And the other topic was mental health because several studies have shown that Generation Z struggles more mentally compared to other generations and that they also place more importance on their employer offering such services that we just talked about. At least in global studies. I am now focusing on Germany, and I believe that in Germany, it is still a different topic. I think we are not as open about mental health and the stigma around it. That's why it's interesting to see. But yes, that's the reason why I chose it. And at the same time, of course, because we are all just starting out in working life or have only been there for a few years and then I just thought that perhaps this could also be an interesting topic for employers, because we are simply the employees of the future, and for them it is also important to know how they can support their young employees.

30 MM:

Yes, of course it's an exciting question to what extent communication can help. Because communication can of course only ever help if what is communicated is actually implemented. In other words, you don't just say we give tips, but that you offer other services where someone can really make a difference and help. But the fact that you take up the topic shows that you as a company are sensitive to the fact that it is an important issue. It's also important to be described as a "great place to work", that awareness is there and that comes through communication. But I think I agree with you in general, the Germans don't say that my generation is good right now, maybe I'm an exception because I'm dealing with it, but I realize that there is a great need for healing in Germany. Yes, we are all here, how should I put it, a

traumatized society, from many generations, and the Americans are already a bit further along than we are.

31 Julia Starke:

Yes, because I also talked to American companies for my master's thesis, and with Germans, and of course the whole topic is very, very different there. So the topic of mental health and also the offers that exist, that's a completely different strategy behind it. So everything they do, from virtual yoga during the day to teams that really focus on coaching.

32 MM:

Nice, yes, that makes sense.

33 Julia Starke:

And other companies in Germany don't prioritize the topic as much. So yes, it's mentioned in the newsletter that there's an initiative here and there, but it's simply not a priority, especially not for Generation Z.

34 MM:

That's a shame, yes. Of course, you always have to look privately if you want to do yoga or healing therapies. But these are things that, if I don't have that and I can't get it there or I have a company that is completely averse to it, then I probably won't look for it myself. But the employer could provide inspiration. As an employee, I've also had a lot of toxic employers, and when I look at company dynamics, teams and organizations, you also have to look at what it does to the success of a team and ultimately to the success of a company. And people in Germany still pay far too little attention to that today, because if we could do that, companies could be much more successful and I think it's important to look at how we can support them and, on the other hand, it's clear that everyone is responsible for themselves. But I know that your generation is looking for companies that are not toxic. My husband, for example, works in a start-up and there was a very young employee who said that this is exactly what is important to me.

35 Julia Starke:

Sure, yes. How many young employees do you have?

36 MM:

Hmm, so it's always difficult to say who is really Generation Z and who isn't. So we do have some global, young employees, but they're mainly people from Bulgaria. We have a few under

35, but in my marketing organization we tend to have a lot of older people. But we would like to have more younger people, yes.

37 Julia Starke:
And how many employees do you have in Germany in general?

38 MM:
Let me think about it. Worldwide we are about 6000, only in Germany I think we are about 3000.

39 Julia Starke:
Okay, that's good to know. I don't think I have any more questions, if I'm interested in the results of the Master's thesis I can of course send them to you. But that will take until September, that's when I have to hand it in, and it's also in English, but I'm happy to do that and if you think of anything else, feel free to write to me. In any case, it was very nice and very helpful. Thank you for taking the time.

40 MM:
Yes, interesting topic . Yes, it was a nice conversation, I enjoyed it and thank you for that. And yes, I'm looking forward to seeing something of the Master's thesis.

41 Julia Starke:
Thank you very much. Bye!

42 MM:
Thank you, have a nice day bye.

7th Interview: LL

1 Julia Starke:

2 *First of all, thank you for taking the time, even though you have so much to do at the moment. as I said, I would just briefly explain what my Master's thesis is about. then I would ask you to introduce yourself, what you do and why you are the right person to talk to. And then I would get straight to the questions, if that suits you.*

3 LL:

4 *My pleasure.*

5 Julia Starke:

6 *Yes, I'm writing my master's thesis on internal communication about mental health and I'm focusing a bit on what Generation z wants in the IT/tech industry and my aim is to draw up a comparison of what companies are doing and what Generation Zeit really wants. I also have a survey running on the side where I'm getting the opinion of Generation z and then these expert interviews where I'm asking about the strategic background, so to speak, and that's basically what my master's thesis is all about.*

7 LL:

8 *Very cool.*

9 Julia Starke:

10 *Would you like to briefly introduce yourself?*

11 LL:

12 *Okay well, yes, my name is LL, I am responsible for transformation and change management at a technology and IT system integrator in Germany and also for marketing, communication and public affairs, so I have two teams under me that take care of internal change management on the one hand and internal external communication activities, all marketing, programs and also public relations with political and government institutions and decision-makers on the other.*

13 Julia Starke:

14 *Okay, great, thank you, my first question would actually be directly, how does the topic of mental health affect your internal communication strategy?*

15 LL:

16 *Yes, this is actually a topic that we actively take into account when planning our communication activities. This is partly because we have an internal health management and the person responsible for health management is always part of our editorial meetings, so this is a dimension that we use in the context of communication, so to speak, because it falls within the scope of employee-centric communication. there is a regular exchange of content. This is every two weeks, where all health topics are taken into account per se and mental health is of course an important part of this topic, which we also actively discuss, because we as a company have been undergoing a comprehensive transformation process for several years now and this also has an impact on the mental health of the workforce. in this respect, it is one of the topics that is taken into account.*

17 Julia Starke:

18 *And what communication channels do you use to communicate with employees on mental health issues?*

19 LL:

20 *As an IT and technology company, we generally use various digital tools. So of course the standard communication is via e-mail, i.e. sending newsletters. But we also have a large information platform in sharepoint, for example, where all the latest news of the week is always shared as sharepoint online news. Within Microsoft Teams Community, we have specific channels that are also used again, for example for managers, where health management-relevant content is shared, which in turn is also relevant for team leadership, or with a junior community, i.e. the young professionals, there is also a Teams channel where you can share target group-specific information or from our joint cooperation you also know the women's network, i.e. various communities, which are then also used for internal communication for specific target groups, and we are a bit behind in the corporate context compared to other countries, but there will soon be viva engage, which is another app from the Microsoft environment that we will use for internal communication, so of course it will have more of a social network platform character and of course there will also be communication via town hall meetings, so all hands call etc. will also take place.*

21 Julia Starke:

22 *For the managers, the team channels, why do you differentiate the content? What kind of communication is sent to them?*

23 LL:

24 *So, due to the health management, there are also roles that go beyond this, such as a representative body for severely disabled employees or similar, which you have in our Group, dedicated offers that are there for managers. In other words, content that is really tailored to disciplinary managers, which they can take into account in their team management. For example, we had a topic on safety in the workplace and it wasn't just physical safety, but also mental safety. And by addressing them or providing them with a toolbox, managers simply have a different approach to the communication that then goes out to the workforce, where we of course also communicate support, but we also provide managers with appropriate training and information on how they can be sensitized to mental health, but also how to deal with challenges that arise in this context.*

25 Julia Starke:

26 *And for normal employees, there are also workshops or seminars on this topic?*

27 LL:

28 *Yes, but we don't always do it in-house, so to speak, so it's organized by the health management department, but the colleague who is responsible for it often brings external partners on board. Our partner health insurance company is Siemens and we work with them, the health management team, to plan the topics to be offered on a quarterly basis, which then includes information events and workshops that employees can attend. Of course, this is not during traditional working hours, but rather an interest in what I do alongside my work and I can find out more about a wide range of health topics and we organize seminars with other internal interfaces, such as a representative body for severely disabled employees, with the respective sponsors. At the moment, it's accessibility month so communication is very much about accessibility, where testimonials are also being made for employees and managers by the blind colleague, for example, so that there is simply a greater understanding of the internal structure and what topics are there in this area.*

29 Julia Starke:

30 Yes, I had seen the linkedin post with the blind employee, that was really cool, I hadn't realized that before to be honest. we also have a lot of working students with us, a lot of dual students, do you think there are channels that might work better for young people than maybe for older employees?

31 LL:

32 Yes, well, that is of course a subjective assessment on my part, but what I have noticed is that this community management, the community maintenance within the young professional community, for example via a Microsoft Teams channel, works better because there is simply a subjectively perceived stronger digital affinity than in other age groups. This means that interaction and dialog in this virtual space takes place a little more regularly and intensively in a Microsoft Teams channel in its community than in other groups, let's say employee groups, and that's why I believe that everything that relates to digital virtual communication. even within workshops, if you bring a tool with you, because you say come on, we'll just do a whiteboard or a survey with Menti, or something where you really do a complete brainwalk digitally, is of course much faster in terms of adaptation and implementation speed in a younger community.

33 Julia Starke:

34 Yes of course, with email something is likely to get lost quickly. how often do you communicate on this topic? do you always try to include it?

35 LL:

36 Yes, well, as I said at the beginning, health management is a stakeholder within our internal communications planning, so the participant is present at the weekly or fortnightly editorial meetings, so it is continuously included in the content planning, and we work operationally, so that we make an editorial plan every quarter and then the topics from the specialist departments are also queried by health management, among others. But it's just not the case that we, as the internal communications department, take the sovereignty and decide which topics should be included, instead the topics are selected by health management, so it can happen that for one or two months there's nothing about mental health, but perhaps there are other topics. we recently had this nutrition month, so you have a lot about nutrition and things like that.

37 Julia Starke:

38 *Are there also feedback options for employees, so that they can contact someone and say "I'm interested in this topic, can this be included"?*

39 LL:

40 *Yes, the health service can of course be contacted via a classic functional mailbox, i.e. a central address where you can get in touch, and as an internal communications team, we can always be contacted via our email address and, as I said, we also have very strong community management, i.e. strong maintenance, including of the individual communities, where we always try to get involved in feedback loops. so there are various starting points, not just email, where employees can also get feedback.*

41 Julia Starke:

42 *You mentioned that there are certain topics for managers, i.e. sensitization. Can you give a few examples of topics relating to mental health for normal employees?*

43 LL:

44 *So basically, we always try to include this health aspect in our broad communication, so it's not just HR or health management that points it out, but also in the direct approach we choose, especially when it's a crisis communication or something like that that goes out to employees, that we often write in at the bottom and pay attention to you and others, so that a basic sensitization takes place, so to speak. Otherwise, it's actually linked to specific topics, so if we know that it's now part of the editorial plan, then there's dedicated communication about it.*

45 Julia Starke:

46 *Okay, you had mentioned that it's Accessibility Month. Is there also a Mental Health month or other specific campaigns?*

47 LL:

48 *yes, there is. i don't know when it was, but there are already socially defined motto days or motto months, so to speak, and our group's communication strategy is also very closely aligned with them. so you remember, we did something for diversity month, now it's accessibility and there's also this mental health awareness month and then we do local initiatives, but of course there was also what is the group's communication strategy? There are always webinars that create awareness. we also have a social service in Germany, so we really have two*

employees who are psychologically trained and are available to talk to employees, in a confidential setting of course. and these are, of course, constant offers that we don't actively advertise every month, but they can of course be found here, as part of our internal communication, for example via our A to z index, which means that every employee has the opportunity 24/7 if he or she is specifically looking for such information via our communication page, to obtain and search for this information.

49 Julia Starke:

50 *Can you think of any other special campaigns? Maybe something that other companies don't necessarily do.*

51 LL:

52 *I would have to know what other companies do. That's why it's kind of difficult for me to compare the offerings, the external offerings somehow, so what I think is great about us in the company is that we have a wide reach internally in terms of our information and communication offerings and that we always work together with a global organization, as I've already said, so I think there's always a very diverse range of offerings for employees, either to go into an international offering around mental health or similar stories. and flanked by a local offering and I think we are already relatively good within the Group in terms of providing information and also in terms of reach.*

53 Julia Starke:

54 *Yeah, are there any deals like gym memberships or anything like that through these external partners?*

55 LL:

56 *Well, we have so-called corporate benefits. Employees can get offers for gym memberships or similar and there are always additional local offers, for example here in Munich there was only a cooperation with a gym here at the Siemens site for a long time. I don't know if that still exists today, but it used to be possible to do that. From time to time there are also self-organized groups that do something. Again, I can only speak for Munich, where for a while there was also yoga during the lunch break, which was organized by colleagues, so there were also a few bottom-up topics, so to speak, which employees then also do for themselves.*

57 Julia Starke:

58 *But is that probably pushed by the employees themselves or do you officially support it?*

59 LL:

60 *Yes, it is already being pushed by the employees, but these are also initiatives that are then discussed again with the health management team or with us as a communication unit, so that we advertise this again locally via the site communication and thus also support it and what we do as a group as a whole and perhaps you have already read or heard that there is currently another fitness challenge and as an employee you have the opportunity to download an app that is tailored to the company. You can look for a team, do sporting activities, collect points together and of course that also strengthens the team spirit but also the overall fitness level in the organization.*

61 Julia Starke

62 *Do you still have offline communication on site, for example in Munich?*

63 LL:

64 *Yes, we have a lot of screens above the elevators at the locations, for example, or in the entrance area, which we as the communications team also regularly display information on. so when we had International Women's Day, for example, where we also worked together on the campaign, we also displayed these testimonials on the screens at the locations, which is always a nice way to extend this even further, because we often get the feedback "Oh, so the newsletter gets lost in my mailbox. But when I'm waiting for the elevator and see the information one-pager again, it has an additional effect. and we actually still use traditional printouts because our infrastructure allows us to do so. We have extra poster compartments in the elevators and you can actually print out information and post it there. This is not only in Munich, but also at the other locations and to stay with the fitness theme We now have the company runs again in the summer, the so-called Be to Run and the campaign for the registration for the Be to Run is also directly in the elevator, so we have elevator stands, can also register directly via the QR code for the run.*

65 Julia Starke:

66 *Yes, do many young employees come to the office in Munich? So you reach them through offline communication?*

67 LL:

68 *In my opinion, yes, I also have a lot of young professionals in my teams, both in the Change Team and in the MarCom Team, and I think that there is definitely a need among younger employees, at least as a manager, and perhaps subjectively there is also a slightly greater need for these on-site meetings and exchanges, because the dual students in particular, and I have just taken on two juniors in my team, have mirrored back to me that their time at university was so virtual due to the pandemic and then the office location is not where the university location is and there is now simply a need to see each other on site and work together and our young professional community in Germany has also set up an initiative, called nextgen, where we, and we also support this on the employer side, organize after-work events at regular intervals with a budget and this also shows that there is already an urge from the community to network, to come together, across departments and we also support this accordingly on the employer side.*

69 Julia Starke:

70 *You just mentioned the pandemic, was there any internal communication and mental health, were there any specific things that you communicated because that was a time when a lot of people probably needed the support?*

71 LL:

72 *Yes, actually, we set up a crisis team right at the start of the pandemic, which was also headed by Internal Communications, and together with our security contact, health management, HR, communications, but of course also with colleagues who now come from the business, we met regularly in this crisis team and also did dedicated crisis communication, because as you said, there were specific requirements, above all to stay in contact with the workforce at completely different frequencies and also to communicate in new formats, so that completely revolutionized our internal communication of the situation. But we actually structured and strategically planned this from the outset due to the exceptional situation of the pandemic, and this crisis team existed for a year and a half until it became a regular process again, in this case internal communication.*

73 Julia Starke:

74 *Yes, and there was probably more communication about mental health than there is now?*

75 LL:

76 *Exactly. So not always necessarily under the mental health banner, but then of course via synonyms, as well as again in relation to managers, be close to your employees, hold regular team meetings. We have created guidelines for completely virtual meetings, so what tools can you use? Which moderation techniques can you use? In other words, a lot of help that went out there for employees and managers.*

77 Julia Starke:

78 *Okay, when you communicate about mental health or the services that are available, how do you make sure that the information is easy to understand for everyone? I mean, we also have many, many different languages, many different cultures in the company.*

79 LL:

80 *Yes, because I primarily communicate with the German-speaking perimeter, our communication is already in German per se, although the technology already allows it, we will now also have this integrated translation so that non-German speakers can also translate it quickly using the technology. We have developed a guideline for internal communication that pays particular attention to these aspects of comprehensibility and simplicity of communication, because I think this actually applies to all topics that we communicate, that they follow a certain structure and orientation, our tone of voice, so to speak. And the team also continuously coaches the colleagues who have topics that need to be communicated. but I'd say the aim is of course always to have the employee in mind when communicating, or to have the target group in mind in general and to tailor it to that and we always say less is more, because everyone gets so much information in the project business alone, which means that it always has to be on point in terms of information content.*

81 Julia Starke:

82 *Yes, the tone of voice, can you give me two or three words, how would you describe it?*

83 LL:

84 *So there is a very, very formal orientation. For example, we also use gender in Germany, so we use inclusive language, yes, that's one of the credos, so to speak, and the tone of voice is otherwise also strongly dictated by our global communication guidance and you know our brand structure, which is very clean, very reduced, so we're back to this credo of less is more.*

The focus should be on the facts and the surrounding area should not be sober, which is perhaps the negative term, but should be very tidy, so that the focus is really on the key messaging. And in Germany, for example, we have developed a structure in which every message we launch for our employees contains the most important facts in brief in a box at the top and then the 3 or 4 key messages from the newsletter are briefly summarized so that I as an employee can see whether it is relevant to me or not. and then the most important links, the most important messages are already in this the most important things in a nutshell and the feedback based on what we have received from the employee feedback actually shows us that this is what we want.

85 Julia Starke:

86 *You have a lot of Gen Z in your team yourself. Do you see a difference in communication between Generation z and other employees?*

87 LL:

88 *Yes, of course, I see differences, but I don't necessarily want to generalize, because I also see individual differences or characteristics within the Gen Z community in my teams. but my impression is that there is a need, as I said earlier, for a direct exchange. So it's not so much that I'm sitting in my home office and am only in a virtual room with the team, but really this need for personal communication and personal exchange and also for regular and fast communication. so I do notice, for example, that I do a lot with the young professionals via chat or something and with generation x I have to set up a meeting and have a longer phone call, so the communication is not as fast-moving and direct as with generation Z.*

89 Julia Starke:

90 *Yes, that's true, it will certainly become even more exciting as more generations enter the world of work, so the dynamics will certainly change somewhat. I think I've actually asked all the questions from my side. I don't know if there's anything else you'd like to mention, so now on the subject of mental health, which I may have forgotten to ask.*

91 LL:

92 *No, there are no additional topics from my side.*

93 Julia Starke:

94 *Great.*

95 LL:

96 *So of course I find it exciting how you then also establish your correlation, so to speak, between the generation and the topic of mental health. So you've explained the basic direction of your work, but I'm also really interested in the results or the different facets that you've taken away from the interviews, so I hope you have the opportunity to share that.*

97 Julia Starke:

98 *Of course, I'm very happy to do that. The reason why I actually chose the topic was because there were several studies with Generation z and Generation x that asked about mental health. They asked about mental health, but also how that affects your choice of employer. And many people said yes, it's extremely important for me that my employer can support me or give me offers. I also think with Corona over the last 3 years that a lot has changed in their lives and that, as I said, they are focusing on what the employer offers. but the survey I'm still doing doesn't necessarily go in that direction. i don't know whether it was because the other survey was a global one and maybe in Germany it's still a bit of an issue that isn't communicated quite so openly.*

99 LL:

100 *Okay, interesting, good, yes, exciting.*

101 Julia Starke:

102 *In my interviews, I also spoke to another German company that is similar to us, and, for example, they have started to include mental health in the blocks of their training because they just said ok IT industry is very fast-moving, very stressful and we want to point out early enough that this is an important topic.*

103 LL:

104 *Interesting yes, maybe that's even part of our dual training program. I don't know, but I think it's very, very diverse and also focuses on personal skills and development, so in the Leadership programs that we have, where we send in team leaders and managers and executives, it's also very pronounced. But of course, it's also always in the context of your leadership role and what responsibility you have. and then there's always a part of self-reflection and mental health, in the sense of taking care of your health, but you also really do a deep dive into Generation Z, so to speak.*

105 Julia Starke:

106 *Yes exactly, that's one of the things I have in the survey. So I'm asking whether Generation Z would confide in their managers, and also whether they feel that their manager cares about this issue or has enough knowledge about it.*

107 LL:

108 *Yes, interesting, it would be great if you could share that with us in any case, because I always find that totally exciting, because it gives a very broad perspective on such a complex topic, which you otherwise don't get at all within the company.*

109 Julia Starke:

110 *Yes, I really enjoy it. I don't want to take up any more of your time. Thank you again for your great help.*

111 LL:

112 *Yes, thank you, good luck.*

113 Julia Starke:

114 *And I'll probably see you soon! Thank you so much.*

115 LL:

116 *See you then!*