# THE ROLE OF TRAINING IN MANAGING AN INTEGRATED COMMUNICATIONS APPROACH: OBSERVATIONS AT A SMALL DIGITAL AGENCY

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## ANALYSIS

### Theoretical Framework

As the framework for my research, I used a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is designed to develop a well-integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory is distinguished from other theories since it intentionally blurs the distinction between data collection and analysis and allows for both to be done simultaneously.

There are innumerable examples of grounded theory being successfully employed in previous research within the field of journalism. For example, Vivian B. Martin successfully utilized grounded theory in her study of daily news regimens. She sought to explain the process of how people interact with news every day. Working from a grounded approach, Martin conducted 86 face-to-face interviews as well as a document analysis of Internet discussion groups around various news events, news articles, surveys and industry reports, letters to the editor, informal letters and emails sent to writers and editors, and college student essays (Martin, 2008).

According to Charmaz (2006), the main advantage of grounded theory is that you may learn about gaps in your data during the earliest stages of research. This gives you the opportunity to find sources of needed data and fill the gaps.

Grounded theory informed both the methods I use and the way I conducted my research. Through simultaneous participant observation and individual interviews I explored the role of training in managing an integrated communications approach.

## Literature Review

**Introduction.** Traditionally, marketing efforts have been divided by category. Agencies developed separate campaigns for advertising, sales promotion, public relations, etc. However, the practices of marketing and public relations are rapidly changing to a more integrated approach blurring previously established lines. According to Convergence of Marketing (2014), experts estimate that the pace of this change will accelerate in the next five years.

Numerous agencies are moving towards integration. For example, FleishmanHillard recently rebranded in an attempt to become an integrated marketing communications agency that offers services like advertising and social media marketing in addition to public relations (Elliott, 2013).

The following literature review defines IMC and explains the growing trend towards integration. It looks at who can benefit from using IMC, how practitioners can take advantage of IMC and examines some obstacles standing in the way of integration.

**Defining integrated marketing communications (IMC).** Coined in the late 1980s in an attempt to define marketing methods in the post mass-marketing era, the term "integrated marketing communications" caused some confusion in the minds of industry professionals (Smith, 1995). Confusion about the definition of IMC still exists today. Rather than relying on one official definition, most industry professionals have their own

ideas of what integrated marketing communications means to them. However, there are several key concepts present in most working definitions of IMC.

The most recurrent concept is consistency. Many integrated approaches focus on consistency of message across the elements of the campaign including advertising and public relations. Smith (1995) discusses Lane Bryant as an example of this. When Lane Bryant aimed to maximize credibility and sales impact within the African-American market, it used a coordinated approach to create a consistent message, voice and look for all of its marketing efforts (Smith, 1995). Lane Bryant coordinated its mailings and in-store events with a five-city mall tour. This tour ran in tandem with a new ad that offered a store coupon. The integrated campaign also utilized radio advertisements and publicity in local markets to build awareness and draw consumers to the events (Smith, 1995.)

Another concept that is consistent in the literature is consumer interaction. Technological developments now allow for companies to talk with consumers rather than talk at them. It also allows for consumers to talk to each other. This makes marketing communications a dynamic process. In order to take advantage of these dynamics, Tom Duncan, the University of Colorado's IMC program head, says that building relationships through consumer interaction should be the goal of IMC (as cited in Smith, 1995).

According to Persuit (2013), IMC moves away from the methods of mass communication. It does not view communication as a one-way, linear model. Instead communication is an interactive and multidimensional process (Persuit, 2013). This multidimensional communication model allows marketers to interact with consumers to build strong relationships and brand connection. Research by Lang and Ewoldsen (2010) adds to this line of thinking. Their book stresses the importance of feedback and warns

against ignoring the two-way nature of communication (Lang & Ewoldsen, 2010). According to Lang and Ewoldsen (2010), incorporating feedback into a campaign leaves room to change something and then change it back or change it in another way. This gives practitioners more flexibility in their campaigns.

Finally, most marketing practitioners agree that IMC utilizes a variety of marketing disciplines. IMC methods stem from the belief that the development of new media does not reduce the value of traditional marketing techniques. Rather than choosing between the different techniques, IMC methods aim for seamless integration of old and new techniques (Brand, 2009). When campaigns are built in this way, content and strategies can build off of and enhance each other. According to an article in PR News (Anonymous, 2009), fusing the best of each discipline strengthens a campaign. This article offers "brand storytelling" as an example of a successful integrated marketing tactic (Anonymous, 2009). Ed Woodcock, director of narrative at Aesop marketing agency, defines brand storytelling as the application of narrative thinking and storytelling techniques to define brands, inform strategy and structure creative activity (Woodcock, 2011). Brand storytelling borrows from each discipline; taking the credibility of public relations, the value of advertising and the measurability of online (Anonymous, 2009).

Based on an analysis of the literature listed above, the researcher will use the following definition for IMC for the purposes of this project: Integrated marketing communications is a strategic approach that utilizes a variety of marketing disciplines to create clear, consistent and effective campaigns that interact with consumers in a powerful way. According Persuit (2013), IMC is human communication. It allows brands to interact with consumers in a natural, holistic and human way.

**Explaining the growing trend toward integration.** Most practitioners agree that IMC is a necessity in today's industry. However, this was not always the case. In order to understand IMC's surge in popularity in recent years, a brief analysis of the history of IMC is necessary.

According to an article by Larsen and Len-Rios (2006), IMC developed in the 1980s and 1990s. As the industry moved away from mass marketing, communication professionals had to adapt.

One reason IMC surged in popularity is that it was cost efficient. According to a study by Rose and Miller (1994), an increased emphasis on bottom-line profits served as an incentive for agencies to become more integrated. It was more cost efficient for agencies to add in-house functions than it was to contract out. When the recession caused clients to reduce their communication budgets, it became crucial that agencies figure out how to get their clients the most bang for their buck (Anonymous, 2009).

The surge in integrated marketing communications can also be attributed to the growing popularity of digital marketing. Developments in digital technology forced communication professionals to integrate (Anonymous, 2009; Persuit, 2013). These developments led to the introduction of many new media channels. It became important for agencies to be able to develop campaigns that could carry across every media channel (Integrated Marketing, 2012).

Also, a perceived need for IMC on the part of the client caused many agencies to become full-service (Rose & Miller, 1994). Clients began to believe that they needed an integrated marketing campaign. Many agencies started adding more functions to meet the demands of their clients and stay current in the communications industry.

**Who can benefit from using integrated methods.** Rosemary Ryan, online editor at B&T Weekly, insists that the key to staying on top in the communications industry is to become integral to your clients. According to Ryan (2005), real partnerships exist when clients view marketing practitioners as essential to success, not as interchangeable commodities. Ryan contends that the best way for practitioners to become integral is through the utilization of IMC (Ryan, 2005).

IMC should be on the agenda for companies who advertise across multiple media channels, target niche markets or care about the accountability behind their campaigns (Integrated Marketing, 2012). As this depiction arguably fits all companies today, all marketing practitioners and clients alike can benefit from integrated methods.

**How practitioners can take advantage of IMC.** There are many different strategies when it comes to implementing a successful integrated marketing plan. Careful examination of each strategy allows for an understanding of how practitioners can successfully utilize IMC.

Brand (2009), suggests looking at marketing in a different way. Traditionally, communication professionals envision the different areas of marketing as separated by a line. He suggests instead envisioning a wagon wheel diagram to reflect the nonlinear, integrated approach (Brand, 2009).

According to Jones (2008), the customer has become the media. Consumers report their experiences with brands through the use of online sites such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook. This shift in who is telling the brand story creates an opportunity for communications professionals (Jones, 2008). Integrated marketing campaigns should be developed around the stories customers are telling (Jones, 2008).

Some practitioners argue that the best strategy for implementing a successful integrated marketing plan is to switch the focus from attitudes to behaviors. Traditional marketing focuses on the attitudes of customers. Persuit (2013) suggests IMC practitioners focus on the behaviors of customers. According to her study, the behaviors of customers more accurately indicate how they will act in the future (Persuit, 2013). Also, focusing on behaviors allows for better measurement and evaluation (Persuit, 2013).

Another strategy is to focus on branding. Many practitioners argue that branding is the most effective marketing tool (Anonymous, 2009; Jones, 2008; Pursuit, 2013). A recent study conducted by ARAnet and Opinion Research Corp. showed that consumers are far more likely to take action when reading online articles that include brand information (51%), as compared to search engine advertising (39%) or banner advertising (25%) (as cited in Anonymous, 2009).

**Obstacles standing in the way of integration.** Communications practitioners must overcome multiple obstacles in order to successfully manage IMC. An analysis of the literature has revealed three major hurdles that communications practitioners face: organizational barriers, the inability to measure success and a lack of training.

The biggest hurdles communications practitioners face when trying to implement integrated marketing systems are organizational ones (Smith, 1995). Eliminating silos and moving to cross-organizational integration can be difficult. For example, IBM moved from centralized communications functions to a decentralized team approach, and then to a marketing services "account manager" approach. Then, the company dismantled its vertical marketing functions completely in favor of cross-functional teams (Smith, 1995).

Much of this organizational trouble stems from marketing departments' fears of losing resources and decision-making power (Smith, 1995).

The second hurdle is the inability of agencies to measure the success and impact of integrated marketing campaigns (Smith, 1995). Paul Root, president of the Marketing Sciences Institute in Cambridge, says that companies are implementing IMC, but want to know how to evaluate it, how much to commit to their overall communications budget, and how to justify these decisions (Smith, 1995). According to Rachel Hatton, planning director at Ogilvy Group, measuring both long-term and real-time presents a challenge for agencies (as cited in Derrick, 2011). Angela Jeffrey, U.S. Strategy Director at Salience Insight, adds to this opinion by saying that most communication professionals lack the analytics training necessary to measure integrated marketing campaigns effectively (as cited in Convergence of Marketing, 2014). According to Kliatchko (2008), IMC approaches should look to measure behavioral responses and outcomes. This differs from traditional approaches to measurement, which look to evaluate communication effects and outputs (Kliatchko, 2008). For example, an IMC approach would measure purchases and financial returns, while a traditional approach would measure brand recall and what media placements were bought (Schultz & Walters, 1997). Therefore, the drive for accountability is the core of IMC as IMC programs must be accountable for business results (Kliatchko, 2008).

The third main hurdle communications practitioners face is a lack of training in integrated marketing strategies. Rose and Miller (1994) argue that while more and more clients are demanding an integrated marketing campaign, most communications practitioners are not equipped to develop such a campaign.

Professional training and development can take many forms such as seminars, workshops, continuing education courses, and self-study (Rose & Miller, 1994). While graduate school is an option, most professionals won't abandon job security for the sake of obtaining a degree (Rose & Miller, 1994). Thus, training needs to be designed around the needs and schedules of working professionals (Rose & Miller, 1994).

Rose and Miller (1994) conducted a self-administered, national mail survey of American Advertising Federation (AAF) and Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members to identify and compare the perceived educational needs of advertising and public relations practitioners. The survey was completed by 564 individuals for an overall response rate of 25% (Rose & Miller, 1994). They found that more than 74.1% of advertising professionals and more than 80.1% of public relations professionals conveyed an interest in further professional training (Rose & Miller, 1994). For both groups of professionals, the main reason for wanting training is to keep current in the profession (Rose & Miller, 1994). Another motive for training is as a means of career advancement (Rose & Miller, 1994).

The need for training does not just affect those at a professional level. According to Larsen & Len-Rios, it has also affected the education and development of communication students. As the line separating marketing disciplines becomes more blurred, employers expect to see related changes in the students' skillsets (Larsen & Len-Rios, 2006). Larsen and Len-Rios (2006) conducted a web-based survey of educators teaching courses in advertising, public relations or strategic communication designed to explore the current status of curriculum integration from the perspective of an educator. A total of 197 surveys were completed, yielding a 41% response rate (Larsen & Len-

Rios, 2006). They found that only 13% of respondents said their programs were partially integrated (Larsen & Len-Rios, 2006). Furthermore, only 23% of respondents said they believed the curricula in their program would become more integrated in the next three years (Larsen & Len-Rios, 2006). These findings show a disconnect between what skillsets employers expect students to have and what skillsets are actually being taught to students.

**Conclusion.** In summation, this review of the literature shows that integrated marketing communications is a rising trend in the industry. IMC has become a popular strategic approach to marketing, thanks to a growth in digital marketing, a demand for IMC by clients and its cost efficient nature. The benefits of IMC are not limited to certain agencies or categories. All marketing practitioners and clients alike can benefit from integrated methods. However, they will have to overcome organizational hurdles, measurement complications and a general lack of training.

For the purpose of this study, the topic will be broadened from integrated marketing communications to integrated communications. According to Clarke Caywood (2012), the use of the term "integrated communications" bridges the gap between academic communications, public relations and advertising. Using this term will allow the researcher to examine all means of communication that an agency may utilize. Based on this information, the researcher proposes an examination of one of the obstacles of integration, specifically a general lack of training. To that end, a qualitative study will be conducted to answer the following two research questions that could be beneficial to the communications industry.

RQ1: What is the role of training within an agency in managing an integrated approach?

RQ2: How can agencies utilizing an integrated approach best meet the training needs of employees?

## Methodology

**Research Design.** I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board before beginning any research.

The first step was data collection. I used two different methods: participation observation and individual interviews. According to Charmaz (2006), the two methods work well together as participant observation at interview and field sites helps to facilitate interviews. Interviews are the primary method of collecting data, but participant observation gives a distinctive insight, revealing what people are really doing, instead of what they say they are doing (Laitinen & Kaunonen & Astedt-Kurki, 2014)

**Participant observation plan.**

***Introduction.*** Participant observation is a data collection method that reveals the reality of daily life in a specific context (Laitinen & Kaunonen & Astedt-Kurki, 2014). From the start, participant observation in a grounded theory study takes a different form than other types of ethnographies (Charmaz, 2006). Priority is given to the studied phenomenon; so grounded theorists study what is happening in the setting and make a conceptual rendering of these actions (Charmaz, 2006).

The participation observation took place at a mid-sized, Midwestern integrated communications agency and lasted eight weeks.

***Open coding.*** In open coding, the incidents, events and happenings observed are analyzed as potential indicators of phenomena and given conceptual labels (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For example, if I observed that a participant spread his or her activities

over the morning, taking a coffee break between tasks, then I labeled this phenomenon as "pacing." If I observed other incidents, and upon comparison to the first, noticed they resemble the same phenomena, those incidents were also labeled as "pacing." According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), only by comparing incidents and naming like phenomena with the same term can a theorist accumulate the basic units for theory. These comparisons assist the researcher in guarding against bias, since they lead the researcher to challenge concepts with fresh data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Next, categories were developed and rated (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Concepts that pertained to the same phenomena were grouped into categories; however, not all concepts became categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), categories are generated through the same analytic process of making comparisons to highlight similarities and differences, but categories are higher in level and more abstract than concepts. Continuing with the example presented above, in addition to the concept of "pacing" I also might have generated the concepts "resting," "taking a lunch break," and "chatting at the water cooler." While these concepts are different in practice, they seem to be part of a similar process: spreading out activities to avoid burnout at work. Thus, they could be grouped under a more abstract category of "Self Strategies for Avoiding Burnout."

The next step was sampling. In grounded theory, sampling proceeds in terms of concepts, their properties, dimensions and variations rather than in terms of specific individuals, units of time and so on (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For example, I was not sampling employees of the integrated agency. Instead, I was sampling the incidents, events and happenings that represented the work done by those employees as well as the

conditions that facilitated, interrupted or prevented their work and the consequences that resulted from their work. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), it is through this theoretical sampling that representativeness of concepts and consistency are achieved.

***Axial coding.*** In axial coding, categories are related to their subcategories and the relationship is tested against the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I made sure to account for patterns and variations. The data was examined for regularity and for an understanding of where the regularity was not apparent (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For example, if I noticed that the Vice President of Brand Management leads all of the brand management team meetings I noted that as a pattern. If, however, I also noted that when the Vice President of Brand Management was extremely busy they delegated the leadership role to the Senior Brand Manager, then I noted that as a variation of the original pattern.

***Selective coding.*** Selective coding is the process by which all categories are unified around a "core" category (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), these core categories represent the central phenomena of the study. For example, to determine my core category I asked myself, "What is the main analytic idea presented in this research?"

During this stage of the research process, poorly developed categories (categories for which few properties have been uncovered in the data) are identified (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The researcher returns to the field to obtain data that will fill the gaps in order for the theory to have explanatory power (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Continuing with the example presented above, if I determined that my category "Self Strategies for

Avoiding Burnout" was lacking conceptual density, then I returned to the office and continued participant observation until that category was filled-in with descriptive detail.

***Writing memos.*** In order to keep track of all the concepts, categories, properties, hypotheses and questions that arose during my participant observation, I implemented a memo-writing system. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), writing memos should begin with the first coding session and continue until the end of the research. Memos vary in form and length according to the stage of research and type of coding (Corbin & Straus, 1990). Through these memos I explored, explained and hypothesized emerging data. For example, when coding the concept "pacing," the accompanying memo might have elaborated on the concept with names of participants, specific activities, language used, my interpretations of the data and the hypotheses developed. I believed that taking field notes during the participant observation would have drawn unwanted attention, so I made notes at the end of each workday.

**Interviews plan.**

***Introduction.*** In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Interviews are the primary method of collecting data in qualitative research (Nunkoosing, 2005). According to Charmaz (2001), the advantages of in-depth qualitative interviews for conducting grounded theory analysis are unassailable. One advantage is that the interviewer assumes more direct control over the construction of data than does a researcher using most other methods, such as ethnography or textual analysis (Charmaz, 2001). Also, since grounded theory methods depend on flexibility, the

combination of flexibility and control inherent in in-depth interviewing techniques fits grounded theory strategies (Charmaz, 2001).

To maintain the flexibility that is an integral part of grounded theory, I conducted semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviewing, a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). I served as moderator of the interviews, and used a guide consisting of seven core questions, each with optional prompts and follow-up questions. The interview questions changed as new data was gathered and analyzed; however, the questions were standardized and probes were provided to ensure I cover the correct material.

***Process.*** I conducted 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews. All interviewees were employed at the mid-sized, integrated marketing agency where the participant observation occurred. Their ages ranged from 24 to 55 and multiple roles were represented, including but not limited to, brand manger, graphic designer, VP and owner. The sample included both men and women with varying amounts of experience in the industry. Due to limited time and connections I used a convenience sample. A convenience sample is a non-probability sample of research participants or subjects selected not for their representativeness, but for their accessibility or handiness, such as when university researchers use their own students (Colman, 2015).

Due to the nature of grounded theory, there were no strict criteria for sample size. According to Charmaz (1990), the sample should depend upon developing the range of relevant conceptual categories, saturating those categories and fully explaining the data. I planned for 12 interviews but I stopped after 10. I believe I reached saturation, as the latter interviews were not offering any new insights on the categories.

Eight of the interviews were conducted in person, and two were conducted via Skype. As expected, each interview lasted around 30 minutes.

## Participant Observation

**Introduction.** Throughout the observation period, trends and patterns were noted and the data collected was used to reveal the reality of daily life at an integrated communications agency. Through a careful examination of this data, key insights into the management of integrated communications were developed.

**Setting.**

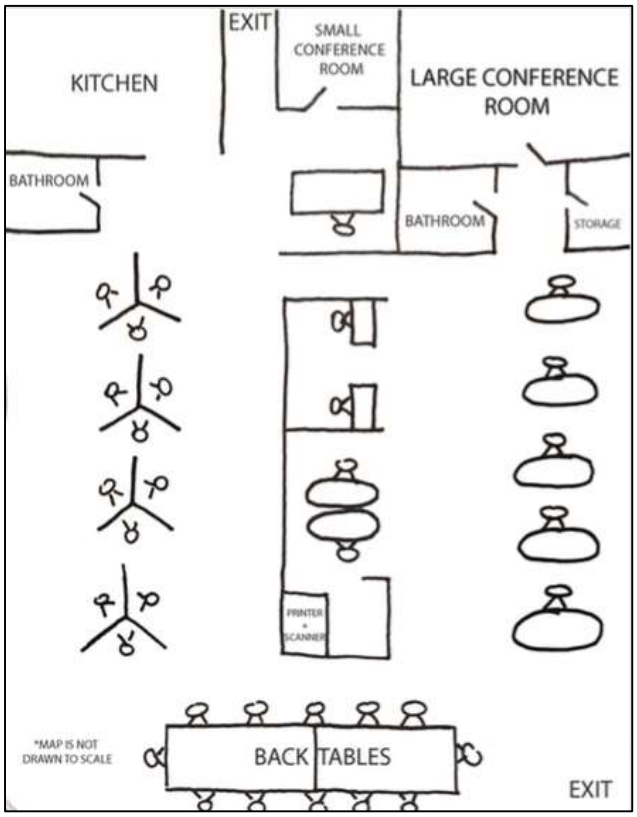


*Figure 1*. Office Map. This figure illustrates the layout of the office.

The office is divided down the middle with a wall that extends ¾ of the way up to the ceiling. Aside from this partition, the office utilizes an open floor plan. There are not any separate offices or cubicles for individual employees.

The office has white walls and grey carpeting which; combined with the open floor plan, make it feel very large. There are two different styles of desks throughout the office, all of which are white. One side of the office has four workstations, each with space for three employees to sit. The other side has 10 tabletop desks. Each of these desks seats one employee. All of the tabletop desks have a two-drawer, rolling file cabinet placed next to them. Every desk is paired with a black, high-backed, rolling office chair. Three of the tabletop desks sit empty. The others each have an HP laptop computer, Allworx telephone, and a dual monitor.

The office does not have many decorations. There are bulletin boards, wall calendars and personal photos hung in a few places on the walls. However, most of the walls are bare. Along the base of each exterior wall there is a long, metal storage set. It is made of large drawers and cabinets that are used to hold files, magazines, office supplies, etc. At the back of the office there are two long, blue tables placed end to end and surrounded by 12 chairs. The tables are usually empty except for a large bowl of assorted candy.

**Participants.** Typically, there are between 10 to 15 people in the office at any given time. This number varies, as there are four part-time employees who work fewer hours and are not regularly in the office. The employees are mostly female, and every employee is white. The biggest demographic variant is age. Employees' ages appear to range from early 20s to mid 50s.

Most employees remain at their desks for the majority of the workday, with occasional moves to the conference rooms and back tables for meetings. Employees also spend a small amount of time in the office bathrooms and kitchen.

Two generations are strongly represented among the research participants, Generation X and Millennials. George Masnick of the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies defines Generation X as people born in the timeframe of 1965 to 1984 (Bump, 2014). This timeframe indicates that today Generation X members are between the ages of 32 and 51. The second generation with a strong representation at the office was the Millennial generation. Researchers Neil Howe and William Strauss define Millennials as those born in the timeframe of 1982 to 2004 (Bump, 2014). This timeframe indicates that today Millennials are between the ages of 12 and 34.

**Activities.** Activities observed include, but are not limited to, individual work, team meetings, phone calls, office lunches, team bonding exercises and client meetings.

Table 1

*Dress*

| Clothing | Title | Occasion |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| Leggings | SBM, BM | Regular workday (in office) |
| Jeans (dark) | SBM, BM, BC, Jr art, VP digital, Designer, VP PR, Owner, VP brand, VP strategy | Regular workday (in office) |
| Jeans (light) | Jr art, Designer, BM | Regular workday (in office) |
| Slacks | OM, VP strategy, VP digital, Developer, Owner, VP brand, VP PR | Regular workday (in office) |
| Sweater (pullover) | BM, BC, JR art, Designer, SBM | Regular workday (in office) |
| Sweater (cardigan) | VP Strategy, VP PR, OM, SBM, BC | Regular workday (in office) |
| Blazer | VP digital, VP strategy, VP brand | Regular workday (in office) |
| Button-up blouse/shirt | Owner, VP strategy, Vp digital, developer | Regular workday (in office) |
| Blouse | VP digital, VP strategy, VP PR, Designer, OM | Regular workday (in office) |
| Boots | VP digital, VP strategy, VP brand, SBM, BM, BC, jr art, Designer | Regular workday (in office) |
| Dress flats/shoes | Owner, VP digital, VP strategy, VP brand, VP PR, OM, Developer | Regular workday (in office) |
| Tennish Shoes | SBM, BM, jr art | Regular workday (in office) |
| Heels | BC, SBM, VP Digital, VP brand | Regular workday (in office) |
| | | |
| Leggings | | Client Meeting |
| Jeans (dark) | SBM, BM, BC, Jr art, VP digital, Designer, VP PR, VP brand, VP strategy | Client Meeting |
| Jeans (light) | | Client Meeting |
| Slacks | OM, VP strategy, VP digital, Developer, Owner, VP brand, VP PR | Client Meeting |
| Sweater (pullover) | BM, BC, JR art, Designer, SBM | Client Meeting |
| Sweater (cardigan) | VP Strategy, VP PR, OM, SBM, BC | Client Meeting |
| Blazer | VP digital, VP strategy, VP brand | Client Meeting |
| Button-up blouse/shirt | Owner, VP strategy, Vp digital, developer | Client Meeting |
| Blouse | VP digital, VP strategy, VP PR, Designer, OM | Client Meeting |
| Boots | VP digital, VP strategy, VP brand, SBM, BM, BC, jr art, Designer | Client Meeting |
| Dress flats/shoes | Owner, VP digital, VP strategy, VP brand, VP PR, OM, Developer | Client Meeting |
| Tennish Shoes | Jr art | Client Meeting |
| Heels | BC, SBM, VP Digital, VP brand | Client Meeting |

*Job Titles: SBM = senior brand manager, BM = brand manager, BC = brand coordinator, JR art = junior art director, OM = office manager

Overall, manner of dress within the office could be classified as business causal or professional dress. Most employees wore dark jeans or slacks and a blouse or sweater. For the most part employee's attire remained consistent whether they were meeting with clients or simply working at their desks all day, with the exception of leggings. While some younger employees wore leggings in the office occasionally, no employee ever wore leggings to work on a day when a client meeting was scheduled.

Table 2

*Lunch habits.*

| Activity | Title | Status |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| Lunch | All employees | Alone (out of office) |
| Lunch | All employees | Alone (in office) |
| Lunch | BM, BC, Jr art, Designer | Informal Group (out of office) |
| Lunch | BM, BC, Jr art, Designer | Informal Group (in office) |
| Lunch | VP digital, BM, VP brand, OM, BC | Formal Group Lunch |

*Job Titles: BM = brand manager, BC = brand coordinator, JR art = junior art director, OM = office manager

Ordinarily all employees ate lunch alone, with an even split between eating out of the office or at their desks. However, some employees would occasionally eat lunch together. The majority of these meals occurred outside of the office; however, the employees occasionally ordered food and ate together in the office.

Table 3

*Non-work related activities*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| Pacing<br>Getting mints<br>Getting water bottles<br>Making a loop around the office<br>Small talk<br>Phone calls (personal)<br>Texting (personal)<br>Social Media<br>Phone time<br>Planking competition<br>Leaving for Coffee<br>Making coffee | Self-Strategies For Avoiding Burnout |

Employees demonstrated many different strategies for avoiding burnout at work. Throughout the period of observation, all employees were observed making small talk, taking personal phone calls, spending time on personal social media accounts, etc. No apparent pattern appeared for when these strategies would be employed, whether by employee, day of week or time of day.

Table 4

*Feedback.*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| "I'm so proud of you!"<br>"Great, great work!"<br>"These look great."<br>"Perfect!"<br>"I love it."<br>"Thanks!"<br>"Awesome job!"<br>"Cool."<br>"Great!"<br>"This looks awesome."<br>"Perfect."<br>"Thank you so much!"<br>"You rocked it!"<br>"Awesome."<br>"Nailed it!" | Enthusiastic Feedback<br>Acknowledgments |

All of the feedback witnessed within the office was positive feedback. Most likely, this was due to the fact that negative feedback and concerns were addressed in a one-on-one meeting, which could not be observed. While all observed feedback was positive, some ranked much higher in positivity and enthusiasm than others. The younger employees typically gave the most enthusiastic feedback.

Table 5

*Communication.*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| "Circle back" | Formal Communication |
| "Close the loop" | Informal Communication |
| Talk on phone (with coworker) | Jargon |
| Talk on phone (with client) | |
| "Story" | |
| Approach desk | |
| 'Shout' across office | |
| Email | |
| "Integrity" | |
| "Aligned" | |
| Slack messaging | |
| Meeting (formal) | |
| Gathering (informal) | |
| "Flag" | |
| "Soft seed" | |
| Text message | |
| "High level" | |
| "Touch base" | |

Communication within the office appeared unorganized. Some employees utilized formal means of communication such as emails, phone calls and official meetings. Other employees utilized informal communication such as shouting questions across the office, text messages and spontaneously approaching coworkers' desks. There was no apparent strategy for when each means of communication should be employed.

There was also a significant amount of industry jargon observed within the office. The younger employees displayed a tendency towards using abbreviations, colloquialisms and industry jargon, more so than the older employees.

Table 6

*Tracking hours.*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| Daily timesheet update | Value-Centric Work Strategies |
| Weekly timesheet update | Hour-Centric Work Strategies |
| Account labels (on timesheet) | Strategies For Work-Life Balance |
| Task labels (on timesheet) | |
| Punctuality | |
| Work late | |
| Working lunch | |
| Work weekends (remotely) | |
| Sick days off | |
| Paid time off | |
| Sick days in office | |
| Weather-related time off | |
| Rain or shine attitude | |
| Leave early | |
| Long lunch | |

Employees were required to keep track of their hours using QuickBooks timesheets. Some employees filled out their timesheets daily, while other employees updated their timesheets weekly. The amount of detail used in the timesheets also varied. Younger employees' timesheets were observed to be more detailed and task-oriented while older employees' filled out their timesheets more broadly.

Work habits within the office also varied by employee. While some employees were observed to value punctuality, others frequently arrived late. There appeared to be no consequences for tardiness. Some employees were observed leaving the office before the workday had ended. Throughout the observation period, there were two altercations

between employees about this issue. However, despite these altercations some employees continued to leave early.

It was not uncommon to observe employees working through their lunch break at their desks. Many employees ordered food to be delivered to the office if they had a busy schedule that day. It was also not uncommon to observe sick employees in the office. Very few employees took sick days during the observation period, as most were observed showing up for work despite various illnesses.

Table 7

*Training.*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| Content writing workshop<br>PR Newswire tutorial<br>Optional digital training<br>Meeting sit-ins<br>Phone call listen-ins<br>Lack of training<br>Cross training gaps | Formal Training<br>Informal Training |

There was a notable lack of formal training within the office during the observation period. On one occasion, two employees were sent to Chicago for a content writing workshop. No other formal training occurred. However, there were some opportunities for informal training. Employees had the option of sitting in on meetings and phone calls if they wanted to learn and observe; however, of the 15 employees that were regularly in the office only approximately three ever took advantage of this opportunity. There were also opportunities for employees to learn from each other directly. Employees were often observed giving each other impromptu tutorials on various things such as how to use PR Newswire or how to launch an ad in Facebook.

However, there was a large amount of informal training. This usually took the form of hands-on training, and occurred on an as-needed basis. Most of this training was self-directed. I often taught myself how to complete new tasks, and familiarized myself with new software. For this type of training to work, employees need to be self-motivated.

Throughout the observation period, this self-directed training most frequently occurred when employees saw the potential for personal gain. For example, I took it upon myself to take the Google Certification courses and become Google Certified in AdWords because I saw how doing so would immediately benefit me personally. I knew that taking the certification course would increase my skills and improve my chances of receiving a job offer. Employees were observed to resist training when they did not see how the training would benefit them. For example, one employee actively opposed being trained in a new method of PR reporting. When another employee offered to help teach him he said, "It will be faster if you just do it."

Table 8

*New technology.*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| Gmail | Resisting |
| Slack | Embracing |
| Google docs | |
| Resistance | |
| Refusal | |
| Complaints | |
| Excitement | |
| Acceptance | |
| Absence of Training (official) | |
| Helping (unofficial) | |

Throughout the observation period there were several technological changes within the office. The majority of older employees were observed resisting these changes,

if not outright refusing to adapt to them. Younger employees were more excited about new forms of technology that were introduced and accepted most changes without question. The office manager was the exception to this trend. Despite being one of the older employees, the office manager embraced all technological changes that took place and was often observed helping other employees adjust.

There were no formal training sessions for any new technologies introduced to the office. On one occasion an office-wide email indicated there would be a training session for Gmail and Google Docs; however, the training never took place. Most employees adjusted to the new technologies through trial and error, and by voluntarily helping each other.

Table 9

*Meetings.*

| Concepts | Categories |
|---|---|
| All employees<br>Brand team<br>Account<br>Impromptu<br>Training<br>Digital team<br>1-on-1 | Meetings |

Throughout the observation period many different types of meetings took place. There were all employee meetings, which always occurred first thing in the morning. These meetings took place in the large conference room and were always scheduled at least 14 days in advance using Google Calendar. The office manager always supplied a breakfast food (bagels or donuts) half an hour before the meeting.

Second, there were brand team meetings, which occurred at varying times of day. These meetings always took place in the large conference room. Although they were called "brand meetings" not every member of the brand team went to each one. The attendees usually varied, sometimes even including members of the digital team.

Another common meeting was an account meeting. These occurred in various locations around the office. If the large conference room was available, the account meeting always occurred there. If the large conference room were unavailable, the account meeting would take place at the back tables. If both the large conference room and back tables were unavailable, the account meeting would take place in the small conference room.

There were also impromptu meetings, which occurred almost daily. These meetings took place in many different locations such as the large conference room, back tables, or at an employee's desk with no apparent pattern as to why one location was selected.

Table 10

*Work habits*

| Activity | Title | Status |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| Work | All employees | Alone (at desk) |
| Work | BM, BC | Informal Group |

*Job Titles: BM = brand manager, BC = brand coordinator

All employees conducted the bulk of their work individually at their desks; however, some employees would occasionally work in pairs or a small group on certain tasks and projects. These small collaborations were always informal and usually unplanned.

**Analysis.**

***Social differences.*** Age appears to be the strongest factor that influences social behavior within the office. Employees that belong to an older generation tended to work individually on the majority of their tasks while Millennials tended to collaborate with their peers. Younger employees were frequently observed asking each other for ideas, proofreading help and general advice. Millennials prefer to work in teams, in part because they perceive group-based work to be more fun, but also because they like to avoid risk (Alsop 2008; Gursoy et al. 2008). This mentality may be a result of group-based learning and project groups throughout their years in school (Howe and Strauss, 2007). Whereas Generation X workers like to work autonomously and dislike meeting and group work (Martin, 2005).

Furthermore, older employees are more likely to eat lunch and spend breaks alone. These employees were often observed leaving the office to grab lunch and run errands by themselves or eating a solitary lunch at their desks. Younger employees tended to eat and spend time in pairs or groups. According to Alsop (2008), Millennials report that working and interacting with other members of a team makes work more pleasurable

Integrated communications managers should nurture this growing trend towards collaboration, as collaboration and integration go hand in hand. Teams and employees within an integrated communications agency need to work together seamlessly to create a consistent campaign.

***Feedback.*** Also, there is a significant difference in the style of feedback given by employees. Employees of a younger generation were much more praising in their

feedback than older employees. Frequently observed Millennial responses included, “Great, great work” “I’m so proud of you” and “Awesome Job!” Older employees were more likely to leave a completed task unacknowledged. Millennials expect communication with supervisors to be more frequent, and more positive than has been the case with members of Generation X. An annual review will not be sufficient. Employers must be willing to provide consistent feedback and a clearly defined path for advancement (MOJO Ad, 2015). Meeting those expectations may be key in managing integrated communications. The companies that are most successful at managing Millennials are those that understand the importance of setting clear targets and providing regular and structured feedback (Millennials at work, 2011).

***Communication style.*** Throughout the observation period, some differences in communication style were noted. Generation X employees used more formal communication methods than the younger generation. These employees were observed to talk on the phone more frequently than their younger coworkers. They were also more likely to schedule a formal meeting to discuss projects, whereas the younger employees would informally gather at each other’s desks. While both formal and informal communications have benefits, having no specified communication plan may be a disadvantage. Without clear communication and the team effort it permits, the successful completion of any important project can be jeopardized (Webster, 1992).

According to Harris and Nelson (2008), communication is one of the most dominant and important activities in organizations. With communication playing such a vital role, it should be structured and consistent. However, there was no accepted system in place for how tasks should be delegated, how feedback should be dispersed, how

questions should be raised and addressed, etc. For example, some employees would delegate tasks to their team members via email, while others would delegate the tasks verbally. This disconnected communication was not efficient. In order to effectively manage integrated communications, agencies need to employ clear and consistent communication processes.

A significant amount of industry jargon was also observed within the office throughout the observation period. The younger employees displayed a tendency towards using abbreviations, colloquialisms and industry jargon, more so than the older employees. This division isn't necessarily a bad thing. Using functional or organizational jargon can be an easy way to communicate ideas clearly for people who are fluent in those terms and acronyms (Moran, 2008). Older employees may not use abbreviations, colloquialisms and industry jargon as much as the Millennials do; however, as long as they understand it communication will still be effective.

***Work expectations.*** This gap in behaviors by generation carries through work expectations as well. Employees that belong to Generation X appear to place more weight on hours spent in the office than younger employees do. This is reflected in their timesheets. These employees were observed filling out their timesheets on a daily basis, while younger employees tended to fill theirs out at the end of each week.

Millennials appeared to measure performance by results rather than hours. Their timesheets, while filled out less frequently, were more detailed. For example, a Generation X employee's timesheet may read, "Worked on Account XYZ, 2 hours. Worked on account ABC, 4 hours. Worked on Account QWE, 2.5 hours." While a Millennial's timesheet may read, "Write and publish a blog post for Client Z, 90 minutes.

Create a social media calendar for Client Z designed to increase brand recognition, 60 minutes. Launch Client G's PPC campaign to drive traffic to their website, 40 minutes." For these Millennials, emphasis is placed on the amount of tasks completed and the value of those tasks, rather than documenting how many hours were spent in the office.

To successfully manage integrated communications, employers need to take this shifting mindset into consideration. Currently, most employers encourage long hours and reward employees based on number of hours worked, rather the amount of productivity involved. But employees would prefer to be evaluated based on the value of their work rather than the amount of hours worked. Ninety-one percent of youths and young adults place high importance on their employer recognizing their value to the company (MOJO Ad, 2015).

This disconnect between the way employers measure the performance of their employees, and the way employees measure their own performance leads to disgruntled, inefficient employees. To combat this, managers should evaluate performance based on completed tasks and objectives, rather than hours spent the office

***Training.*** Aside from two brand managers being sent to a content writing workshop in Chicago, very little formal training took place throughout the period of observation. However, there were many opportunities for informal training. These opportunities usually took the form of listening and observing others at work. For example, one brand manager was preparing to launch a press release using the PR Newswire. A brand coordinator asked if she could watch and learn how to do it, so they moved into the large conference room and utilized the overhead projector to walk through the process together step-by-step.

Only the younger employees appeared to take advantage of these opportunities. In the previously mentioned example, the brand manager announced to the office at large that she would be giving a brief example-based tutorial on how to use PR Newswire, and only two employees opted to sit in. Both of these employees were Millennials.

It could be theorized that the older employees already knew how to use PR Newswire, and therefore did not need the training. However, this hypothesis was disproven when one member of the PR team, a member of Generation X, announced that he was not familiar with the service. Despite a chance to benefit from the informal training, he declined the offer saying, "Well if you know how to do it, then that's good enough for me."

Millennial employees were frequently observed asking to sit in on meetings that they weren't required to attend. They seemed eager for any chance to learn new skills. According to Coopers (2008), Millennial employees have high expectations for being trained well, and they feel that this is a very important part of their experience.

The lack of formal training at this office may be detrimental since training and education have been shown to have a significant positive effect on job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Karia & Asaari, 2006). In order to effectively manage integrated communications, employers need to invest in continuous training. By providing opportunities for continued learning, employers are ensuring that their workers keep up-to-date on the latest industry trends and tools.

***New technology.*** There was also an apparent failing in the way employees adapted to new technologies. Throughout the observation period, several technological changes took place within the office. For example, the agency switched email service

providers from Outlook to Google. Many of the employees resisted this change. These employees were observed frequently complaining about the new email service and many continued to use their Outlook email address for several weeks after they were told to switch.

This resistance extended past the email service providers. Throughout the observation period, every time a new form of technology was introduced it met resistance. A second example is when the messaging app, Slack, was introduced to the office. Intended for all within-office communication, this app was supposed to increase efficiency, improve office organization and create quick turnaround on requests. However, many employees ignored the app altogether.

Integrated communications managers must work to help their agency absorb new technologies efficiently. First, managers should build up hype for the product, service or platform in question. It is important to make the benefits of the new technology visible to employees (Leonard-Barton & Kraus, 1985). According to Didier Bonnet, co-author of Leading Digital, employees need to understand why [the new technology] is an improvement from what they had before (Knight, 2015).

Second, integrated marketing managers must work to help their employees feel comfortable using the new technology. It is important to remember that familiarity with and interest in digital technology will vary widely among employees. Training efforts should reflect those differences (Knight, 2015). Some employees might prefer online training, and some might desire a workshop with hands-on learning. Managers need to take the time to determine what their employees want when it comes to digital technology training, and then provide it.

## Individual Interviews

**Introduction.** Key insights into the management of integrated communications were discovered using individual interviews. These interviews explored how practitioners define integrated communications, what obstacles are standing in the way of integration, how agencies can overcomes these obstacles, what role training plays in managing integrated communications and how agencies can best meet the training needs of employees.

**Analysis.**

***Defining integrated communications.*** Overall, when asked to define integrated communications in their own words, all interviewees gave very similar answers. In every interview one of two ideas were conveyed. First that integrated communications means "different teams working together." (Participant B, personal communication, April 1, 2016) Second that integrated communications is a "blend between traditional marketing and digital marketing." (Participant D, personal communication, April 1, 2016) These ideas match what is found in literature surrounding integrated communications. According to Brand (2009), integrated methods aim for seamless integration of old and new techniques.

***Obstacles standing in the way of integration.*** When asked about the obstacles standing in the way of integration, participants gave several answers. The obstacle most frequently mentioned was the size of the agency. If true integrated communications is combining a variety of disciplines, agencies need to have team members that can speak to each discipline. The smaller an agency is, the more difficult it becomes to ensure that each specialty is covered. "I think internally the limitation is probably our size. While we

have staff members who are proficient in a variety of areas, we don't have a lot of depth in several of those areas. So I think our size can sometimes be a challenge to providing a full repertoire of integrated marketing communications." (Participant F, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

Another frequently mentioned obstacle was the size of the clients that mid-sized agencies serve. According to the interviewees, mid-sized agencies tend to attract smaller clients with limited budgets. These restrictive budgets prevent true integration, as they can only afford to utilize one or two services. "You can't always do a fully, crazy, digital experience if you're working with just a $500 out-of-pocket spend" (Participant D, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

The third obstacle mentioned was the organization of the agency. According to the participants, the agency must be organized in such a way as to allow different teams to work together. This can be difficult to achieve. "There can be a lot of confusion and resistance when employees aren't on the same page. If brand and digital have different ideas and don't communicate effectively, the final product will be sloppy." (Participant J, personal communication, April 5, 2016) However, the research interviews showed that once an agency found an effective way to organize itself, integration became a lot easier. "There's a lot of steps to make sure that the brand side and the digital side are working together effectively. It takes time to set everything up. Once you can set that backbone up though, then I think things flow better." (Participant B, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

Research interviews found that the best way to effectively organize an agency is to use structured processes to keep things flowing smoothly. "I think right now, we have

to be flexible, but I think the ultimate goal is to have a very set process because that's where the internal balls are getting dropped." (Participant D, personal communication, April 1, 2016) Having consistent, organized processes that employees follow every time increases efficiency and cuts down on confusion. "It's a lot easier to get things done if you answer to a process versus answering to a person. If you know these are the steps that need to be taken every single time, you're not gonna have to reference someone above you to say, 'Hey, I just wanna make sure I'm doing this right,' because you'll know that you're doing it right." (Participant B, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

***Contributions to integration.*** According to the research interviews, there are many different factors that can contribute to successful management of integrated communications. First, the office layout should be considered. Research interviews show that agencies should consider an open-office floor plan. More and more companies are embracing open office layouts with the goal to improve communication, increase collaboration and cut back on overhead (Brown, 2015). In an industry that relies on communication and seamless teamwork for success, this approach may be particularly effective. "The environment that we work in is very open. While it can be distracting and noisy at times, I do think it does contribute to that integrated approach just by sharing of ideas and overhearing people working on something and then kind of piping in and offering to help. Just being aware of what others are working on I think is a positive thing." (Participant F, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

A 2013 Deloitte and Touche Human Capital survey showed that 95% of American CEOs felt that effective internal communication was very important to the success of an organization (Bassett, 2014). Similarly, the research participants agree that

internal communication plays a major role in successfully managing an agency. There are many different types of people that work at an integrated agency. With the large variety of jobs and roles come a large variety of personalities and work habits. Thus, communication between management and employees is critical. “I’d say that the success is having someone who can really understand how all those different types of people think and work and bring them together, communicate with them, and then kind of manage them when they go off and start doing their pieces.” (Participant A, personal communication, March 30,2016)

This need for communication extends past the management. It’s also essential that employees effectively communicate with each other. “I think a good communication between office people, members of the team making sure that everybody's on the same page and working towards that same goal. If everybody feels like they're on the same team, then everybody will be more apt to give each other some slack and work together along that path.” (Participant B, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

While practitioners appear to agree that communication is an essential part of successfully managing integrated communications, its much easier said than done. In the previously mentioned Deloitte and Touche Human Capital survey of American CEOs, only 22% of CEOs surveyed said that they thought internal communication was being delivered effectively (Bassett, 2014). Research interviews showed that within an agency communication is often unorganized and chaotic. “Usually its off the cuff and kind of a free for all. Which might be unavoidable due to the fast-pace nature of this industry. Sometimes it’s a problem when there’s an dispute and its like I swear I sent that email but the person never got it.” (Participant H, personal communication, April 5, 2016)

***Training.*** The first research question asked what is the role of training within an agency in managing an integrated approach? All participants unanimously agreed that training plays a vital role. The general benefits received from employee training are increased job satisfaction and morale, increased motivation, increased efficiencies in processes, resulting in financial gain, increased capacity to adopt new technologies and methods, increased innovation in strategies and products and reduced employee turnover (Elnaga and Imran, 2013). The research participants expressed the belief that these benefits would hold true for mid-size integrated communication agencies. “I think that's how people individually develop and how we cross-pollinate ideas and share our own expertise.” (Participant F, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

However, while all practitioners agreed training was important, they acknowledge that most small to mid-sized agencies fall short in this area. “I think that training is big and very important and it is not done enough in our industry” (Participant A, personal communication, March 30, 2016). The research interviews provided two explanations for this shortcoming.

According to the interviewees, there are two big obstacles standing in the way of training. “Smaller organizations have less money, less time.” (Participant A, personal communication, March 30, 2016) Due to this lack of time and money, small to mid-sized integrated communications agencies often lack consistent, structured training programs.

Training takes up a lot of time no matter what type is used. Watching a tutorial video requires less time than attending a conference, but it is still takes away billable hours, which are crucial to most mid-sized agencies. “As an agency that bills our time and tracks our time, I think the natural push is to dedicate as much of your time in a week

towards billable account work. That wouldn't be training, right?" (Participant F, personal communication, April 4, 2016) Furthermore, asking employees to seek out individual training in their own time is not realistic. While all research participants acknowledged that they had an interest in training, they claimed it simply wasn't possible to train themselves as much as was necessary. "Time is a big thing. 'Cause personally, there's always things that I want to learn or take upon myself to do, but there's never enough time in the day." (Participant C, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

The second big obstacle to training is money. "Big corporations invest a lot in training programs since they promote from within a lot of the time. As a smaller agency, we don't have a ton of money to invest in training so we have to be more careful about where it goes." (Participant G, personal communication, April 5, 2016) According to a 2014 "State of the Industry" report by the Association for Talent Development, companies with less than 500 employees spend around $1,888 per employee on training, but it only translated to 27 (or fewer) hours (Casuto, 2015). Despite the obvious need for training, mid-sized integrated marketing agencies simply cannot afford to continuously provide training to all of their employees. This means that agencies need to be smart about how they allocate their training budget, by determining which employees and disciplines should get the most attention.

The second research question asked how can agencies utilizing an integrated approach best meet the training needs of employees. According to the research participants, in order to best meet the training needs of employees integrated communications agencies should focus on cross training.

Cross training involves teaching workers to perform job functions not included in their current job description and is practiced to maximize overall staff efficiency and flexibility (McKay, n.d.). This practice may be particularly useful within integrated communications agencies. Cross training helps employees to be agile when a client's needs change. It also allows employees to step up and fill in when another employee is ill, on vacation or quits unexpectedly. "With integrated campaigns teams overlap and employees might be asked to perform tasks outside of their skillset. Or members of one team might need to try and pitch another team's services to potential clients. I think cross-training is necessary to make sure all of our employees can speak to all disciplines at least a little bit to make sure there aren't any big fallouts." (Participant H, personal communication, April 5, 2016) Research interviews provided multiple examples of fallouts that occur due to lack of cross training. One involved members of the brand team not being cross-trained in design. After the brand team finished meeting with a client they returned to the office with tasks for the graphic designer, only to discover that what they had promised the client was not possible. If the brand team would have been cross-trained in the basics of design, this problem could have been avoided. "I think just understanding the basics of how it operates on both ends, like us understanding each other's jobs would make it a little easier." (Participant C, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

While all participants acknowledged the need for cross training, they did not agree on how the cross training should be provided. For example, some participants said they learn best by doing and would like to have time set aside for hands-on training in the office. "Sometimes if I watch someone else do it I think I get it, but then when I go and

try it on my own I can't remember how. I think it would be better to drive the training so I'm doing it while I learn." (Participant I, personal communication, April 5, 2016) There are multiple benefits to hands-on training. Hands-on training is a flexible training method that is immediately applicable to the trainee's job, and it allows the trainer to immediately determine whether the trainee has learned the new skill or not (Sisson, 2001).

Other participants expressed a desire to attend conferences and workshops. "I think conferences and workshops. I'm a visual learner and I need someone that's engaging enough." (Participant D, personal communication, April 1, 2016) There are also many benefits to attending conferences and workshops. They provide participants with renewed motivation, as well as the opportunity to learn new techniques, receive expert knowledge from top industry professionals and network (Morgan, n.d.).

It appeared that there was a connection between which type of training the participants preferred and their job within the agency. Members of the brand and PR teams expressed an interest in attending conferences and workshops while developers, graphic designers and digital specialists favored hands-on training. Employees in a management role expressed a need for both. "I would say maybe a combination of that. Conferences provide opportunities to hear some speakers, but hearing it is different than doing it. So I think you need to hear it at the conference, but then use webinars to start getting a little bit closer into how do I actually use that in my day to day job." (Participant E, personal communication, April 1, 2016)

Furthermore, some practitioners expressed that despite the obstacles small to mid-sized agencies might have an advantage when it comes to training. "While small companies may not have the time and the resources, what we do have is flexibility to try

just about anything. We can share ideas and try it and test it. We at least have a platform to allow people to try new things." (Participant E, personal communication, April 1, 2016) However, the research interviews showed that some uncertainty exists in regards to who should be responsible for implementing training programs.

The research interviews demonstrated that there is no widely accepted protocol on who should be responsible for professional development and training. While the responsibility could fall to managers, this option presents some drawbacks. "I've been in that situation before where I provide training but the employee isn't really interested. It ends up just being a waste." (Participant J, personal communication, April 5, 2016) There are also drawbacks to holding employees completely responsible for their own professional development and training. "From the top-down there has to be a kind of support for that. If employees are responsible for tracking and billing their time, they need a blessing from management to dedicate a certain amount of time to training." Without that support, employees would need to seek out and complete training in their own time, outside of work. As stated earlier in this paper, employees are expressing growing desire for work/life balance so expecting employees to put in extra hours is unrealistic.

The research participants conveyed the opinion that training needed to be both a top-down and a bottom-up approach in order for it to succeed. "I think it's honestly both probably. That sounds a little bit idealistic maybe, but I think definitely the first side of that is having managers provide that sort of mentorship and training. But I think that the individuals have to be receptive too and motivated to grow their own kind of knowledge.

So without both, I think it's a problem." (Participant F, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

In order for this top-down and bottom-up training approach to work, employees need to be enthusiastic about their roles and interested in further training. This means that for agencies to successfully manage integrated communications, they need to take great care in who they recruit and ultimately hire. "The goal of a company is to hire the right people who are naturally interested in these things and will continuously seek it out, learn and always develop themselves." (Participant A, personal communication, March 30, 2016)

## Discussion

**Findings.** Multiple key insights were developed through the use of participant observation. First, managers should encourage employee collaboration. A balance between individual focus and team collaboration will move an agency more effectively towards its goals.

Second, managers should frequently provide structured feedback. Regular feedback is a critical component of a successful integrated communications agency and should be used in conjunction with setting performance goals. With steady feedback employees will not be working blindly, and they will be more effective in reaching the set goals.

Third, agencies need to establish clearly defined, consistent communication processes. Integrated communications agencies typically have multiple moving parts. It is vital that each team is able to communicate both amongst themselves and with other

teams successfully. Without clearly defined channels of communication, important tasks and insights may slip through the cracks.

Fourth, managers should evaluate performance based on completed tasks and objectives, rather than hours spent the office. It is important to set performance goals for employees and use those goals as a benchmark for evaluation. This way, employees feel confident that their work is appreciated and that they are not wasting time in the office that could be better spent elsewhere.

Fifth, managers need to invest in continuous education and training for their employees at all levels. Providing continuous training and development will lead to better job performance and increased job satisfaction.

Finally, integrated communications managers must work to help their agency absorb new technologies by explaining the benefits of the technology and providing digital technology training. This will allow agencies to stay up-to-date, efficient and innovative.

Multiple key insights were developed through the use of individual interviews as well. First, current practitioners define integrated communications as different teams working together to blend traditional marketing with digital marketing. Managers should emphasize this idea of teamwork and attempt to create an office culture that fosters collaboration. To do this, managers should consider utilizing an open-office floor plan.

Second, mid-sized integrated communications agencies must overcome multiple obstacles. Agencies must offset their limited size by making sure the staff they do have is sufficiently trained to provide a full repertoire of integrated services. They need to implement clear, easy-to-follow workflows to increase efficiency and ensure that each

task is completed to agency standards. Additionally, managers need to encourage communication in the office to guarantee that everyone is on the same page and working toward the same goal.

Third, training plays a vital role in managing an integrated approach. Agencies need to be smart about how they allocate their training budget in order to overcome the obstacles of time and money. The majority of training budgets should be dedicated to cross training through conferences, workshops and hands-on training sessions.

Finally, managers need to take great care in who they recruit and ultimately hire. In order to successfully manage integrated communications, employees need to be self-motivated to continue learning and bettering themselves. Only then will self-directed, hands-on training be effective.

**Significance.** This research serves to fill gaps in the literature surrounding integrated communications. It expands on the current knowledge by applying it to real-world situations and determining which theories hold true. With regard to managing integrated communications, the research establishes a best practices model that practitioners can benefit from following, especially in terms of training.

**Limitations.** There were some disadvantages to participant observation that must be addressed. First, participant observation was time consuming. The restraints on my time limited my ability to get a holistic understanding of the day-to-day activities in the agency. However, I tried to remain focused on my research questions in order to get the necessary information in a short period of time. Second, it was difficult to document the data. It was hard to keep track of everything that was important and I had to largely rely on my memory.

There were also a few cons to conducting individual interviews. First, my lack of experience as a moderator was a disadvantage. It was difficult for me to develop strong questions, create a comfortable interview environment and build a good rapport with the interviewees. This may have limited the information I received. I compensated for my lack of experience with thorough preparation and practice. Second, individual interviews did not allow me to reach a very large sample size. This sample size may make it difficult for my conclusions to be applicable to the industry at large.

**Directions for future research.** Future research could look more closely at the topics of working remotely and flex scheduling. Practitioners have stated there is a need to determine how these options can be utilized successfully within an integrated communications agency. Additionally, future research can add to the literature by conducting research at large integrated marketing agencies and discovering if the same findings apply.