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## 1.0 Introduction

Internal marketing (IM) is a significant factor in utilising employees' skills, attitudes and behaviour to deliver service (Huang *et al*, 2020). The Authors have over 40 years' experience of teaching Marketing in a UK business school. They have raised the subject of IM throughout their teaching careers. Whilst teaching students and practitioners, IM has been universally accepted as an important topic, however very few marketers think an Internal Marketing Orientation (IMO) is adopted in their own organisations (Richardson, 2020). This provides a rationale for this study.

The focus in IM research has shifted from an external orientation to an internal orientation (Qui *et al*, 2022) however many studies ignore the Marketing Orientation (MO) platform on which an IMO is based. This conceptual paper, predicated on a hermeneutic literature review, is a reflexively critical analysis of pertinent literature (Smythe & Spence, 2012), providing insights into IMO's characteristics. The aims are first to improve understanding of IMO; it provides clear demarcation of IMO ownership apropos the Marketing and Human Resource Management (HRM) functions, whilst identifying the benefits of adopting such practices for employees and organizations (Qui *et al*, 2022). Second, it improves understanding of the limitations of IMO dimensions and frameworks (*ibid*). Finally, through better understanding of IMO's characteristics, it improves conceptualisation apropos Internal Communications (IC). This includes the identification of a core journal as part of the hermeneutic process.

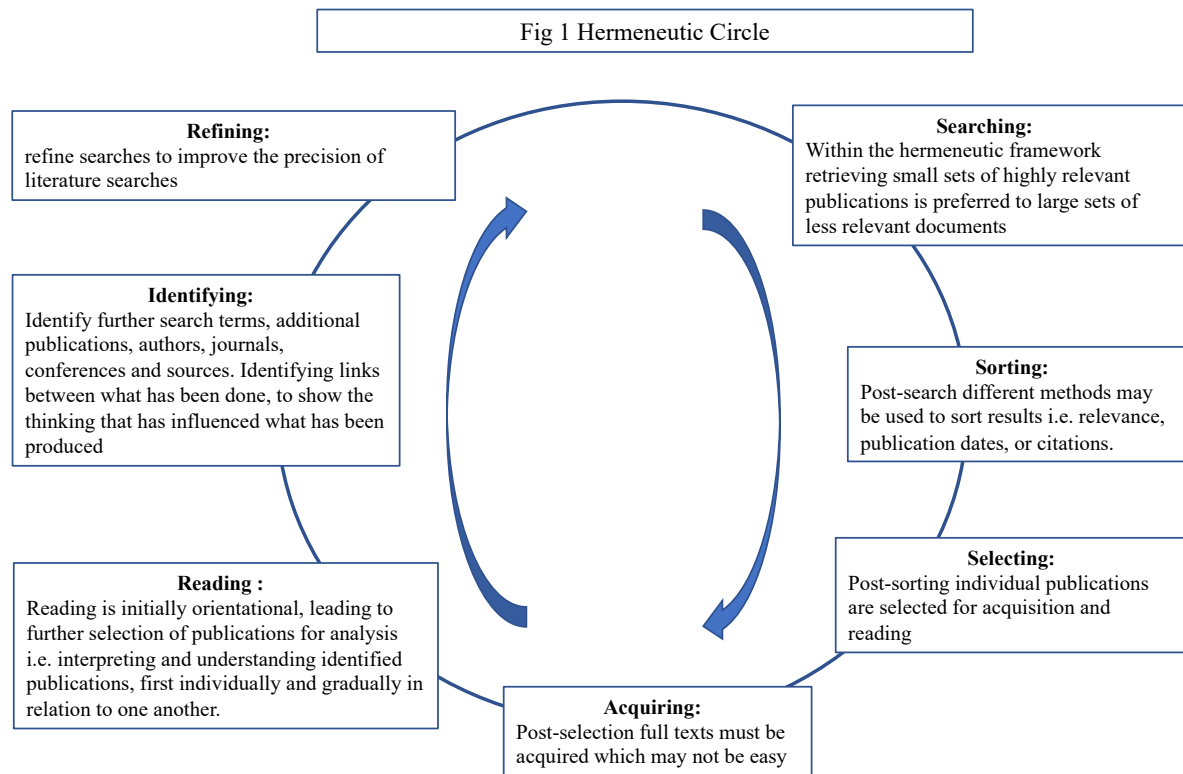
Academic fields will grow, maintain productivity or decline. Productivity may decline within particular fields (Bloom *et al*, 2020) as new ideas are increasingly hard to find. New variations may 'stave off' the decline (*ibid*). Qui *et al* (2022) identified IMO eras i.e. 'Emergence' (pre-2007), 'Establishment' (2007–2012), 'Explosion' (2013– 2016), and 'Ennui' (2017–onwards) with the 'heyday' between 2009 and 2015 (*ibid*). There is very little published on why specific fields decline, stagnate or grow. To date, no journals are dedicated to IMO. Beyond this, antecedents of decline or stagnation could include: -

1. the field is no longer of interest to academics and/or practitioners.
2. the field is of interest but has been subsumed into other domains.

As IMO developed, conceptual research steadily tailed off. This study supports those who offer conceptual papers (Huang, 2020; Qui *et al*, 2022) as there are still new, meaningful insights to be garnered. This paper addresses antecedents 1 and 2 apropos IMO.

## 2.0 Methodology

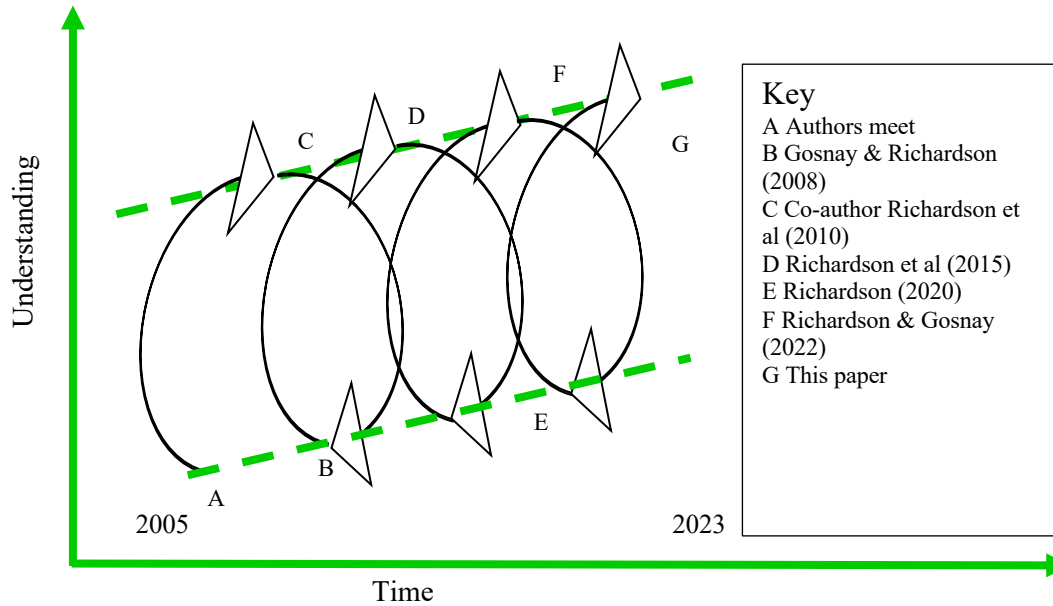
Hermeneutics philosophy, where Gadamer is seminal (Smythe & Spence, 2012), provides a theoretical foundation for developing understanding and meaning. It refers to the science or art of interpretation (*ibid*) where philosophical insights can powerfully call one into thinking, thus shaping the analysis and findings (van der Wath & van Wyk, 2020). A paper's understanding is never isolated rather it is interpreted in the context of other papers (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). Hermeneutic theory traditionally discussed the circular structure of understanding. In a hermeneutic circle (Fig 1) understanding the meaning and importance of individual texts depends on understanding the whole body of relevant literature which, in turn, develops through the understanding of individual texts (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014).



Source : adapted from Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014, p269

This paper draws on the 'Identifying' stage by identifying central terms, a core journal and seminal authors (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). Fig 1 implies a single iteration where the end ('Refine') and start ('Searching') points meet. However, in hermeneutic processes there is no final understanding of the relevant literature but constant re-interpretation. Reviews are better understood as continuing, open-ended processes where increased understanding of the topic and the research problem inform each other (*ibid*). Reading others' works raises one's own understanding (Smythe & Spence, 2012). The Authors' hermeneutic journey started in 2005 when they started to discuss each other's areas of interest in marketing (Fig 2).

Fig 2 Using a Hermeneutic helix to portray authors' interactions over time



The Hermeneutic Helix better reflects academic praxis. Cycles are shown equidistantly for graphical purposes. Cycle lengths will vary as will the learning within (and/or between) cycles and outputs will not be generated at regular intervals. Fig 2 does, however, illustrate that having completed the 7 stages (Fig 1), the Authors had improved understanding before commencing the next cycle. The nature of a hermeneutic review is that there are few rules to follow, rather a way to be attuned (Smythe & Spence, 2012). The ensuing abductive process (*ibid*) led to co-authored publications apropos marketing (B, C, F & G), communications (D) and IMO (E & F).

## 2.1 Identifying a core journal

With thousands of academic journals published annually, the hermeneutic tradition of identifying core journals is prudent. To evaluate IMO's role in all journals is beyond the scope of this paper. Academia has many examples of papers providing critique within a single database, journal, book or paper. Qui et al (2022) utilised 349 articles published since 1981 in a single database, restricted to 25 journals but excluding books, conference papers, theses and dissertations. This study aligns with those who have published marketing-related papers focusing on a single journal e.g. Academy of Marketing Science Review (Babin *et al*, 2021) and the Journal of Macromarketing (Jones & Shaw, 2006; Drenten & McManus, 2016). An objective herein is to establish whether IMO continues to be of interest within another field (antecedent 2). Seminal IMO researchers (Lings, 2004; Lings & Greenley, 2005; Gounaris, 2006, 2008) stressed the importance of the internal communications (IC) field. Hence, findings from the IMO literature are juxtaposed with papers deemed comparable (again hermeneutically) from a 'core' journal as per the 'Identifying' stage (Fig 1). Drawing on abduction (Fig 2), autoethnography and reflexivity the Authors 'identified' 'Corporate Communications: An International Journal' (CCIJ) as a respected, well-established, peer-reviewed journal wherein IC is a key theme. Naturally, other journals (including those herein) could also be deemed 'core'. To illustrate CCIJ's suitability, a search for "internal communications" intext, produced 233 publications between 1996 and 2023.

Only 2 CCIJ papers cite Gadamer (i.e. Dhir, 2006, 2007). Four allude to adopting hermeneutic processes (Olkkonen et al, 2000; Jaatinen & Lavikka, 2008; Wong & Danesh,

2017; Gellrich et al, 2020) whilst others include hermeneutic studies in their bibliographies (Michelson & Mouly, 2004; Hrasky & Smith, 2008; Costa et al, 2013; Alshorman & Shanahan, 2021; Han et al, 2020; Qian & Jian, 2020). This paper complements CCIJ studies influenced by hermeneutic approaches and promotes methodological plurality.

That the Authors are limited to outputs written in English, is a form of bias recognised in other studies (Huang *et al*, 2020, p58). International and intercultural differences will generate distinctive IMO characteristics (*ibid*). Articles published in other languages would have contributed to this paper and to the multitude of outputs (including the CCIJ) predominantly in the English language.

### 3.0 Literature Review

Kohli & Jaworski (1990)'s seminal work apropos developing an MO underpins building the dimensions of an effective IMO (Lings 2004; Lings & Greenley, 2005, 2009; Gounaris, 2006, 2008; Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2014, 2015; Ruizalba Robledo & Vallespín-Arán, 2014). Organisations should develop a robust IMO prior to pursuing an external MO (Piercy, 1995; Gounaris, 2009; Lings & Greenley, 2010). Boukis *et al* (2017) insisted service success is largely determined by front-line employees. The term 'front-line' is somewhat outdated. An internal customer may be a boundary spanning employee (BSE) i.e. someone who regularly interacts with external customers beyond the organisational boundary (Richardson, 2020; Richardson & Gosnay, 2022). An MO culture involves identifying and satisfying internal customers, including BSEs, prior to satisfying external value-seeking customers (Lings, 2004)

Fang *et al* (2014) suggest the term IMO was created when Lings (2004) and Lings & Greenley (2005) applied the MO concept to employer-employee exchanges, from a behavioural perspective. Employee commitment and retention must be considered and measured. Hence, the need to build effective relationship bridges (between managers and employees) **and** a culture (or set of behaviours) that underpins this. Furthermore, managers must subscribe to the notion of MO, placing the employee at the heart of their decisions, strategies and actions (Lings & Greenley, 2009). Boukis *et al* (2017, p691) advocate recognising IMO as a dynamic capability. This approach is a departure from the stereotypical instrumental, communications and "selling" perspective of IMO, rather, it is "a capability that has the potential to reconfigure the organization's internal stakeholders and align them with its brand values and promise" (*ibid*). If relationship bridges are built, then interaction, integration, communication and cross functional cooperation should follow.

Gounaris (2008) argued IMO is the 'internal analogy' of MO that is a key criterion for achieving success in the external marketplace. Gounaris (2006) distinguishes between IM and IMO which synthesises specific beliefs with marketing-like behaviours focusing on the needs and expectations of the employees (*ibid*). This assumes that the value taken by employees influences that (taken by) organisations' customers (Berry, 1991; George, 1990; Piercy, 1995; Gounaris, 2006). Although IMO and MO are separate and distinct, they are interrelated, reflecting a more contemporary integrated view of marketing philosophy (Gounaris *et al*, 2010). IMO adoption reflects developing three dynamic capabilities that allow companies to integrate, build and reconfigure internal competences apropos managing employees while addressing challenges coming from the internal and the external environments (Boukis *et al*, 2017). First, generating intelligence that facilitates understanding the needs and wants of the employees. Second, using communications channels so managers can communicate (to employees) organisational goals, expectations and policies, while at the same time allowing

managers to receive employees' feedback. Third, responding to this knowledge, say, through developing employment conditions that meet employees' needs (*ibid*). Henceforth, this Literature Review is structured to address the aforementioned antecedents.

### 3.1 The IMO field is no longer of interest

Regarding Antecedent 1, Table 1 illustrates the number of articles found in a range of widely used databases. Using a purposive approach, the selection of databases was curtailed when it became apparent that new results were not emerging i.e. the same pattern of results occurred.

Table 1 Search findings for different terms							
Term	Database						
	Ebsco	Emerald Insight	Google Scholar	Google	Jstor	WARC	Wiley
Internal Marketing	848	>5,000	54,300	1.46 million	949	9190	754
Internal Marketing Orientation	49	274	1,030	20,010	3	756	3
Marketing Orientation	596	>10,000	35,600	223,000	762	1878	534
Marketing	204,980	266,000	4.3 million	3.9 billion	459733	60055	294916
Databases accessed 18-09-22 & 20-01-23 using the terms in a single string with a fixed order.							

Table 1 provides a contemporary snapshot of 'searches' to improve understanding within a hermeneutic process. It neither represents a detailed meta-analysis nor a chronological study and conclusions cannot be drawn apropos growth or decline. Apropos chronology, Huang (2020) utilised two databases and a search engine, generating 249 IM results, peaking with circa 25 papers in 2015. Qui et al (2022, pp54-55) suggest their two recent eras (i.e. 2013 onwards) featured "an exponential growth with an average of 22.5 article published per year... (and) ...in the 'Explosion' period a plethora" of IM studies. Their hyperbole is problematic and contradicts the seminal study of Gounaris (2006) who suggested IMO literature was thin and sporadic.. When juxtaposing their findings with Marketing and/or MO in Table 1, it is hard to think of 22.5 or 25 articles per annum as explosive, exponential or a plethora. Even if a recent increase in academic interest exists (Boukis *et al*, 2014; Huang, 2020; Qui *et al*, 2022), IMO represents a niche area of study. The paucity of studies dedicated to IMO provide motivation for this paper.

Table 2 portrays studies focused upon the development of IMO, its dimensions, measurement, evolution and development. Ruizalba Robledo *et al* (2015) identify seminal authors (Lings, 2004; Lings & Greenley, 2005; Gounaris, 2006, 2008) who developed the IMO construct.

<b>Table 2 Studies illustrating the chronology of IMO</b>			
Author/Date	Study	Country	Sector
Lings (2004)*	IMO: Construct and Consequences		
Lings & Greenley (2005)*	Measuring IMO	UK	Retail
Gounaris (2006)*	IMO and its measurement	Greece	Hotel
Gounaris (2008)*	Notion of IMO and employee satisfaction: some preliminary evidence	Greece	Hotel
Tortosa-Edo (2009)	IMO and its influence on organisational performance	Spain	Hospital
Kaur et al (2009)	IMO in Indian Banking: an empirical analysis	India	Banking
Lings & Greenley (2009)	Impact of internal and external market orientations on firm performance	UK	Retail
Gounaris et al (2010)	IMO: a misconceived aspect of marketing theory	Greece	Financial Services
Lings & Greenley (2010)	IMO and market-oriented behaviours	UK	Retail
Kaur et al (2010)	Assessment of IMO in Jamu & Kashmir Bank through internal supplier's perspective	India	Banking
Tortosa-Edo et al (2010)	IMO and its influence on the satisfaction of contact personnel	Spain	Hospital
Sahi et al (2013)	Revisiting IMO: a note	India	Banking
Boukis et al (2014)	IMO and different firm types as key enablers of employee brand-supporting behaviour	Greece	Retail
Ruizalba Robledo et al (2014)	IMO: an empirical research in hotel sector	Spain	Hotels
Fang et al (2014)	IMO: market capabilities and learning orientation	Taiwan	Services
Robledo & Aran (2014)	Empirical analysis of the constituent factors of IMO at Spanish hotels	Spain	Hotels
Tortosa-Edo et al (2015)	Influence of IMO on external outcomes: the mediating role of employees' attitudes	Spain	Hospital
Gyepi-Garbrah & Asamoah (2015)	Towards a holistic IMO measurement scale		
Ruizalba Robledo et al (2015)	Analysis of corporate volunteering in IMO and its effect on job satisfaction	Spain	Hotels
Ruizalba Robledo et al (2016)	IMO and work-family balance in family business	Spain	Hotels
Boukis et al (2017).	IMO determinants of employee brand enactment.		Services
Huang et al (2020)	Applying Grey Relational Analysis to Evaluate Internal Marketing Practice	Taiwan, China	Hotels
Qiu et al (2022)	Internal Marketing: A Systematic Review		
Source: Adapted from Richardson & Gosnay (2022, p25); Seminal papers identified by *			

Table 2 supports Huang's (2019) study identifying services, specifically tourism and hospitality, as the most studied in the IM field. An IMO represents cultural and/or social values and beliefs which differ in various sectoral and national contexts. However, such values and beliefs do not necessarily translate across national boundaries (Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2014; Tortosa-Edo *et al*, 2015; Kaur *et al*, 2009), thus challenging the generalisability of results (Sahi *et al*, 2013).

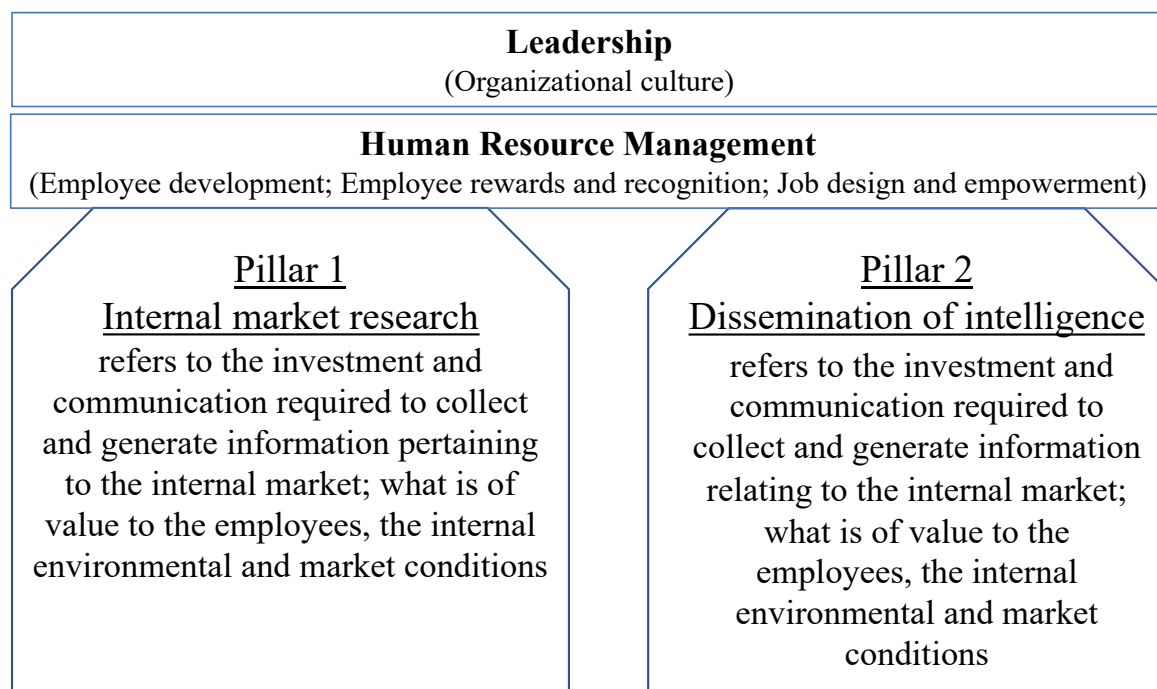
### 3.1.2 *IMO sub-dimensions*

Lings (2004) developed three IMO sub-dimensions reflecting broad sets of organisational behaviour when successfully implementing IM programmes. These 'behavioural pillars' (1 Internal market research; 2 Dissemination of intelligence; 3 Responsiveness) drew upon the MO literature and are seminal for the development of the IMO construct (Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2015). The IMO literature alludes to the boundary between marketing and HRM (Rafiq

& Ahmed, 1993), employee job satisfaction (Gounaris, 2006; Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2014), organisational culture (Gummeson, 1988), volunteering (Ruizalba Robledo *et al* , 2015), the company's learning orientation (Fang *et al*, 2014) and work-life balance (Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2016). A critique is that the ownership of pillars 1 and 2 will normally reside within the marketing department. Whereas pillar 3 is predominantly the purview of the Human Resources (HR) department. There has been considerable debate apropos whether IM is based in HR, Marketing or a combination of both functions (Huang, 2020).

Many authors (Sahi *et al*, 2013; Kaur *et al*, 2009; Tortosa-Edo *et al*, 2015) have directed their readers to Lings (2004) whilst others use the model to underpin their own studies. Huang *et al* (2020) incorporated three dimensions and 18 sub-dimensions. Qui et al (2022, p56) identified "six overarching dimensions: (1) Internal Market Analytics; (2) Internal Communication; (3) Employee Development; (4) Employee Rewards and Recognition; (5) Job Design and Empowerment; (6) Leadership and Organizational Culture". Clearly Dimensions 1 and 2 reflect Ling's Pillars 1 and 2. Three dimensions (3, 4 and 5) are overtly under the auspices of Lings 'Responsiveness' pillar. Apropos dimension 6, it is the role of 'leaders' to establish an appropriate organizational culture. Campaigns without senior level support experience a greater degree of difficulty in terms of user acceptance (Huang, 2020). IM has featured in marketing and HRM debates as it has to "embed the strategy of the overall organizational operation" (*ibid*, p166). Hence, Leadership and HRM can be conflated with Lings work to produce a new framework for IMO (Fig 3).

**Fig 3 The Dimensions of Internal Market Orientation (IMO)**



[Source- adapted from Lings (2004) and Qui et al (2022, p56)]

The extra dimensions in both Huang et al (2020) and Qui et al (2022) 'fit' within Fig 3 which encourages marketers to take a holistic view of the organisation. Businesses where the (marketing) pillars support Leadership and HRM are more likely to achieve competitive advantage. Marketers face fast-changing, turbulent market conditions. The more turbulent the



environment, the more the organisation's IMO should drive internal collaboration. The 'pillars' and supported activities are not isolated. HR, crucially for marketers, recruit, train, motivate and reward the marketing and/or sales teams. However, marketers should be recognised as the specialists apropos communication and market research. In many workplaces, employees need to understand industry jargon and subtle differences in organizational culture to communicate effectively and efficiently (Huang, 2020). There is a need for fluency in communication between managers and employees (*ibid*). The purpose of pillars 1 and 2 are to communicate the organisations' vision, objectives and strategies to employees **and** to report their needs apropos requirements from managers (Lings, 2004). The organisational culture must support this (Lings & Greenley, 2005, 2010; Gounaris, 2008; Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2014) along with effective IC (both horizontally and vertically).

Later works developed the IMO dimensions and measured levels of adoption in various contexts (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Gounaris, 2006; Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2014). Studies (Table 2) also investigated the influences of IMO against other criteria such as market capabilities and learning orientation (Fang *et al*, 2014), external outcomes (Tortosa-Edo *et al*, 2015) and work-family balance in family businesses (Ruizalba Robledo & Vallespín-Arán, 2014; Ruizalba Robledo *et al*, 2016).

Whilst Fig 3 provides clear demarcation, it is simplistic and some advocate more sub-components as many constructs, such as satisfaction, are multifaceted (Gounaris, 2006). Chen *et al* (2021, p1216) suggest the various dimensions of IM "can be categorised into four major groups including vision, communication, reward system and training". They suggest dimensions should include "value of needs, authorised autonomy, internal communication and rewards" (*ibid*, p1223). Clearly these align with Fig 3 where vision, values and autonomy are the responsibility of the leadership. IMO is an important aspect of employees' work environment; it reflects the firm's emphasis on creating value for internal stakeholders (Boukis *et al*, 2017). Value, however, cannot be given to employees, it can only be taken by them. Internal value only resides in the minds of those seeking it. IM success is based on the employee's understanding and internalization, which is affected by how individuals comprehend things (Huang *et al*, 2020). Internal market research can assist the manager to comprehend employee needs and demands (*ibid*).

Lings & Greenley (2005) developed Lings (2004) work by including formal and informal information generation, resulting in five extra behavioural components. They are often cited by authors (Tortosa-Edo *et al*, 2015; Kaur *et al*, 2009; Sahi, 2013) apropos the development and validation of their IMO measurement scale. Gounaris (2006) developed an instrument for assessing an organisation's IMO adoption predicated on it being viewed as a more multifaceted, hierarchical construct comprising three major and ten sub-dimensions (*ibid*). Tortosa-Edo *et al* (2015) applied the Gounaris' (2006, 2008) expanded construct to represent IMO. Similarly, Ruizalba Robledo *et al* (2014) offered three IMO behavioural constructs where the first and third form another five 'first-order constructs'. These studies do not address the internal ownership issue. Furthermore, the dimensions they offer can be incorporated into the approach portrayed in Fig 3.

### 3.1.3 *IMO segmentation*

A critique of the behavioural pillars is employees are deemed homogenous when they are likely to be heterogenous and may need segmenting. Lings (2004) suggests IM segmentation represents a dimension of the organisation's ability to collect intelligence regarding the employees' market. However, Gounaris (2006, p436) insists internal intelligence is a "pre-

condition for segmentation that follows....the same is true for the dimension of developing strategies for specific segments". Huang (2020) identifies five groups namely 'Stakeholders', 'CEO', 'Manager', 'Employees' and 'Customers'. They do not differentiate between BSEs and other internal customers. However, what is communicated to BSEs is not necessarily the same as that to the back-office staff. Internal staff are not homogenous. (Huang *et al*, 2020). More experienced workers will place higher demands for IMO research apropos exploring and understand their needs (*ibid*). Furthermore, 'Stakeholders' and 'Customers' normally reside in the 'micro-environment' (Richardson, 2020) whereas internal customers reside in the 'internal' environment (*ibid*). Herein, only those in the internal environment should be considered for IMO segmentation purposes including, internal line managers, team peers, project-to-peer (Lemon & Towery, 2021). Value should be created for all internal staff (e.g. senior executives, back-office staff, middle-level managers) (Qui *et al*, 2022). There is consensus in the IMO literature that 'external' success is partially due to having motivated, satisfied staff, particularly BSEs (Lings & Greenley, 2009; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991).

### **3.2 The IMO field has been subsumed into other domains specifically IC**

Apropos Antecedent 2, IMO encompasses various managerial actions aiming to generate value for employees and improve their performance (Lings and Greenley, 2010; Boukis *et al*, 2017). The dynamic nature of generating, disseminating and responding to information about employees' wants and needs, inherent in IMO, may allow the values of the firm and those of the employee to converge by developing a common understanding of the other's value position (Boukis *et al*, 2017).

#### **3.1 Internal Communication (IC)**

Different dimensions were examined in the IMO literature (see Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2014). Huang (2020) found the most commonly used dimension was IC and that several authors recognised that "managers require strong communication to deliver the organizations vision ...(and) ... good communication can assist teams to work better and improve their relationships" (*ibid*, p171). IMO adoption entails the IC element "necessary to develop brand knowledge among the company's employees" (Boukis *et al*, 2017, p692). There is some consensus that "managers require strong communication to deliver the organization's vision (Huang *et al*, 2020, p57). Excellent communication can assist teams to work better and improve their relationships (Huang *et al*, 2020)

The CCIJ literature aligns with IMO studies in recognising IC as the strategic management of interactions and relationships between internal stakeholders across interrelated communication dimensions and corporate communications (Lemon & Towery, 2021). It is strategic and contributes to a more complex corporate communication mix (Oltarzhevskiy, 2019) ranging from social interaction through messages (Huang, 2020) to informal office exchanges to formal communication between employees and senior management (Lemon & Towery, 2021). IC facilitates workplace interactions, organizational identification, group membership, improved organizational change, workplace efficiencies and operational success (*ibid*). It captures the practices through which firms build relationships between internal stakeholders and disseminate info across organizational echelons (Park & Tran, 2018). IC disseminates tacit and explicit knowledge across the organization (Lings & Greenley, 2005), forming effective vertical and horizontal interpersonal relationships (Smith & O'Sullivan, 2012), inter-functional integration, cooperation mechanisms (Conduit & Mavondo, 2001), and shared vision (Chow *et al*, 2015), composing a comprehensive dimension of intelligence exchange and network interactions (Qui *et al*, 2022). An IMO should not be the remit of, or focused on, one department but be considered an organization-wide orientation (Qui *et al*,

2022, p60). The Authors agree (to an extent) however marketers tend to be the better communicators and researchers of customer attitudes. Hence when striving to adopt an IMO, Marketers should utilise their IC skills first and foremost.

Table 3 Recent CCIJ studies that continue or develop the IMO literature		
Author (s)	Topic	Comment
Andersson (2019)	Employees as ambassadors: embracing new role expectations and coping with identity-tensions	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups of employees of seven organizations in Swedish public and private sectors
Gode <i>et al</i> (2020)	Employee engagement in generating ideas on internal social media	online observations, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, archival material, with employees and managers (in a large, knowledge-intensive Danish organization-7,000 employees worldwide)
Kim & Scott (2019)	Change communication and the use of anonymous social media at work- Implications for employee engagement	An online survey of Microsoft management and employees (US)
Oltarzhevskiy (2019)	Typology of contemporary corporate communication channels	Conceptual paper
Ajayi & Mmutle (2021)	Corporate reputation through strategic communication of CSR	a qualitative content analysis using the directed approach on the textual CSR communication materials of ten reputable organisations in South Africa
Lee & Kim (2021)	Enhancing employee advocacy on social media	online survey was conducted with 419 full-time employees in the USA from various industry sectors
Lemon & Towery (2021)	The case for internal communication: an investigation into consortia forming	In-depth case study - interviews and focus groups- a multi-site government contractor Private sector LLC USA
MacNamarra (2020)	Corporate listening: unlocking insights from VOC, VOE and VOS for mutual benefits	participatory action research interviews, observation, content analysis of documents, within a Dutch multinational corporation operating in Europe, Canada and Australia,
Li & Lee (2021)	Information-seeking strategy and likelihood of workplace health	An online survey with 409 full-time employees in large sized companies from a diverse range of USA industry sectors.
Ramjaun (2021)	Corporate brand management in a charity context: the internal communications challenge.	Charities (UK)
Vercic <i>et al</i> (2021)	Measuring internal communication satisfaction:	507 employees of a large Croatian subsidiary of a multinational bank
Source: articles published between 2019 and 2021 in Corporate Communications: An International Journal		

Table 3 is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to be a meta-analysis, rather it reflects a contemporary snapshot of IMO-related topics in CCIJ. The Authors' knowledge of IMO components was contrasted with the titles of every CCIJ article published between 2019 and 2021. More CCIJ papers may have been identified by searching within the texts rather than only the titles. The topics therein fall into two areas; first, employee centric (employees as ambassadors, employee engagement, employee advocacy, employee consortia forming, employee information seeking strategy); second, company-centric (HRM, corporate listening, corporate communication channels, corporate brand management, change communication, measuring communication satisfaction, corporate reputation). Whilst recognising degrees of overlap in this demarcation, it aligns with findings regarding employee engagement where two research streams were identified, namely the instrumental, managerial approach and the constitutive, co-worker approach (Gode *et al*, 2020). The largely dominant managerial perspective mainly focuses on managers' role in engaging employees who are seen as instruments to achieve organizational success (*ibid*).

#### 4.0 Discussion

#### 4.1 *Matters deemed employee-centric in the CCIJ literature*

Employee engagement is an antecedent of organizational success embracing productivity, effectiveness, innovation, competitiveness and growth (Gode *et al*, 2020). Strategies to encourage employees to express their voice can engender positive attitudes overall (Kim & Scott, 2019). Communications scholars have long argued that good practices with employees can be instrumental for corporate well-being (Oltarzhevskiy, 2019), increasing the quality of relationships, enhancing employees' likelihood of sharing positive information about their organization (Lee & Kim, 2021).

##### 4.1.1 *Voice of Employee (VOE)*

Employees receive implicit and explicit organisational messages through their working conditions, treatment from supervisors (and co-workers) and customer feedback. All of these messages communicate different elements (Boukis *et al*, 2017). In the CCIJ literature, Employee voice (VOE) alludes to providing workers with the means to communicate with management and have meaningful input into decisions. Forms of VOE include official channels i.e. unions, staff satisfaction surveys, meetings, staff conferences, intranets, "suggestion box" submissions, grievances and social media comments (Macnamarra, 2020).

VOE is a crucial organizational asset across interdisciplinary studies i.e. corporate management, business studies (Lee & Kim, 2021) and Human Resources (MacNamarra, 2020). Organizations should maintain positive relationships with various stakeholders, employees and customers. Furthermore, the voice of customers (VOC) and other stakeholders (VOS) are complementary key CC components (*ibid*). However, none of these create value without active listening. In fact,

"expression of voice without appropriate consideration and response can lead to negative effects such as criticism, disengagement, decreased productivity, and loss of customers and employees" (Macnamarra, 2020, p379).

Employee disengagement may lower organizational performance and even threaten (organizational) survival (Gode *et al*, 2020). Anonymous forms of VOE exist i.e. hotlines, helplines, whistleblowing and organizational surveys (Kim & Scott, 2019). VOE anonymity has advantages i.e. supporting free speech, protecting message sources, obtaining sensitive information, fostering risk-taking and innovation at work (*ibid*). Increasingly VOC, VOE and VOS are deemed interconnected, not discrete, areas of communication (Macnamarra, 2020).

##### 4.1.2 *Brand Ambassadors*

Managers who communicate organization values well, make organizational brands easier to identify with and more transparent for employees (Boukis *et al*, 2017, p693). An IMO is integral to ensuring employees "understand and 'buy into' the promises that the firm makes to its customers, positioning IMO as a key enabler of internal branding programs" (Boukis *et al*, 2017, p698). Employees as brand advocates (Ramjaun, 2021), ambassadors (Andersson, 2019) or informal spokespersons engaging in communicative actions have been well documented in communication literature (Lee & Kim, 2021). As brands become increasingly hard to control, managers should "empower" employees to take responsibility for the brand. Employees who understand the brand can create relevant value for other stakeholders (Andersson, 2019). As ambassadors, employees internalize the organizational/brand identity (and values) and deliver them as part of their own identity in interactions with stakeholders (*ibid*).

Employees' personal messages, deemed credible by external publics, can create competitive advantages (Lee & Kim, 2021). Increasingly, employees (as 'active communicators') can create or destroy value (Andersson, 2019). This develops early IMO conceptualisations where employees are merely mechanistically involved in value creating activities (Gummesson, 1987). Value creation has moved from the factory to communication processes (Andersson, 2019) and increasingly employees are considered important communicators, encouraged to think of themselves as ambassadors (*ibid*). Their words may greatly influence organization-to-public relations and corporate reputation (Lee & Kim, 2021). Employees (who feel trusted, committed and satisfied with their company) may distribute favourable messages voluntarily whilst engendering self-enhancement, altruism or enjoyment resulting from positive, pleasant and satisfying experiences (*ibid*).

#### 4.2 *Matters deemed company-centric in the CCIJ literature*

##### 4.2.1 *Corporate Communication (CC)*

CC is the management function for overseeing and coordinating internal and external communications between organizations, customers and other constituencies (Oltarzhevskiy, 2019). In CC, all consciously used forms of communication should be harmonized to create a favourable basis for inter-group relationships and informational flows necessary for daily operations. Correctly formed CC provides a (more) symmetrical constructive dialogue externally and internally, building long-term relationships, stable market positions and more efficient business development (*ibid*).

##### 4.2.2 *Internal Communication (IC)*

CCIJ scholars develop the IMO literature's recognition of the need for effective IC. Vercic *et al* (2021) refer to the increasingly significant internal (i.e. intraorganizational) communication and the need to maintain employer-employees IC systems. Furthermore, employee communications begin prior to joining and continue after leaving (*ibid*). IC is a separate aspect of engagement and a key factor influencing employee engagement (Gode *et al*, 2020). IC activities can be conducted horizontally, downward or upward and are undertaken by all organizational members (Vercic *et al*, 2021). Effective IC can influence employee morale (improving organizational culture), communication climate, relationships with publics, quality, revenues (Kim & Scott, 2019), corporate reputation, customer satisfaction and employee commitment (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021).

The IMO literature advocates measuring internal customers' satisfaction. CCIJ studies concur advocating internal communication satisfaction (ICS) measurement of employees' satisfaction with organisational communications. ICS positively relates to employee engagement, perceived organizational support, employer attractiveness, higher (employee and organizational) productivity, organizational effectiveness and job satisfaction (Vercic *et al*, 2021) with increased employee engagement (Macnamarra, 2020).

##### 4.2.3 *Communications channels*

The IMO literature largely ignores the issue of communications channels. Clearly BSEs will benefit from the effective use of such channels which (the IMO and CCIJ literature insist), includes internal audiences. 'Insiders' channels e.g. intranets, internal corporate journals or internal social media (ISM) (Gode *et al*, 2020) are specifically created for internal stakeholder communications. They (advantageously) can be used at the company's discretion, asynchronously, without costly media services (Oltarzhevskiy, 2019).

##### 4.2.4 *Internal Corporate branding*

IC is crucial within internal corporate branding initiatives. Ramjaun (2021) expands the IMO sectoral contexts (Table 2) by including charities, for whom internal branding is as important, as the external role (*ibid*). In the IMO literature (Huang & Rundle-Thiele, 2014), most branding studies favoured insights from senior managers (Ramjaun, 2021). Consumers and employees may differ (apropos expectations, interests and needs) and most CCIJ studies focus on external stakeholders (Lee & Kim, 2021).

#### 4.2.5 IC and change management

Successful IC practices are imperative during major organizational change as they inform employees of forthcoming changes and what to expect; this reduces anxiety and uncertainty in unsettling times (Lemon & Towery, 2021). Bottom-up communication benefits employees (and organizations) and may be essential apropos crisis management (*ibid*) and/or change communication (Kim & Scott, 2019). Managers must ensure that IC systems are effective and efficient (Vercic *et al*, 2021). In crises, they need fluid decision-making structures using expertise and experience as sources of knowledge rather than the organization's hierarchy; such knowledge may come from the 'bottom up', informing management (Lemon & Towery, 2021). During 'change', organisational communications should create transparency and understanding, predicated on audience preferences for channels and content (*ibid*). 'Active listening' produces benefits for organizations and stakeholders e.g. positive ICS outcomes and improved organizational profitability (Macnamarra, 2020). Dialogues should occur among all organizational members apropos understanding strategies and creating engagement (Gode *et al*, 2020). Employees can contribute to ideation, creativity, innovation and knowledge management. However, employee ideation and participation are often low because of lack of feedback or transparency (*ibid*). Most organizations dedicate insufficient resources to understanding employee preferences (Lemon & Towery, 2021).

Managing change communication can be challenging especially when frequent adaptation is required to meet varying internal and external demands (Li & Lee, 2021). Change implementers should consult stakeholders (Kim & Scott, 2019) within ICS. However, some organizations struggle to communicate change in a timely and strategic manner (*ibid*). Employees identifying with the organizational culture tend to believe, support and advocate change (Lemon & Towery, 2021). Those experiencing ambiguity and uncertainty may exhibit strong desires for information to aid decision-making (Li & Lee, 2021), expecting mutuality (and reciprocity) amongst peers and managers alike. Indeed, employee participation in decision-making can increase acceptance and openness toward change (Kim & Scott, 2019). They become valuable internal innovation sources, engaging in developing innovative ideas (Gode *et al*, 2020).

#### 4.2.5 IC and trust

Improved trust is a benefit of IMO adoption (Varey, 1994; Fang *et al*, 2012; Tortosa-Edo *et al*, 2015). The CCIJ literature develops this implying perceived trustworthiness is vital before, during and after organizational change (Kim & Scott, 2019). Uncertainty during organizational change and feelings of lack of control could engender anxiety, stress and lower performance (*ibid*). Trusted supervisors increase employees' information-seeking (Li & Lee, 2021). Trusting employees are satisfied with (and committed to) their company taking better care of their organization's success and external reputation (Lee & Kim, 2021). However, often the perceptions surrounding IC in the midst of such change were negative (Lemon & Towery, 2021). Clearly, poorly executed IC engenders negative sentiments (around IC) resulting from inadequate employee-centric communication. Furthermore, the dissemination of broad, simple information may not be meaningful (*ibid*). Employees may

'test the water' through anonymous channels if their concerns are not addressed by management (Kim & Scott, 2019). When workplace freedom of speech is missing, employees are less likely to view their organization as participative. Effective IC can influence employee trust, and morale (*ibid*).

#### 4.3 HRM

The CCIJ literature provides continuity apropos employee engagement (Gode *et al*, 2020), organisational climate (Li & Lee, 2020) and culture (Lemon & Towery, 2021). Related topics include employee advocacy (Lee & Kim, 2021), CSR communication strategies, corporate reputation (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021) and corporate listening (Macnammara, 2020). Employees in transparent cultures are more likely to share information with colleagues and supervisors (*ibid*). CSR communication strategies recognise that distinct organisational parts (i.e. stakeholders, customers, employees, regulatory bodies) combine to form a complex whole (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021). The IC process, shared with employees, creates meaning constructing organizational cultures (Lemon & Towery, 2021) and climates (Li & Lee, 2020) featuring shared employee perceptions (of procedures, practices and policies) and expected (supported) workplace behaviours. Supportive learning environments motivate employees to adopt information-seeking behaviour (Li & Lee, 2021). Feedback-seeking behaviour helps employees to manage uncertainty and solve problems (*ibid*). These demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between CC and HRM within an IMO.

#### 5.0 Conclusions

When addressing antecedent 1, there is still sustained interest (even if smaller than Marketing and MO) in IM and IMO. The interest in the technical constructs (i.e. MO and IMO) is less than the concepts. It is fair to describe it as a niche area. Considering the potentially wide-scale impact of poor IMO implementation, the paucity of studies seems counter-intuitive. Indeed, IMO research should be expanded to encompass a far broader range of "states and qualities to benefit both employees and marketing managers" (Huang *et al*, 2020, p57.. As discussed, no IM-related journal exists. This paper aligns with Boukis *et al* (2017, p699) who see IMO as an inside-out dynamic organisational capability, reflecting the ability to modify service delivery by reconfiguring internal resources (i.e. employees). This contrasts directly with previous studies, which largely saw IMO as a set of normative marketing activities with an internal focus. We however see IMO as more than this. Like MO it is an orientation, a mindset, a philosophy that should permeate the whole organisation. IMO adoption has been found to have benefitted many organisational aspects such as employee satisfaction (Chen *et al*, 2021), internal branding (Boukis *et al*, 2017)

Apropos antecedent 2, there is a wealth of IMO-related material available in the CCIJ and (the Authors suspect) in other journals and databases. Some fields may cease to be of interest and suffer atrophy. The IM baton has indeed been taken up by scholars in the communications field in what the Authors consider (within the hermeneutic process) a core journal. The communications papers (drawn from the years 2019-2022) capture a contemporary feel apropos 'antecedent 2'. This is not a meta-analysis of recent CCIJ papers, rather a hermeneutic approach to improve understanding. We do not imply that CCIJ authors have previous knowledge of IMO even though several studies therein clearly overlap, underpin and/or refine the findings in the IM/IMO literature. These fall into the broad categories, namely employee-centric (e.g. VOE, Brand Ambassadors) and company-centric (e.g. corporate communications featuring IC, channels, internal branding, change management and CSR). This paper establishes that IMO and the CC field are complementary rather than competing fields. IMO continues to be a nascent field within social sciences,

whereas CC is well-established. Hence, having a better understanding of IMO can only improve conceptualisation in (IM-related) related CC studies.

The paper posits the notion that the full resources of the organisation should be channeled to empower and enable BSEs to create the maximum value for the external customers. This resonates with current thinking regarding value creation in that it can be created (by BSEs) and taken (by external customers) but not given.

## **6.0 Further Research**

Too many IMO studies focus upon ‘managers’ or one level of employee. Future studies could include a better cross section of employees going beyond senior managers, including BSEs. More understanding is needed apropos how an IMO should adapt to organization's nature

Lings & Greenley (2005) insist different ‘sectors’ have unique characteristics and, therefore, results are not generalizable across all service-based environments. Furthermore, manufacturing is only studied infrequently (Qui et al, 2022). Many IMO studies' results are not generalisable as the national contexts therein may exert influence. IMO cannot be truly understood without being related to actual organisations or persons involved (Ahmed *et al*, 2003). Therefore, further studies with national, sectoral and more in-depth organisational perspectives, may provide insights to this field.



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