Investigating the phenomenon of silence and voice at ICL meetings and the remedial Actions.

An Action Research Inquiry

'Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.'

by

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Abbreviations

ICL   I Chose Life

IPA   Interaction Process Analysis

HR   Human Resource

LMX   Leader Member Exchange

SMT   Senior Management Team

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ABSTRACT

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This investigation examines why junior staff remain silent in senior management team meetings. The results show that decision making by the leadership is not all inclusive since junior staff were not involved. Resolutions on far reaching work place based problems was the preserve of a few as the study found. Powered by a strong hierarchical structure and an African traditional manifest by power distance Ghosh (2011), the staff felt it was futile to raise concerns. This study aims to create an understanding of the phenomenon of silence by applying theoretical frameworks identified in five thematic areas. These are voicing and silence, conversations, facilitation of meetings, relational processes and an aspect of the African culture. Each is seen to have a bearing on silence in the context of meetings. The analysis help develop conceptual frameworks with the outcomes leading to workable recommendations on corrective actions.

The investigative data was obtained at six senior management team meetings at a designated site. Methods used for data collection included video recording, field observations, administration of a questionnaire through interviews, journaling and field testing. The data was transcribed and codes assigned to contextualize meaning and for analysis for sense making later justified by triangulation. Additional data was obtained to give impetus highlighting broader characteristics of the organization under study. Supplementary documents were evaluated in relation to primary data to offer greater understanding and remove rhetoric. Additionally informal engagements helped strengthen findings showing what was peculiar to warrant further attention.

As posited by Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), organizations is a community of people where talk thrives. The lessons ICL needed to learn were a need to train junior staff on senior management meeting preparedness including development and implementation of structures that help manage meetings. Well applied, this should resolve dysfunctional practices such as misuse of power, lack of focus, a climate of fear and lack of inclusivity and involvement. How silence affects productivity is out of scope and a subject of future investigation. Conversations is highlighted as the new frontier for organisation growth and development moving away from dependency on strategic planning, process and systems development and human resource management. This study contributes new knowledge to theory and practice and also helps scrutinize known models and concepts such as Leader Member Exchange that was found to be inordinate to and at variance with field findings at ICL.

List of tables and figures.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.

The many years' experience on poor management of talk in meetings and how it impedes decision making, strategy development and implementation at the work place motivated this study. This was greatly inspired by my association with I Choose Life (ICL), the study site and earlier Carolina for Kibera (CFK) that both exhibited failure. In these organisations, junior staff did not speak up even when it was expected that they should. The voice of seniors was superseding while that of junior staff was muted. In my experience, 90% of the strategic plans failed. This was because the input of junior staff was not sought even where they are the implementers. The teams were not coalesced around a common vision and requisite buy-in was lacking. For illustration, an example of young people not speaking up during a round table meeting of senior management was when ICL was developing a 2 year resource mobilization strategy. They did not offer an opinion or make a contribution. They felt their input was not valued despite being required to execute the strategy upon its completion. It was therefore necessary to have a shared vision, concerted effort and also be intentional in having a joint coalition to problem solving.

These organisations had failures, a result of wrong actions brought about by defective decisions. The strategy and policy documents were moribund giving my research impetus as it showed the aspect of misalignment and the import of not speaking up resulting to under performance. Junior staff not involved in formulating strategy eroded their commitment as it reduced transparency and the trust required for teams to work effectively. Originally, I wanted to examine talk between departments, identifying silos as an impediment to a cross functional workflow but after my time at CFK and ICL, I noticed a different talk problem where junior staff did not contribute in these meetings leading to the managerial consequence mentioned above. This helped contextualize the practice problem.

This research is undertaken with ICL, an NGO where I worked as an Academic Consultant where I was tasked with reinforcing best management practices. Specific tasks included developing a regional expansion plan, resource mobilization and the five year strategic plan. I was also required to lead engagements with third party service providers. I therefore attended all senior management team meetings and interrelated with staff at all levels. Previously I had served in various capacities in three other organisations in two sectors across three countries working with people to get results. In these roles, I took an interest in understanding work place problems, the decision making process, their

execution and eventual outcomes based on the conversations held. I understood meetings to be places that inspire, reviews performance and provides a platform to share information through:

> "Careful analysis, proper planning and judicious selection in alternative problem solving formats as preliminary safeguards to success" according to Seibold (1979).

I understood this to mean that meetings make staff aware of their purpose and their actions and how those actions affect the greater good and objectives of the organization.

The call to study meetings as a social phenomenon is very recent according to (Rogelberg *et al*, 2006) cited in Allen & Rogelberg (2013). Many more areas of inquiry still exist. This research draws from a general area of study to a specific topic of inquiry. It covers voice, silence and the facilitation of meetings at ICL. The study illuminates the essence of conversations as a tool to understanding and solving the work place based problems better than the previous concepts that are mentioned above. The interrogation of the research problem is buttressed by three research questions centered on social interactions in meetings. These are: Why task based meetings which have little social emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk? When does managerial openness and a two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African led organization? And, how can an African styled organisation create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff? These questions later evolved to acquire deeper knowledge on the cause and effect of the intricacies inherent in the phenomenon thereby advancing a new thought process.

The study, designed to capture the holistic essence of talk limits the focus to social and operational factors relating to speaking up at official meetings. It avoids aspects that are either not directly relevant or too problematic to quantify given the time limitations. Being a qualitative research, it looks at factors that influence the effectiveness of meetings and the motivation to voice. As a result, aspects such as the setting of agendas is examined. This included examining what is to be discussed and why, the preparation required and whether a bicameral approach to consultation on what are the important issues should be considered. A question that arose was for instance was whether items listed in the agenda was a true reflection of what the meeting participants felt was important. Although an agenda setting is focal in arriving at a unified version of "reality", it was important to establish if it embraces concerns, ideas and suggestions from all participants. The corrective actions discussed in the analysis chapter lists a raft of measures intended to improve the situation. They include a new meeting

management process, establishment of an Ombudsman, engagement of a tempered radical and a new meetings assessment process.

There were peculiar findings that threw the study into new dimensions serving as a catalyst to explore different avenues to further deepen understanding. For example senior staff succumbed to silence. Staff also lacked capacity to engage at senior management meetings. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was adjudged to sabotage his best intentions by not changing his methods giving further stimulus to the research problem. Whereas the thesis discusses literature, methodology, findings and analysis, it covers interpretations, the lessons needing learning by ICL and recommendations for action followed by a conclusion, reflections on learnings and the change required. It also analyzes the CEO's perspective on issues found to help counter primary data and balance the arguments including the exploration of other sources of data to remove rhetoric. The findings of the field study that took 6 months were triangulated to substantiate claims. Methods like focus groups and survey were however disregarded due to the sensitivity of the study and need for confidentiality.

Why this topic was important

This is an action research study aimed at contributing to organizational change anchored on existing literature and equated to operational and management practices at ICL. In order to understand the phenomenon of silence, issues that limit active voicing by all staff are scrutinized. Like other organizations, ICL need to review and evaluate their principles on "talk" along other internal structures that impact organizational performance. My 20 years' as a practitioner has persuaded me that the problem is entrenched and that conversations are one way. In my work, I came to the realization that official meetings were less successful and did not achieve much largely due to exclusion in decision making. Staff across tiers were not involved.

The previous studies that I reviewed for this project had a restricted outlook - focusing on one aspect of conversation or the other. This paper consolidates several issues within 5 thematic areas that affect voice. It provides a broad and holistic view of the subject with multi-faceted dimensions of arguments. As a result, the findings are significantly distinctive from past studies. In examining different aspects, the research topic is formulated to interrogate why junior staff stay silent at meetings. There was emphasis on the African tradition in which most companies in Kenya are organized making this aspect significant.

How change of employment shaped the inquiry

In the organizations that I worked, fear of speaking up at senior management meetings was prevalent. Over the duration of my study, I worked in 3 organizations as General Manager at both Equity Bank Rwanda and Consolidated Bank and as Executive Director at Carolina for Kibera (CFK) providing me a vintage point to see what happens at the Executive Management meetings and the Board. At ICL where the study is undertaken, I interacted with staff and the CEO as a Consultant but in their natural work environment giving me a different dimension. In all the organizations, staff implicitly supported the status quo by not challenging the CEO for fear of retribution. Although Barclays had a policy for receiving feedback during performance appraisals, junior staff were still restrained. This problem was equally profound at a Pan-African organization as it was in a State Corporation, a Regional Bank in Rwanda and a Non-Governmental organization in an informal settlement. The organizations exhibited a "tell" conduct that pigeonholed staff to "group think" as the findings will show.

My initial thinking was that the unquestioning respect for those in authority was perpetuated by age differences as shown by Morrison and Millekin (2000). This is later discounted. The more attributable factors were culture and power distance. Complications arose when silence was interpreted differently in these organizations. At Equity Bank for example, it signified "agreeing" according to the CEO whereas at Consolidated Bank and CFK it communicated subtle resistance and indecision. Argyris (1977) comes under scrutiny for stating that when staff are silent, it means they are not opposing a proposition. He saw silence as affirmation and not dissent or dissatisfaction as was found in the field.

How being a Director and consultant influenced the study

My last two roles influenced the inquiry in a significant way. As a consultant at ICL, I found that staff were good listeners and valued empathy from the seniors. They exhibited a genuine desire to resolve problems and were enthusiastic to share and learn. As a consultant and having no direct authority over them, the staff opened up readily and shared their thoughts uninhibited. I found that staff were more comfortable confiding in me as there was no direct or indirect consequences as our association was purely an academic exercise. They trusted my commitment on confidentiality with the signing of participant consent forms and participant information sheets that protected them. They trusted me to "communicate findings to the CEO in a creative way." I envisioned that this fact finding process would have been a lot more difficult were I to administer it as a manager with ICL.

Trying to deploy the research at CFK as the Executive Director was difficult despite the fact that I controlled the resources and made decisions on people. In this environment, staff were cautious. They steered away from controversy and sought to align their thinking to my own. When disagreeable, they lacked conviction in stating so and I felt undertaking the project at CFK would not succeed. As a consultant therefore, I was more efficacious because of acceptance. As an executive, issues raised by junior staff would have been interpreted as an indictment on my performance and style as a leader and manager making it a difficult proposition. With the power to make decisions on staff, they would have had difficulty portraying me in bad light. Although being a consultant placed me at a vantage, accessing certain sources of data and resources was impossible. Without executive powers, I had no mandate to implement recommendations from the study and had to depend entirely on the CEO's goodwill to put them into effect. As an executive however, I could have had the power to bring change with reference only to the Board on structural and policy issues.

Running the project as an executive was therefore complicated due to the added risk of pre-understanding and role duality as manager and researcher. It is possible that my assumptions and deep held prejudice could prevail and distort my perception of data and the issues. Had I conducted the study as a manager therefore, I would have had to hire a data collector and a research associate to intervene and prevent possible project bias on my part. This would be the benefit of an independent assessment allowing the study to take its own course without prejudgment.

The organization under study

This study was set in a charity organization situated in Nairobi Kenya. I Choose Life Africa was founded by the serving CEO and was incorporated in 2003. It has a wide branch network across the country. ICL was developed with the association of the student community of the University of Nairobi. The organization envisions a healthy Africa and an empowered people. It exists to create a "movement of people that help enhance the quality of life for communities through programmatic interventions in health and social economic empowerment. The programmes are aligned to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their core business is to improve the life chances of youth of between 10-25 years of age through envisioning, empowering, enabling and engaging them. ICL has over 80 staff with a presence in 24 of the 47 counties in Kenya according to ICL strategy (2016).

The organization structure is built on five key functions under the leadership of a CEO in a pyramid shaped hierarchical configuration with a substantive Board. The structure has 5 levels from the executives to the field officers. The study will seek to establish how this structure affects voice (see appendix 1 for visual). To clarify, the CEO has 6 direct reports as senior management. These are Director of Programmes and Planning, Research and Development/Monitoring and Evaluation, Human Resource, Finance, Grants and Administration and Relations and Communication. There are 4 pillar heads tasked with thematic programmes and Regional Heads at counties serving as middle level managers. The lower 3 tiers constitute managers, middle level and junior officers. (Carrier 1996), cited in Altinay and Altinay (2004) expresses agreement with the views that a decentralised structure increases interaction between higher ranks of management and employees promoting an entrepreneurial process that promote sharing ideas without hindrance. This philosophy is tested and so Altinay and Altinay (2004) organisational design comes under scrutiny. A review of ICL human resource management component was also reviewed to understand staff exits and establish correlation to voice.

The readings undertaken and why.

Prior studies laid the foundation for understanding the research problem in a deep and multi-faceted way. The theoretical framework and policy debates emerged from literature. This collection of interrelated concepts such as the spiral of silence, leader member exchange, leaderful organizations, dimentionalizing cultures, psychological safety, conversational travel and the dialogic approach to the creation of new knowledge led to the interrogation of African culture specific to Kenya. Other readings that guided the framework were literature on voice and silence, conversations, facilitation of meetings and relational management considered central in understanding the phenomenon of silence at senior management meetings. The theories helped determine what needed examining leading to framing a conceptual framework where a shift in the research paradigm was recognized. For the study purposes, meetings were set as the basis for interrogating the problem question. The other theories were studied because they manifested at meetings.

Hedman and Gesch-Karamanlidis (2015) noted that conversations were the key to "unleash and catalyze ideas" and therefore understanding how conversations are conceived and how they travel in meetings was worthwhile. Listening was yet another key component. Detert and Burris (2007) underscored the need for managers to practice non-defensive listening as a means to promoting talk. This raised

questions on such relational dynamics as power and proximity to power which influences how people talk and listen. For instance, power distance affect how people connect and relate in Africa. Managers protect their domain and preserve their authority by centralizing decision-making excluding others.

To bind the study, the interpretation of the word "voice" was contextualized to focus the reading to what was relevant. Voice was considered as a discretionary verbal communication as defined by Morrison *et al* (2011) "a shared belief about whether speaking up is safe or dangerous." The study adopted a preliminary view that the feeling of futility by junior staff and the case of dictating voices by dominant groups overwhelm them. This affects pluralism of thought and stalls information sharing. The angles applied in understanding the phenomenon helped further narrow the literature needed.

Additional readings were derived from personal work experience for example power dynamics from traditional and conventional perspective. A guiding question was whether meetings solve work problems. This raised additional questions that helped in selecting the literature required. An example was the relevance of leadership in silence, the various philosophies and styles of leadership and how they affect voice. Profiling junior staff and characterizing them helped bring greater scrutiny to the study and demonstrated widely how fear is propagated. This included how skills, technical competencies, knowledge, experience, culture and education influences voice. These elements helped explain staff submissiveness, assertiveness or aggressive dispositions during talk. How previous studies perceived these issues helped highlight other issues that led to a search for appropriate literature.

My reading further covered facets of African culture on silence. Africans were seen as hierarchical espousing "respect and reverence to not encourage a questioning attitude" as stated by Sesanti (2010). Establishing how this affects communication was pertinent. (Kamalu 1990) cited in Sesanti (2010) classified African ways of doing things as 'Ubuntu' a "philosophy of collectivism." Ubuntu, a Southern Africa concept of leadership is founded in humanness and a sense of community also called collective solidarity Msila (2014). A paradox the thesis looks out for is the incongruity between Ubuntu and authoritarianism that is also common in Africa. Other readings on African leadership and their rituals came from the former Chief Justice and the President of the Supreme Court of Kenya, Dr. Willy Mutunga.

Tsoukas (2009)'s work was also critically appraised. He saw creation of new knowledge in organizations as a dialogical process based on the relationship one wanted to have with the interlocutor. He upheld that talk was an act of maintaining a state of favorable expectation. An analogy to explain this was motions taken during a dance. Two dancing individuals synchronize their steps and movements to be in harmony with each other. Each anticipates their opposites impending move and respond accordingly to foster reciprocity and continuity. I saw this as synonymous with talk and as supporting Tsoukas assertion. Similarly, the understanding of Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) study of intentional withholding of information on critical work by junior staff was pertinent. A survey found that 85% of professionals admit to being silent on citing Milliken *et al,* 2003 providing yet another dimension.

The Study Direction.

The multiple disciplines and concepts considered in the framing of the project are discussed above. This thesis chronicles intervention to generate actionable knowledge for change and as required at I Choose Life to initiate corrective response. The important and relevant debates include the role of African leadership in an increasingly complex globalized economic system according to Kuada (2010). The thesis covers what happened, what was discovered, managerial action proposed and their implications.

On methodology, face to face interviews and administering of questionnaires were applied to ascertain the views of staff. For example, the data collection tools recorded facts on whether staff had the courage and confidence to speak up or challenge their seniors during meetings; and, whether they felt their contributions were valued including suggestions such as adopting modern meeting technologies. During the field work, video recording was undertaken for visual images to validate or discount what is observed. Journaling offered a reflective process for sense making the data. Other useful sources of information were documentations such as the human resource manual, training and development policy, performance management, organization purpose, corporate aims and objectives as articulated in the ICL strategic plan.

Four findings were classified as the major themes. These were: lack of focus, a climate of fear, dynamics of power and influence and lack of inclusivity and involvement. Lessons also emanated from the gaps that were discovered that include lack of a framework to guide meetings and lack of capacity to engage productively at senior levels leading to recommendations for action. These were invitation of meetings

auditors to assess meetings management for continuous improvement, the appointment of a tempered radical, training and development and deployment of a new meeting management process. Also significant was letting the CEO speak last on issues to create a viable environment for debate.

The process was directed by underpinning theories from past experience and the initial background check in the field of study providing a framework that supported the entire project. A section of participants felt their opinion was not valued and so conforming to the way "things happen here" was expected. This also led to querying the role of relationships on effective functioning of meetings. Discussions in meetings did not follow a logical sequence. These led to 3 questions that helped affix the literature as follows:

1. Why do junior staff remain quiet in meetings that require their participation?
2. What is the impact of silence that should trigger new approaches to meetings? and
3. How can the situation be improved?

The literature search based questions were linked to research questions as they were a precursor to not only retrieve journals but help to better understand social emotional engagement, dyadic relationship and their promotion of employee voice in an African context. The conditions for upward communication also became better manifest. The research topic was instrumental since the questions ensured the topic was clearly delineated.

These questions helped to methodically search for literature on causes of silence to establish underlying issues and corrective actions. Relational management through leader member exchange, African culture on power distance, meeting structure around protocols and processes and psychological safety emerged giving diverse theoretical viewpoints. The findings were isolated for further analysis as they offered a qualitative interpretive inquiry in a social context. They also aided in assessing empirical data to eliminate speculative or artificial deductions. Changes in the questions emerged from examining my perceptions in the inquiry process during the study. They were refined at all stages of the reflexive journey to help map possible directions the study could take. The research hence developed from how questions emerged and changed. For instance, the research questions raised at the review of literature were not as significant as I first thought. The research developed from how questions changed in the findings and discussions chapter. This led to refining "emerging avenues of inquiry in greater depth" Pope *et al* (2000). The next chapter explores what previous studies established.

The change of ideas and how they evolved was influenced by the field work, literature review, application of methods and my personal experience.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.

INTRODUCTION.

This section provides an account of what I learned reviewing literature. It summarizes the main viewpoints encountered. The ensuing actions included an identification and assessment of the experts and their ideas and the questions needing additional exploration to establish new avenues for the study to develop. The broad literature search questions helped find and determine the initial focus providing a glimpse different theories, methods and data needing collecting.

In the last chapter I showed that the research problem and questions triggered additional questions to guide the search for requisite literature. This provided scope for these previous studies to be examined relative to the problem under study. In coming up with the key research questions, other considerations were such as possible future research and themes that were conceivable for exploration. The ability to evaluate the evidence in literature in order to make comparisons with findings was key. These questions suggested a problem worth interrogating. The first chapter explains the orientation to the research process exploring the factors that call for change in the management of meetings at ICL.

In this chapter I examine wide reading and explain how it led to the segmentation of literature into 5 thematic areas. Arising from ideas and relatable questions asked in search of literature, the interpretations from text, my past experience and theoretical understanding of the phenomenon helped advance the main arguments. The main topic being studied also raised thematic questions for the manuscript by associating it with a research question and the ideas the text provided for synthesizing. The major impressions formed are classified as thematic areas essentially the opinion I expressed on a matter. Literature review helped identify other areas that needed development, verification and refutation. It also offered new perspectives for field work.

I used literature search questions to retrieve journals. To optimize the search, key words and phrases were used and in some instances thematic oriented questions were formulated and applied to be more targeted and narrow the search. On retrieval and upon reviewing the content and arguments adduced, usable texts were grouped appropriately, those that were considered relevant, those that were puzzling or those that raised additional questions to widen the scope thereby placing the study within an existing body of knowledge.

The Structure OF Literature Review

This review is organized along thematic areas. The literature review and other concomitant data pointed to 5 major influencers on silence making them a subject for extensive scrutiny. The ideas they propagate and the questions they raise were pivotal to improving the quality of conversations. Ideally, these theoretical constructs were viewed as the issues that cause and affect silence. The review helped establish a theoretical framework which structured the thesis. The arguments in literature are applied in this project to check suitability, explore and expand urgings advanced in order to add value to the review and the field work.

The primary sources of data enabled me gain field insights at micro level interactions to analyze against identified theories. To capture salient points relevant to the study, I obtained information from two distinct sources. Questions that shaped the research grew from silence and voice literatures whereas managerial action points grew from academic journals on conversations and meetings. This helped expand context. Overall, reviewing the previous studies brought to the surface unanswered questions that led to shaping the research problem in this study.

Over 200 academic articles and 57 practitioner journals were reviewed. These articles consisted of those with differing opinions, those in concurrence and others in conflict to provide for amalgamation. Other articles for review were decided upon deeper reflection. This was based on what I thought was happening thereby provoking ideas on what else to search for. Other recommendations came from leading scholars and the study supervisor. To put social constructs into perspective, the review was advanced through a critical re-look at personal experiences for a broader understanding of the goings-on. Following the formulation of questions that needed to help with the search for literature, research questions that came about from text helped answer the research problem, design methods of data collection and support analysis. A broad view of the topics has been taken and filtered to more specific issues. The review shows why my research questions needs to be addressed because failure to do so could leave fundamental aspects unattended.

How research questions guided review of literature

The 5 thematic areas associated with silence were conversations, voice and silence, meetings, African culture and relational processes. These segments were justified as accelerators of the desired change because of the questions they provoked and the ideas they posed. Whilst reviewing literature, sub-questions emerged providing new dimensions that also widened the search for literature. For instance, in reviewing relational processes, the barriers brought about by levels of seniority became apparent. On asking if the gap can be bridged to allow free conversations, the search led me to the work of Kimball. Kimball (2013) speaks of Leader Member Exchange (LMX) powered by a two way dyadic relationship. This was particularly so in a vertically influenced workplace. (Axelrod 2010) cited in Kimball (2013) saw LMX as widening the circle of involvement embracing democracy to mitigate dysfunctional systems where protocols are not adhered to. The writer advocated for "wicked questions" however, this raised yet another question, whether power and Africa culture allows it. This compelled me to conduct additional search to help deliver a broader and a more meaningful understanding that would advance a holistic change. Although this appeared perfect in theory, questions arose such as territoriality negativity that could not be ignored. This include the difficulties with high power distance Ghosh (2011), defined as the acceptance of unequal distribution of authority which impacts cross tier relationships. This outlook helped examine existing conventions and also recounts scholars observations based on provocative use of theory or thoughtful inquiry Ramsey (2011).

The question "how can an African styled organization create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff" was particularly confounding. I found Kimball (2013) pitch on a minute of silence for participants as being useful. She felt that reflecting before responding to a question was a liberating structure under Leader Member Exchange (LMX). This raised a secondary question. How can staff make meaningful contributions in meetings through co-creation? I was drawn to staff redemptive behaviors that ensures they do not upset the status quo and risk being labelled "enemies of the institution." Was staff safety a critical item in talk? This question led me to Jian *et al* (2012) who saw LMX as propagating psychological safety, where employees feel safe in speaking up, a factor for managerial openness and employee voice as cited in (Detert & Burris 2007). This was supported by Milliken & Morrison (2003) assertion on:

> "The range of ways people use to raise issues, and how organizations can help create conditions that facilitate upward transfer of information."

This suggests a need for mutual trust and loyalty giving credence to questions guiding review of literature. Jian *et al* (2012) saw psychological safety as dependent on staff believing they will not be misunderstood for speaking up, a state of mutual positivity, interest and agreement citing (Detert & Burris 2007 and Nadler 2004). The practicality of this finding is brought to question. I have argued that psychological safety incorporates staff intellectual capacity and confidence. Any knowledge related deficiency causes staff to be subsumed in talk so as not to expose lack of knowing or ignorance.

The Broad Issues from Review of Literature

This section on literature reviewed is structured to discuss broader issues that are general in nature and relevant across. They are broad and all-encompassing before later transitioning to specific defined issues. This section takes a funnel like approach starting with demographics e.g. Morrison (2011) argument on staff tenure. He claimed that newer employees unlike old staff voiced less. Longevity deepens relationships thereby providing a sense of belonging or "legitimacy" to speak out. New staff will not be familiar with habits, rituals and the culture of an organization to offer similar comfort. Although Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) championed organizations as the community of people where conversations foster inclusion and involvement, cordial relationships are mainly fostered by prolonged existence of staff. On reflecting, I found meaning in the thinking that diversity and vested interests impede sharing of social ties and perspectives forcing new comers to tread carefully when engaging with their seniors.

Effective communication is broadly a fundamental factor in voice. To thrive, it requires a responsive atmosphere that is reciprocal. Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013) advocates procedural communication as an effective tool in promoting team meeting practices and an all-inclusive communication. This is expected of every establishment as a denominator to talk. Defined as "verbal behaviors that structure group discussion to facilitate goal accomplishment", the concept is supported by Allen and Rogelberg (2013) who argued for a proactive procedural communication where there is express knowing of who will do what, when, how and why in meetings. The two further show that placing responsibility with different employees works because it spreads responsibility and forces involvement. Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013) sanitizes this thinking. They cite (Putnam 1983) to find that "procedural communication" shapes a team's work climate to facilitate supportive behavior at meetings however there are other dynamics that negates this perception such as status differences that creates barriers between senior and junior staff, perpetual perception differences, unqualified assumptions and other

environmental factors such as fear. Where meetings are purely task based Gorse and Emmitt (2007) there is emphasis on information and explanation but with little social-emotional connection which is a prerequisite for a healthy talk environment. A communication policy may be a vital tool in bringing a semblance of order but seen from Morrison *et al* (2011) argument citing (Tangirala and Ramanujam 2008), "communication in groups is an inherently social process and is influenced jointly by individual and contextual" matters. This makes having a policy framework on communication superfluous and difficult to enforce.

A policy will mechanize talk and limit spontaneity affecting honest discussions. A pre-designed process as advocated by Allen and Rogelberg (2013) could prompt issues in a structured way and increase participation by all. However, this will not necessarily translate to a connection through social-emotional behavior. This is because the level of interaction may be superficial. The essence of communication is captured by Ramsey (1998) who found that "what organizers can hope to make real, has to be agreed in conversation." In contrast, Glaser and Tartell (2014) maintain a need for conversational intelligence, defined as a "learnable ability, to connect, navigate, and grow with others" an aspect of communication. These two principles are in conflict because parties in a wider assembly do not have a common understanding of their reality and will require to develop a unified objective during talk. This indicated the importance of relating as "equals" by dropping the trappings of power and stifling culture.

Silence is interpreted as concurrence, also taken to mean no objection in the African culture. There are no open disagreements. Gorse and Emmitt (2007) attributed lack of disagreements during meetings to reverence of leadership, group think and unquestioning loyalty. This constricts work place debates. Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) on their part find that critical and criticizing statements create relational conflict even though I see it as prerequisite to progressive discussions. African set organizations run with extreme rules. Broadly, a dominant "traditional" African organization has low tolerance to systems of talk that modern users of sound management subscribe to. This include development and fidelity to agenda making. Although Nixon and Littlepage (1992) asserted that agenda integrity is key to successful meetings, it was not uncommon for these organizations to breach acceptable tenets. This goes to question whether indeed silence is concurrence or a sign of subservience.

Silence comes from a concern that staff input is not valued, what Detert and Burris (2007) terms as "dissatisfaction in their situation." This notion has a strong bearing in this work. The disaffection comes from hidden rules either implied or manifest through expressed and implied rites and rituals. According to Hirschman (1970) citing (Detert and Burris 2007), increased discontentment leads to reduced opportunities in stimulating action for change. This is because in the prevailing circumstances, the difficult questions are not asked for either lack of interest or the fear of appearing offensive. (Millward *et al* 1992) cited in Detert and Burris (2007) subscribes to asking difficult questions of senior executives, suggest bold ideas and seeking support to influence action. (Ashford *et al* 1998) cited in Detert and Burris (2007) argued that speaking up can feel risky although the larger risk is the opportunity lost in not confronting the real issues at work.

Another general outlook is Armstrong (2006) seeing voicing as a collective organization good for decision making, ideally an expression of mutuality. The decision to speak up results from an affect laded expectancy like calculus according to Detert and Burris (2007) citing (Milliken *et al* 2003; Ashford, Rothbard *et al* 1998, Withey & Cooper 1989 and Ryan & Oestreich 1998) where costs and benefits of speaking up is a major consideration. Collectivism however is in conflict with the acclaimed hierarchical structures making outright openness Detert & Burris (2007) difficult however the "promotive" aspects of voice to benefit organizations as an incentive and as asserted by Jian *et al* (2012) was worth exploring.

Speaking up promotes pluralism of thought and ideas. In their study, Detert and Burris (2007) reiterate that it was "just not possible any longer to 'figure it out' alone from the top where the lower in rank are ignored." Although this remains a major problem for most organizations, Isaacs (1993) restated the argument emphasizing that thinking alone as a leader is not adequate to solve work problems. According to Bell and Tunnicliff (1996), the future is too complex and uncertain for top management alone to create and implement strategies. Unequal participation, intrinsic conflicts, limited individual thinking and loss of creativity in understanding and resolving issues is amplified where pluralism has been annulled. Why do leaders think alone? Some scholars have argued that the issue is precipitated by traditional practices, trust, the need for control and low capacity of the staff however, multiplicity of thought propagates critical thinking allowing participants to be imaginative genius in problem solving.

Finally, ethical leadership is a factor in voice. Yixin Hu *et al* (2018) gathered that ethical leadership promotes employees' voice through psychological empowerment evidenced by a sense of sincerity. Cropanzano *et al* (2017) saw this as being impactful in the long term prognosis for relationships however, scapegoating and lack of performance integration where organizations predominantly reward output relegated ethical standards to mere rhetoric. The following section filters the broader issues discussed above and presents them into a clearly defined and segmented areas defined as themes for a better articulation of the main issues.

A: VOICE AND SILENCE

People who don't register their concerns, give suggestions or ideas at meetings perpetuate silence. Morrison (2011) defined silence as "failure to voice" which is contextualized in this study to mean speaking up. Citing (Liu, Zhu & Yang 2010), Morrison (2011) finds that voice is not any form of speaking out but a communication process implying an opportunity and the need to do something, terminate or change current practice within a given framework. This means challenging the status quo. Voice is both a consequence and antecedent and can pronounce itself on the prevailing situation or be the precursor to developing something new. Voice will best be understood by examining communication processes including inherent conflicts, the leadership philosophy, structure and pro social behavior that manifests in culture. These elements are discussed in detail below.

I. Communicative choices

Employee silence is a communicative choice and not their perceptions of procedural opportunities Van Dyne *et al* 1995 cited in Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008). Taking the cue from (Van dyne *et al* 1995), Shojaiea *et al* (2011) sees silence as "intentionally withholding of work related ideas, information and opinions". Research on silence has focused on withholding information and further suggests that it thrives where context is unfavorable for example where the CEO holds the last word on an issue or a decision. It can be inferred that silence can be forced on employees by insinuation. Milliken *et al* (2003) puts it in perspective citing (Morrison & Milliken 2000) to submit that silence reinforces a feeling of futility leading to employee apathy and withdrawal further citing (Seligman 1975). This argument is disputable. Silence is a subtle admission of having nothing to say or lacking capacity to contribute meaningfully. This is deliberated in greater detail in the discussion chapter.

II.   Conflicts in voicing between parties

Research has found imposing connections and conflicts between speaking up for the good of an organization and for personal gain. The work of Morrison and Milliken (2000) stipulated that organizations should be inclined to value employee ideas to allow organization find unified solutions to the problems they face by consigning personal interests. Citing (McGregor 1960), theory X shows that employees are self-interested as they corroborate (Williamson 1996) who saw employee talk as a means to maximize individual utilities. Whilst this may be so, employee performance is becoming central to their own retention in employment and so these selfish interests are not sustainable. The interventions require an organization centric approach to problem solving. A democratic system to solve problems however has limitations because it provides for advancement of other interests.

Examining the question of power, influence and domination explains conflict in voice. Morrison and Milliken (2003) found that where majority opinions gain dominance minority opinions weaken effectively escalating silence among participants. Junior staff often seek to align their views with the majority and those that are dominant such as the CEO and proxies. There was the misconception that aligning with popular opinion was safe. On reflection, I find this to give credence to self-protective concerns Morrison (2011) and as a result of persistent power plays, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) claim that the decision to speak up is influenced by one's own perception of the dominant view about an issue and the personal benefit in doing so.

Silence is escalated and voice diminished when a leader's decision is made outside plenary. According to Noelle-Neumann (1991), spiraling of silence occurs when people perceive a threat of isolation and so act to placate those in authority over them. According to (Morrison & Milliken 2000) as cited in Morrison (2011), silence stems from concerns about negative repercussions. To circumvent this, Shojaiea *et al* (2011) suggest submitting such concerns or ideas to a third party who presents these concerns by escalation. A perfect example is the Ombudsman. This could insulate staff from retribution. The Ombudsman will however encounter the very risks it was meant to mitigate. This includes inability to assure staff of their safety. The introduction of an Ombudsman does not guarantee the insulation of staff as they are viewed more as outsiders with no commensurate powers to protect the sources of their information. Should such an intermediary be anchored into the organization structure to give it official authority, it will be subject to the same political machinations as the rest. The intended purpose will

therefore be defeated and as argued by Liang *et al* (2012), staff will not speak. A probable fix is a meeting behavior Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock 2012 cited in (Liang *et al* 2012) that neutralizes conflict.

III. <u>Pro-social behavior and voice</u>

(Bedeian 2002) cited in Islam and Zypur (2005) took a European and an American view to argue that constructive concerns are integral to participating in organizational life. This is not true in Africa. Whereas leaders should enable a voice climate to make employees comfortable about raising problems as inferred by Donaghey *et al* (2011), other behavioral factors have been found to affect voice. For instance, Morrison (2011) cites (Van Dyne *et al* 2003) to propagate behavior that supports sharing of emotive feelings. This is extraneous to African tradition where leadership is synonymous with strength of character devoid of emotions. Showing emotions is normally seen as weakness. The discernment misaligns with the African way of perceiving and dealing with issues. Additionally, in an African situation, staff do as they are told as opposed to the western styled culture that boasts open communication.

Silence may be theorized as a power effect (Clegg 1989) and as an aspect of impression management (Goffman 1959). Management of impressions may leads to pro or anti-social behavior. Brown and Coupland (2005) who cites the two asserts that silence was a means of fostering social cohesion critical to the maintenance of groups. This showed the local relationship between these two arguments. However this is deceptive. Acts of silence were also often calculated to achieve other sinister objectives such as managing impressions making silence an outcome of fear and partisan machinations.

Shojaiea *et al* (2011) equated silence to "loyalty." This holds true for traditional African organizations. Msila (2014) observed that a leader is the voice of the village although modernity offers a different perspective. A leader being the paramount voice therefore, his views are seen as illustrious. Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) argument conflicts with this assertion when they show that silence characterized a conscious decision to hold back information for reasons of dissatisfaction, suspicion and lack of involvement in decision making as opposed to blind loyalty. The unintentional failure to communicate due to having nothing to say (Van Dyne *et al* 2003) cited in Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) was mentioned earlier in this section. It is different from what may be seen as employees' tacit agreement with the status quo leading to the unquestioning compliance and aligning to Shjaiea *et al*

(2011) loyalty pledge. Burris (2012) notes that voice has two dimensions, to challenge or support. Inevitably, these two lead to different social constructs. As argued by Morrison and Milliken (2000), people's propensity to freely interact in a workplace setting is influenced by power relations citing (Keltner *et al* 2000). One's proximity to those in power dictates how staff conducts themselves.

As viewed by employees, supervisors have a high status in the organizations Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008). Argyris (1977) shares findings on powerful customs and defensive routines that prevent employees from speaking up. Many staff relate to this. Morrison (2011) speaks of socially acquired beliefs for which many junior staff subscribe for example, the author felt that "one must not bypass or embarrass the boss." A resonance of Morrison's concerns can be found in his earlier research titled "Break the Silence." In his classic article on raising employee voice worldwide, Huang (2003) cite (Mak, 1998) to demonstrate that in a power distance culture, managers communicate less with their employees. This was to conserve the power equation by allowing an air of mystery that attract deference. Morrison (2011) restates (Liu *et al,* 2010) thinking that voice entails risk, since giving suggestion and raising concerns dubbed 'troublemaker' by Milliken *et al* (2003) implies challenge to authority, a characterization that employees avoid. Organizations were the leaders' personal fiefdom exerting unlimited authority and influence giving them absolute control. Although centralizing decision making allowed efficient execution of actions, it encumbers staff morale.

IV. Leadership and voice

In his work, Burris (2012) noted that additional attention to the issues being raised by junior staff is essential. Citing (Ashford & Dutton 1993), allocating resources for the actualization of ideas or resolving the concerns will bring greater positive change in organizational routines and processes an attribute of prudent leadership. Given the competition for limited resources, silence and submission to authority can be seen as a viable tactic to win favor however, by not challenging the norm, staff were seen as compliant and not reformist. This was compounded by leaders being intolerant to criticism and dissent. Ironically, leadership that takes interest in what junior staff say may also be viewed as weak or misconstrued as patronizing unintentionally muzzling voice. The big man syndrome also presented a problem although Chirisa *et al* (2018) states that it can be corrected through inclusivity. Choi *et al* (2016) cites (Carmeli *et al*. 2010) to advocate openness, accessibility, and availability to discuss ideas that move organizations away from "I centric" bias to collectivism.

Theoretically, culture affects how people relate because people are accustomed to silent salient rules designed to govern them. Some rules are not expressly itemized but implied. African organizations high power distance is indicative of supremacy and submission. To demonstrate, Msila (2014) shares the chronicles of Okonkwo, an elder who "thought that he was the single bearer of values and culture at his village in Umuofia." His imposing ways contradicted the African culture that embraces Ubuntu, a collective solidarity Msila (2014) citing (Prinsloo 1998). Bolden and Kirk (2009) point out similarities giving a (Blunt and Jones 1997) account where African leadership is seen as influenced by centralized power structures. The researchers saw this as bureaucratic resistance to change leading to an authoritarian paternalistic system. In some instance and as shown by Kuada (2010) citing (Montgomery 1987), he observes that African leaders see their organizations as not separate from themselves. I conclude that Kuada (2010) assertion does not align with those of Msila (2014) on Ubuntu and authoritarianism. On this, there is no consensus on the real gravitas of African leadership, a disconnect that complicated the pre-study thinking and affected my initial action plan for ICL.

V.   Structures and processes

Some authors have linked voice to structure suggesting that the flow of information is intricate and that barriers exist that inhibit upward flow of information. A consideration could be made to create a conveyor of messaging from the bottom to the top like the ombudsman example discussed earlier. An alternative is the establishment of an intervening office such as a trade union through a shop steward, a nominated "people" champion. The channels of conversing and engagement with senior executives can be formalized within pre-established structures and processes. Establishment of a tempered radical Creed (2003) citing (Meyerson 2001) was another route. This is a resource person with the courage to stimulate controversial conversations appreciating the sensitivities. The decoy is however not a panacea to solving the problem since they remain subordinate to senior management. Creed (2003) felt they could help create an open "society" since tempered radicals commonly present alternative thinking and ideas at odds with common practice or dominant views. A flexible structure, self-belief and free dissemination of information has limitations. As with ordinary outspoken staff, the risk of conflict and despondency remains significant given the unchanging African tradition of compliance to authority. However, they remove a pattern where people act in predictable ways Brown and Coupland (2005) which was beneficial.

Power distance is described as acceptance of unequally distribution of control and authority in cultures that hierarchically facilitate societal constructs. According to Hofstede (2011), Africa has a high power distance between junior and senior staff. Historical ethnicity practices and proximity along hierarchies adversely intensify the connection between junior and senior staff. Citing (Lee, Pillutla & Law 2000), Huang Xu (2003) maintained that junior staff rarely challenge the boss decisions. Huang Xu (2003) found that in African led organizations, there was an uncritical acceptability in supervisor display of authority. This has relevance to an African run organization given the cultural context. It remains a paradox however given the influence of European and American culture and ethical practices. A question that arises is whether narrowing the gap would make meetings more inclusive and inclined to active participation and whether indeed it was feasible. Collapsing structures may shorten the decision making process but it did not guarantee increased interactions given a reluctance to donate power in Africa.

The narrative from Hofstede's theory may not be usable because the model was company specific with unique variables. The concept defined culture in its holistic form using an organization but was not applied towards individuals and their exceptionalities. Individuals are unique persons with own set of personal experiences, values, skills and competencies. Globalization has also promoted knowledge transfer leading to share of best practice. The internet has become an enabler, a channel of information dissemination across borders. For example, ICL business interactions happen online and by extension influence their culture. Working with international partners aid knowledge transfer and accelerate African led organizations from malaise. Power distance became an item of investigation and relevant in this study because of a concentration of power in the African culture despite globalization. The respect and fear of authority, risk of repercussions and the need to win favor affects how staff relate. Hofstede's concept is however disputed as it is not representative of national cultures as we see it today. The notion that power stems from structures, cultures or the custodianship of resources is largely unsettled.

Huang Xu (2003) found that management's openness and employee involvement is contingent on power distance. This aligns with Israr and Gao (2018) who citing (Lian *et al* 2012 and Tyler *et al* 2000) argues that organizations with an orientation of low power distance are more likely to actively communicate and to build closer relationship with the leadership. The correlation between communication and the distance in the organizational design has not been tested to show linkages and so the assertions are contestable. Ghosh (2011) reference to (Sinha 1995) highlights what is common in

Africa and share that in India, there is dependence inclination depicted in the parent-child like relationship where inequality leads to a behavior driven by an authoritarian mindset which was inescapable in my illustration with flat structures. The hallmark of reverence according to Huang Xu (2003) negates the spirit of openness and active and open communication between the leader and the led.

Jain and Jain (2018) speak of little engagement of junior staff in decision-making. Khatri (2009) faults centralized organizations which he sees as a job-focused employment relationship. This is how the work place in Kenya operates, a manifestation of a high power distance culture propagating unilateral practices through micro-management. The literature suggests structures that centralize decisions provoke less voice and argues that decentralization is a necessary element for spurring talk because staff feel empowered through a system that spreads decision making to lower levels. However, staff will still be governed by a pre-set levels and limits of authority based on organization design and responsibilities. Cortina (2017) affirms this argument when he talks of hierarchy in organizations with a sharp role distinction. Israr and Gao (2005) cites (Kirkman *et al* 2009, Bialas 2009 and Lam *et al* 2002) to speak of an autocratic management style with penchant for staff to avoid disagreement with the leader. Their definition of autocracy reflects some insight on the limits leaders place on others. Accordingly therefore and as claimed by (Jain and Jain 2018) cited in Israr and Gao (2005), there is low autonomy.

Shojaiea *et al* (2011) found that silence is exacerbated by management factors such as unreceptive supervisors, organizational factor in the decision making process and personality factors such a fear or contentment. Staff "read the wind" and tried to determine upfront whether it was safe or worthwhile to speak. Detert and Burris (2007) cites (Milliken *et al* 2003, Edmondson 2003 and Edmondson 1999) to add that "approachability, action taking, and accessibility" led subordinates to conclude it was either safe or unsafe to speak up. Gaining knowledge through co-creation cannot be achieved in this setup. A double loop feedback thrives where executives are accessible however, the causal effect is beyond personalities. There are other nuances, complex and far reaching factors that affect approachability such as the leadership maxim of command and control that leads to compliance without question.

B: CONVERSATION

Conversations inform managerial action. How it travels connects people whereas news and ideas are exchanged in order to elicit action. The way in which conversations are handled determines the quality and extent of voice. (Taylor 1993) cited in Schoeneborn (2011) argues that "an organization is a construction made out of conversation." This is supported by Ramsey (2016) who identified talk as the source of conveying content by way of words, tone and gesticulations. She adds that talk affects much the intuitive as the reasoning in the exchange that ensues. Conversation includes actions considered meaningful by participants and which have a bearing on behaviour in meetings.

I.   **We centric mindset**

Good conversations require leadership, and is collaborative through turn taking. An all-inclusive conversation is "we centric" Glaser & Tartell (2014). A "we centric" approach to engagement is also influenced by other considerations. An autocratic leadership or an organization affected by "founder syndrome" is a puzzling constituent in ICL leadership formation. These equate to "I centrism" and affect conversations. The "I centric" phenomenon was suspected to afflict ICL at the early stage of the study. This was underpinned by the founder syndrome eventually shaping my thinking as it was apparent organisations of similar founding had structures and methods designed to protect and serve the interests of top leadership and not necessarily the organisation and the larger work community. I have classified the traditional autocratic leadership as I centric and the modern transformative and democratic approach to leadership as "we centric" to mean all inclusive.

A conservative or traditional leadership is common in founder led organizations. They have a fixation for control retaining the final say on work issues. Normally, staff act in accordance with the personality of their leader, endear themselves to his caprices and not the greater mission of the organization resulting to a distorted and skewed process in talk. Being I centric, founders centralized decision making. The paradox which is an item to look out for is that these founders developed and deployed policies and policies for others to comply with which they themselves ignored. Curiously, they respected and preferred loyalty over merit. For context, the "I centric" regular pronouncements start with the word "my" or a declaration such as "I want." Notably, leadership styles drive conversation according to Glaser and Tartell (2014). The "I centric" phenomenon therefore places risks in an organization because of the conflicted interest that arise.

The "we" and "I" centric mindset raised several pertinent questions that guided this study. For instant, a major item that puzzled me was why leaders don't consult their juniors whilst solving work place based problems. This problem associated with what literature showed to be the founder syndrome can be reversed if owners of organizations separate themselves from the organizations that they run. The complexities are intensified when founders are less receptive to change. The risk this trajectory presents raises a fundamental question, how can owners delegate responsibility and accountability without the inherent fear of compromising the standards they have set for their organizations?

To best decipher the question of inclusion, new thinking around courage of leadership, curiosity and being cognizant of bias surfaced. Applied well, the ideas for involvement were workable for example asking probing questions to get new perspectives. I tested some suggested interventions with varied levels of success while others were out-rightly not practical. One plausible idea was:

> "Constructive communication that creates a shared understanding of reality by narrowing the reality gap" Glaser and Tartell (2014).

Subjected to deeper enquiry by comparing how the assertion relates to my personal experience, the vested interests in conversations made this difficult. On evaluation, it also made the successful implementation of an idea such as co-creation towards a shared vision problematic because of the aforementioned. Might an arrangement to solve a problem be better served when the solution comes from junior staff? A bottom-up process might provide a greater rate of acceptance of the changes being proposed. This takes away the predictable and fatigue laden bland normality. This was however theoretically sound but practically deficient since the literature has shown snippets on what causes silence at meetings that are numerous and not limited to exclusion that is viewed as linear. Arguably and as cited in (Pearce 2007), communication goes beyond transmitting information to making social worlds Hedman and Gesch-Karamanlidis (2015).

II.   Leadership philosophy and talk

Leadership styles and principles influences how people converse. Borrowing from the concept of future search according to Polanyi (2002), common interests or needs deepens participants' understanding and acceptance of others' experiences and collectively interprets information that is generated for action as seen in open space Euchner (2014) where leaders set the tone for "talk." Team syntegrity as a non-hierarchical decision making processes Espinosa and Harnden (2007) was also usable. Raelin's (2005) on

his part advocates leaderful practice to bring about collective leadership. This is depicted by the rotation of those who lead discussions normally based on expertise in varied subjects or official areas of responsibility. This deviated from the normal practice of having seniors lead meetings. While largely conceiving employee silence as a choice, Raelin (2005) citing (Amar 2002 and Chalofsky 2003) found that employees respond well to open communication, fair treatment and challenging work. Kimball (2013) appeal for transparent and accessible engagement is a potent characteristic to driving conversations at meetings bolstering leaderful practice. This concept assumes that staff have the vital skills and competencies to lead conversations and that there exist a level of affability that enables this arrangement. This was however way too idealistic and largely impractical.

Jian *et al* (2014) demonstrated that the relational dynamic between leaders and members is what catalyzes conversations. They cite (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995) to argue that people associations determine how they talk. On their part, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) viewed talk as the general enduring systems for the formation and articulation of ideas. They submitted that good conversations build trust, strengthen engagement and effectively address work problems. Although good relations foster greater discussions beyond sharing task-based information as shown by Gorse and Emmitt (2007), it did not necessarily present the best opportunity for an all-inclusive communication systems since the degree of relatedness still varied between people.

III. How conversation travel

Conversation that is intentional develop from the lower cadre escalating upwards with a better chance of success. The limitation is that junior staff may not be capable of engaging strategically or provide tactical solutions to work problems. Funneling of conversations from junior staff to their seniors in a systematic manner can help capture issues that impede performance. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) argument that people adhere to protocols of social interaction is a good example of a top down approach to conversations that portrays the importance of the reverse as a better model of engagement. The idea I formed from this reading is that a bottom up approach to talk is unlikely in an African run institution although Groysberg and Slind (2012) sees it as the right option for an inclusive conversation. The environment in which this is operationalized is fundamental.

To adopt bottom up as an approach for accelerating discussions, views are solicited and if found worthy of progressing goes to the converging stage where it is evaluated, compared and rated with other worthwhile thoughts. This process allows proposals to be subjected to rigorous evaluation. A bottom up approach works best in an open forum as it is a democratic and consultative at all levels. Ferreira *et al* (2015) sees it as a model where the main stakeholders participate. Bottom up can also be best used to analyze functional areas in organizations Muras *et al (*2008) citing (Jagoda *et al* 2012) as it is seen as empowering workers to take a lead on improvement initiatives. Other useful platforms for this mode of communication are consultative forums, task forces, project steering committees and focus groups all which involve brainstorming with junior officers who are affected by a particular change. In Africa however, bottoms up is viewed as abdication of responsibility by top leadership and viewed as loss of control. Conversely, lack of cohesion from multiple layers of decision makers also presents an operational risk. The question that was induced engaging with this concept was how to endure the fall out when the systems of interactions at different levels become ineffective.

In this study, I remained aware of the risk of senior executives using the bottom up approach to sanitize their pre-conceived ideas or decisions. The process can turn into a formality even though it has the potential to promote trust and rapport to steer conversations. Bottom up captures the conceptual meaning of active listening and helps raise the commitment on decisions made. The idea is that junior staff require channels and protocols within which they can safely engage and have their voice heard.

(Bushe & Marshak 2014) as cited in Hedman and Gesch-Karamanlidis (2015) argued that dialogic approach "unleashes, catalyzes and support motivations and ideas amongst participants" and in so doing allows conversation to develop and travel. They further emphasized that,

> "Dialogic organizational development is built on the assumption that to facilitate organizational change, employees will need to become aware of the impact of their own contribution of the diversity of multiple stories that constitute their organization."

In claiming for instance that leadership involves intentional construction of direction, alignment and commitment, Ramsey (2016) sees misalignment of objectives as a vital problem, a recognition that it is much about a genuine and co-owned desire to succeed. Glaser and Tartell (2014) proclaimed the need to create the space for "our clients to arrive with us at insights that might emerge jointly." This is debatable because co-creation also allude to blind agreement that don't challenge substantive issues.

Dialogical organizational development on the other hand may not be accurate in asserting that employees have awareness of their impact. What this means and the idea it provokes is that employees never see fault in their behavior and performance and often blame it on lack of support or other factors in effect avoiding responsibility by slanting conversations in their favor to the detriment of all.

Ramsey (1998) in aligning with Groysberg and Slind (2012) backed intentionality and interactivity when taking the view that the content of a conversation is always negotiable. Great conversations are all inclusive devoid of "abstraction wars" such as ideological difference or divergent and strong opinion on a pivotal matter where senior management don't devalue the opinions of others. A number of scholars argued that this is inevitable. Staff suffer "dilemma paralysis" where fear that raising the issues will lead to polarization according to Isaacs (1993) thereby diminishing trust. The subtle "wars" cause fear and despondency. Intentionality and interactivity though compelling raises the question of parity between unequal partners' in this case junior staff and their executives affecting how conversations travel. This requires a policy framework to work.

C: MEETINGS

Meetings encapsulates the study with the other 4 thematic areas providing context and variables for its examination. An item synonymous with the management of meetings was facilitation that could help unravel the problem of silence. Meetings ought to be invigorating, collaborative in solving problems and communicative. This sub-section interrogates meeting protocols, procedures and the general environment. Nixon and Littlepage (1992) explains that effective meetings include open communication, focuses on tasks and an exploration of options to solve problems. They felt that decision consequences, action planning, temporal and agenda integrity and leader impartiality constitute sound meeting practices.

I.   Facilitation.

Facilitation of meetings can boost conversations. Meeting theorists suggest that meeting procedures may have an effective impact on deliberations as they bring order. But this alone is not sufficient as there are issues that are a hindrance to good meeting management. A good example is interactions that drives social emotional communication Gorse and Emmitt (2007) but more enlightening and citing (Cherns 1987), Nixon and Littlepage (1992) viewed excessive formalities as limiting expression of ideas.

This was a weakened take on Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) call for positive action. Procedural meetings suggest a structured approach but the question that comes up is whether spontaneity in talk can be structured. Complicating the benefits of facilitation is a compelling argument giving credence to my reservations on the fiasco of agendas in a typical meeting in an African organization. Agendas are limiting as they list activities in the order in which they are to be discussed and seldom do they accept additional discursive points from others outside the order paper. An obtrusive element to fair facilitation of meetings is display of power that is exhibited in many forms such as reverence, rites, rituals and artifacts that pronounce authority. Insensitivity to these subtleties leads to what Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) called dysfunctional communication marked by lack of positive action.

Psychological availability is a useful constituent of facilitation. Investing oneself physically, psychologically and cognitively Kahn (1990) may require what Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013) called a "critical reminder." This is a resource person who steers a meeting, focuses the team to remain vigilant on what is important almost similar to a tempered radical. The question becomes the distinctive role of a critical reminder and a team leader in facilitating meetings. Where a team leader is effective there is no justification for a critical reminder. They also risk resentment as they are seen as patronizing.

Milliken *et al*. (2003) argument that silence in meetings is caused by individual characteristics such as experience and job tenure and organizational characteristics such as structure, culture and relationship has merit. This may include low commitment or low competency and from the organizational aspect, limitations may include structures, policies or the meeting facilitation model. More important, meetings must be relevant to participants. While plausible as argued by Allen and Rogelberg (2013) that:

> "Managers who makes their meetings more relevant (Reinig, 2002) make employees feel more meaning in their work"

Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) saw successful team meetings as part of the Continuous Improvement Process (CIP) that seeks to improve quality of engagement. Equally, the assumption that:

> "Dissatisfaction with the meeting procedure affects employees' attitudes leading to a pessimistic perspective (Hackman, 2002)" has credibility although questionable.

Structures and processes instill a sense of discipline, cohesion and order. A careful analysis and proper planning for the meeting as well as judicious selection from among alternative problem-solving formats

and procedures are preliminary safeguards to the success of any session according to Seibold (1979). The facilitation of meetings is therefore a critical component of voicing and relational management. The idea this generates is that facilitation brings efficiency and allows collaborative effort that promotes free thought and innovation. How meetings are structured becomes a conceivable idea.

II.   **The environment**

An enabling environment is critical to the success of meetings, the most important being an ensemble of a team. Bell and Tunnicliff (1996) argue that not all groups that converge in meetings are teams. The essence of a team is giving everyone an equal opportunity to contribute from the perspective of a shared vision. Bell and Tunnicliff (1996) contend that teams exist where there is consensus to pool together knowledge and share resources towards creating a "rich picture" collectively. This is best achieved by exploring the past, agreeing on the present and drawing up actions for the future together through effective communication. Bang (2012) established that miscommunication is not only in the domain of junior staff but affects senior staff as well. A review of various definitions of communication suggests that interchange of thought which recognizes that two parties offer to share without inhibition is itself affected by other factors that dissuade talk. Properly articulated, Bang (2012) creates pessimism that all categories of staff are susceptible and will hide how they truly feel on controversial issues. Bang quotes Argyris's theory of action which stipulates that when under threat, risk or embarrassment, people act in ways that "detour" from an issue of contention to maintain harmony in meetings for fear of adverse consequences. Relationships tend to be affected upon disagreeing in public according to Francis (1998). He reports on vulnerability of senior staff that faced double jeopardy in being shamed by their seniors while losing the respect of their junior colleagues. A hostile environment often makes staff succumb to silence.

Allen and Rogelberg (2013) presents an argument that psychological availability is a prerequisite to successful meetings. With psychological availability, one invests oneself wholly in role performance at meetings. This thinking is a little stretched and is unrealistic when viewed on the backdrop of social exclusion and domination. Many staff don't apply themselves fully as they see themselves having a superficial relationship with the organisation. The contractual obligation between employer and employee is pay for work done. This explains why there is a less than significant staff motivation to do more. An incentive to apply themselves beyond expectations physically, emotionally and intellectually is

required to make meetings and conversations more successful. Baran *et al* (2012) compliments this argument by asserting that there is need to develop good meeting practices and meeting citizenship behaviors with a systematic measurement of the practices for efficacy. This skirts traditional conventions but benefits teams and encourage greater functioning of organizations from behaviors not expressly required of workers giving it a sense of control and vigor.

Evidently, psychological availability need complimenting with procedural communication even though the former appeals to emotion whereas the latter is process oriented leading to an all-embracing system. Liu and Maitlis (2014) points out that meeting temperament referred to as collective amusement can provoke counter argument allowing team members to challenge in meetings and by extension bring more people into the conversation through a temperament of amusement. Hilarity as a way of facilitating meetings deters attendees from discussing issues seriously on occasions. This is because the fun meant to ignite conversations in meetings is often counterproductive as it makes talk too casual. Liu and Maitlis (2014) proposal on collective amusement could create resentment caused by familiarity. The question this poses is whether it was more conceivable to bond with the team after a candid and difficult conversation rather than introduce fun with the intention in order to catalyze talk.

III.   <u>Protocol and procedures</u>

Francis (1998) claimed that meetings were valued regardless of what was actually achieved. This made meetings a routine rather than a communication and problem solving platform. Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013) characterized meetings as failing because of unmanaged social interaction, unnecessary conformity and ineffective communication processes and practices as cited in (Janis, 1972). Francis (1998) felt that being valued can break barriers and foster a two way communication that ought to be procedural. This accentuated the role of social interactions and led to the recognition of the significance of cooperation and conflict management which are key remedial measures in dysfunctional meetings in need for order.

Protocols and procedures are important because as put forth by Donaghey *et al* (2011), unrestricted voice is 'dysfunctional.' When conversations are allowed to happen without being shaped, the substantive matters get lost as extraneous matters take their space. The critical question is how the CEO can procedurally guide a meeting without restricting contributions by invoking formalities.

Organizational citizenship is another remedy. This is articulated by the work of Organ 1997 cited and advanced by Baran *et al* (2012) referring to staff that have responsibilities to an organization through voluntary support and behavior. Additionally, Baran *et al* (2012) speaks of organizational justice, an act of fairness citing (Colquitt *et al* 2001). Fairness being relative raises applicable questions on what will truly work in this situation.

D: RELATIONAL PROCESSES

Leader member exchange is akin to a relational process. According to (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995 and Breukelen *et al* 2006) as cited in Jian *et al* (2014), under the LMX theory, leaders develop levels of connectivity with their staff characterized by deep trust, loyalty and support beyond work for pay. Ramsey (1998) expressed the view that leadership is a relationship and not a status symbol, neither is it a personal quality or role. In Africa, leadership is a position of authority and relationships are a foreign concept. The below attests to this conception:

> "African employees tend to be closely supervised rather than motivated in an age when other societies advocate for and practice employee empowerment to ensure organizational agility (Kuada, 1994)" (Kuada, 2010).

Dialogic ways of talking require that staff work with others in negotiating and shaping a sense of what may be happening and what needs to be done. This 'new way' according to Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) is about engagement without prejudice through creating open communication. What follows are opportunities for knowing, then unifying through dialogue, working out differences, respecting and being responsive to differences. This is known as relational integrity. They contend that relational leaders engage in 'questioning, provoking, answering, agreeing, objecting' dialogue rather than dialogue that "finalizes" or drowns out other voices Cunliffe & Eriksen (2011). An idea that this provoked upon deeper reflection was emotional intelligence embracing nuances of emotional responsiveness towards others but it also triggered the question of how conviviality can affect work performance. This may explain why the African leadership is unreceptive to cordiality at the work place and instead embrace the maxim of relating at an "arm's length." Leader member familiarity is disregarded.

Bang (2012) and Milliken *et al* (2003) found that senior staff also experience fear of consequences and feelings of futility. Their intellectual and emotional withdrawals on key issues Milliken *et al* (2003) led to a breakdown in relationships. Baran *et al* (2012) cited (Watzlawick *et al* 1967 and Blau 1964) to further

posit that messages have both content and a relational dimension obligating one to respond from a place of reciprocity. This affects all levels of staff and is emphasized by Baran *et al* who suggest that:

> "If supervisors display interactional fairness, employees will develop better relationships with them and more willingly contribute to goal accomplishment during meetings."

An issue that emerges is the implications when senior staff succumb to silence. There are complexities that present a dilemma to senior leaders such as the existence of an informal office or an exclusive membership club which effectively runs the organisation outside formal structures. This led to negation of interactional fairness.

E: THE AFRICAN CULTURE

This part looks at the African traditional context and it highlights the cultural setting on silence at meetings. Kuada (2010) argued that culture provides a frame of reference and a guide for behavior of employees. He further postulates that an autocratic leadership is synonymous or more appropriate for societies whose members have a high regard for hierarchy. Francis (1998) captured the African way of doing things by signifying thus:

> "My silence is required, it is our way because the elder has spoken."

Huang (2003) questioned whether nurturing a climate of management's openness and establishing mechanisms of formal employee involvement would reduce silence in this dispensation.

Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) cites (Venkataramani *et al* 2010) in rejecting Sesanti (2010) assertion that power and influence can induce positive psychological state in employees although this is not supported with empirical evidence. The implications are that power is exclusionist where a directing leadership philosophy abound. Although the fear of authorities is reinforced in Africans at a young age, the question that arises is whether social interactions overtime changes this edict. Whether this explains why junior officers with differing opinions are seen as renegades and tagged by demeaning and unpleasant names is a subject for investigation.

Building on the example introduced in chapter 1 where non-defensive listening was seen as a means to promote talk, the argument that African leadership propagates sharing, highly regards compromise and consensus and advocates good social and personal relations is at odds with reality leading one to question Ubuntu. African employees according to Kuada (2010) are inspected rather than motivated to

act. I wondered if this limits independent thought and creativity necessary for organizational agility as cited in (Kuada 1994). The study will sought to establish if supervision invites waywardness such as selective listening.

Bolden and Kirk (2005) claim that "African leadership" was initially seen as distant, political and all-too-frequently associated with corruption and the abuse of power of which no one was held responsible. In relation to this contention, the organizations that espouse corporate governance did not show this discipline. Following the misconception of leadership and its role in facilitating a two way talk, Bolden and Kirk (2009) asserts that leadership is no longer regarded as an attribute of individuals but "best conceived as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group" citing (Gibb 1954) in Gronn (2000). I queried whether this can best work through leaderful practice. Nkomo (2006) makes reference to scholars such as (Nyambegera 2002) to assert that the sense of community consciousness and group belongingness may explain the widespread practice of nepotism that could be corrected through leaderful organizations. Nkomo's assertion however remains European in outlook and may encounter difficulty. This is because "Ubuntu" assumes one community with one set of values and a shared culture. Africa is diverse with a multiplicity of traditional practices and beliefs. It is disingenuous to classify them as similar. European concepts ignore this characteristic of African culture as observed by Jackson and Yavuz (2008) and so must be applied with caution.

Although dialogue makes people think together in analyzing a shared problem according to Isaacs (1993), Nkomo (2006) cites (Kiggundu 1991) to assert that African management was highly personalized, what Kuada (2010) sees as private fiefdom. Dialogue in an African based organization is difficult as observed by Haugaard (2017) because of a chain of command citing (Weber, 1978) that may lead to:
> "The threat of violence or the threat of material deprivation."

This is linked to Blackman and Sadler-Smith (2009) assertion that processes, culture and power cause silence cemented by an egoistic philosophy of leadership. I realized an ego-centric mindset thrives and questioned how it affects open conversations. To promote voice and fight silence, Bowen and Blackmon (2003) spoke of social cohesion to counter the spiral of silence propagated by Noelle-Neumann (1991). This had a correlation with Morrison and Milliken (2003) argument on majority view, domination of talk by seniors and the attendant fear for speaking up Milliken *et al* (2003) owing to possible consequences also known as speculative theory. The question that arises is if this could be abridged.

In a 2011 article, Morrison makes reference to voice as an extra role behavior in a section labeled the "domain of employee voice." Specifically, she writes:

> "Voice can be classified within (Van Dyne, Cummings, and Parks' 1995) framework as a form of challenging or promotive extra-role behavior."

There is the issue of changing the status quo and being constructive in intent Morrison (2011). She consolidates the thinking on voice and silence by highlighting self-protective concerns, the idea that silence stems from concerns about negative repercussions. To reverse this, managers need promote an egalitarian climate, one that provides predictable structural possibility and that de-emphasizes the dominance of some actors based on the research of Islam and Zyphur (2005). To improve the quality of speaking up from this text, one need to break the social structures to allow talk to permeate its ranks.

Literature Review relating to Documented Materials.

In other materials that were subjected to my review to better understand ICL policy position on "talk" and staff empowerment, I conducted a literature review to develop and enhance the theoretical underpinnings from internal documentations. Although ICL corporate engagement strategy 2016-18 did not address human resource capacity, Jonk and Schaap (2004) claimed that to improve performance, there must be a degree of freedom in pursuing business optimization through cross company initiatives. On their part, Aburge and Adebola (2015) argued for middle-level managers as key providers of information and strategy. As custodians of "tacit knowledge" critical for decision-making, conversations that isolate them risks achieving the desired results. On operating manuals, Galinsky *et al* (2012) asserts that manuals are written guides to practice involving skills in communication and a breadth of knowledge about human behaviour and processes. In addition, practice involves sustaining relationships. What this means is that standards for employees to follow are established and are predictable.

Training and development aid conversations. Tools and a training needs assessment that is connected to performance management leads to employee engagement and increased productivity. Ironically, citing (Ziderman 2001), Abugre and Adebola (2015) points out that only 10-20 per cent of what is acquired during training is applied in the workplace. Although Aburge and Adebola (2015) found that middle managers' co-ordinate and integrate activities by providing links between the operational core and top management (Mullins, 2007), training remains central to isolating and exchanging usable information.

In the past, managers demonstrated an easy going acceptance of collective bargaining. According to Williamson and Rasmussen (2019) however, rigid collective agreements were replaced with a new focus on "flexible" human resource management approaches. The review on the Human Resource manual showed that most establishments had a "personnel" function, viewed as an administrative sub-section of management. This was however a cooperative, pluralist approach that has become strongly unitarist. I took this to mean the instituting of a single and uniform entity with pre-determined ways of functioning. Similarly, ambiguity today is increased by multiple solutions and lack of clarity on outcomes. According to Geysi and Uzonoglu (2019) citing (Gellermann *et al.*, 1990), corporate values reflect the importance an institution attaches to its beliefs or ideals. These indicates how an organization approaches issues, decision making and organisational behaviour away from the single track thinking associated with their senior executives.

Kalu (2016) defined a functional organizational structure as centralised or grouped by business functions. He adds that the system is bedevilled with bureaucratic bottlenecks with employees herded into functional silos. Very few persons are capable of seeing the total strategic direction of the company resulting in a difficult decision-making process. The implications of this is that staff are distracted by their own functional goals rather than overall company objectives because conversations are not well managed.

How I applied the Literature

The reading raised pertinent questions touching on the application of text in my study. In order to interact with the theoretical arguments adduced, the following questions became points of reference in guiding the next phase of the thesis. These were:

a) Will issues raised in text be similar to the situation at ICL?

b) What data is needed and what methods are required to collect data that corroborates or controverts issues raised in text?

c) Would the interventions in the readings work at ICL and are there areas for moderations?

Other questions that arose call for specific actions. For example, Allen and Rogelberg (2013) drew attention to the processes and protocols that might impact ICL meetings. They triggered a thought on social emotional behavior, what is acceptable and what is not in facilitating useful conversations including the structure of meetings. Here the questions flow from one set to another with additional

questions added as data is collected. These questions helped develop a variety of protocols from interviews to field observations in order to collect the kind of data that reveal perspectives and test recommendations. These questions offer the potential to further explore a rich nexus of social cultural issues affecting staff.

They further helped establish the scope of study as they were attuned with and expanded the key research questions. Besides, they were specific and action focused. The text posed questions that I needed to answer such as how junior staff can stop the protectionist tendency or what the seniors can do to help. Findings on how the CEO can become deliberate and an active listener is covered in the findings and discussion chapters. Finally, what the literature review established helped form the thesis statement creating a strong case for research. The literature review increased my ability to evaluate the field work and provide arguments that would be used to support or question the findings.

What I learnt from extant research

These theoretical perspectives explained why the research problem exist. They offered tentative answers to the key research questions. Overall, the literature review helped establish:

- What was the problem and the questions that needed answers and
- Why the approaches or ideas for improving the quality of conversations by answering emerging questions are feasible in a Kenyan specific organization.

These lessons provided a holistic view presenting relatable arguments for the differences and similarities that arose from the review. The analysis influenced my methods and presented discursive points relevant to the data and evidence from field work. The articles were topical arguments in leadership behavior and voice, surfacing new understanding through leadership development in African, effect of team meetings on organization success, Leader Member Exchange, organization as a communication, power distance, dimentionalizing cultures, conversational travel, the paradox of the silent and the silenced and "Ubuntu."

These aspects of the literature gave room to critical evaluation, a basis for analysis and synthesizing different information to help see patterns, themes possible areas of conflicts and the gaps from cross referencing. Bolden and Kirk (2009, Detert and Burris (2007), Kauffeld and Lehmann-WillenBrock (2012) and Msila (2014) gave the most cogent well thought out analysis with powerful theoretical perspectives.

These included their thinking on the central control of power and the ineptness at holding leaders to account. Issues around managerial openness, courage, cordiality and access offered a safe space to speak. I formed the opinion that continuous process improvement would come from positive action and unanimity. If true, this will potentially support field study findings and the conclusions.

In examining psychological safety in the realms of LMX Jian *et al* (2012) for instance, I noted an inexplicable perspective. That was whether work relationships can allow one to take risk during talk. Feeling secure promotes effective meetings, elicits passion and a willingness to apply discretionary effort by voicing concerns thereby correcting silence in meetings. Based on practical experience and emanating from the literature review, pivotal questions that ended up forming the basis of this research arose. These were:

1. Why do meetings that are task-based and with little social emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk?
2. When does managerial openness and a two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African led organization?
3. How can an African styled organization create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff?

These three questions came from analysis of text and transformed into testable data on commencement of field work. The questions were crystalized by the initial interrogation of ICL work and meeting situation. The work of Gorse and Emmitt (2007) established that there was a problem. The article by Detert & Burris (2007) provided a rationale on the underlying issues whereas Milliken & Morrison (2003) offered probable solutions. There was a direct link of the reading to the questions.

The articles led to the research questions. They developed from claims made by scholars. Gorse and Emmitt for example found that meetings were reserved putting focus on business matters but needed be emotionally expressive to disperse tension. The low level of socio-emotional interaction caused instability through non-inclusiveness but was this so? Gorse and Emmitt (2007) claim this was owing to the groups' restricted development. But what is implied? Detert & Burris (2007) inspired the second question. They argued that in a change oriented leadership, the leader behaviour must signal openness to or appreciation for change, a critical contextual influence on employee willingness to speak up. I was intent on establishing whether this would suffice in an organisation with African setting. The final

question sought to find what interventions would work and it borrowed from the assertion that silence is a behaviour with multiple causes making it difficult to diagnose the meaning as argued by Milliken & Morrison (2003) and therefore the requisite conditions to reverse it to propel voice.

I also established that procedural communication Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013) aligned to the three research questions. This was because, by determining who will do what and when, disallowing losing the trail of thought, criticizing others and providing linkage to meeting satisfaction, the concept promoted verbal behavior that structure discussions towards goal accomplishment. The findings chapter have therefore been placed within the context of existing literature with selected theories used as a framework for design of this enquiry from stating research questions to providing a path for exploratory studies including evidence from the field of study. These questions were therefore both diagnostic and prescriptive but useful for corrective purposes.

In conclusion, the text from literature was linked to fieldwork to identify variations and recognize spaces for further exploration to aid the conceptualization of the study in relation to the practices at ICL. Some ideas the reading generated and those that posed questions were repression or withholding of voice, the power invested process of being silenced, silence as a canvas for decoding non-verbal communication and the invitational process in conversations. Other facets were psychological safety, organization behavior that favor speaking up, understand who speaks up and uncovering micro level interactions with communication behaviors. Successes from relationships, organization citizenship behavior and relational development were vital. African based literature drew attention to values, beliefs and collectivism and other culturally acceptable behaviors.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.

INTRODUCTION

This section explains and covers the strategy I chose to integrate the constituents of the study in a coherent manner. It provides details on how the research problem is to be investigated. This includes how data will be systematically collected, organized and analyzed. It further discusses and explains the research sample and design highlighting the step by step approach for each method. In this endeavor, I have provided the strength and weakness of the 5 sources of data collection, and the basis of their being considered. Inevitably, the methods provided a descriptive record of data. Other areas covered are the limitations of the study, risks and the ethical questions that arose.

On familiarizing with relevant literature, I opted to look at the subject matter differently from the approach taken by other scholars using of critical questions. I used research questions to establish the data type required. The questions were deliberately crafted to extract data that was most puzzling on the issue of silence by junior staff in meetings. I have presented a table on how the three questions were linked to the methods that were most effective in extracting requisite information. A broader architecture and subsequent process flow is discussed including a detailed calendar of the events that were undertaken to arrive at a conclusion. The questions were also designed to invite exploration and discovery and not to constrain the project at any stage. In putting them together, I avoided questions that were too focused and risked inhibiting a broader understanding and analysis. This allowed a more rigorous and reflexive inquiry and the use of meaningful data. Supplementary questions then emanated from unfolding results further expanding the investigation. My approach also made provisions for emergent and unpredictable findings.

I drew the methods from what I learned from similar studies. Observation in the field and consultations with other scholars and practitioners also helped. The entire process was guided by what I thought was going on and how to collect the data that would prove or disprove emerging trends. The rigor in the methods and their reliability to extract required data was considered, examined for acceptability and applicability to the particular work context in which this project was taking place. The entire process typified an ordinary work day at ICL and examined the research question from employee's context.

To keep the study conditions constant, the topics for the meeting were chosen to relate with an actual work scene in-order to elicit participants' normal thinking and to broaden engagement by administering topical questions. This was more helpful where the team discussed a current topic relevant to their work situation (Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012) as backed by Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013). An unequivocal assurance on confidentiality was granted to ensure openness in the interviews and field engagement.

THE METHODS AND SUMMARY OF RESEARCH DESIGN.

I used five steps to arrive at the findings. This was a generic data collection and analysis system. Fig 1 illustrates a structured data collection with different participants at different times or stage during the study from end to end. It encapsulates: collection of raw data; relevant methods; systematically assigning meaning to data; organise to establish patterns and categories; analyse to interpret and make sense, then conclude by making known the themes and linking them to the research questions. The analysis of data, field tests and writing of findings and final report took more than 18 months.

Structure of Research Design Fig. 1

Collect data by observing, video recording, note taking and journaling
Senior Management Team meetings

Deepen data collection from formal and informal discussions with participants by telephone, along the corridors and at tea time
Follow up interviews after every successive meeting with select participants.

Code data, classify into categories and develop patterns to identify key issues that may provide insight on possible themes
Undertake initial analysis and sense making by self and few participants

Collect additional data to consolidate initial findings through side conversations with participants, observation and recordings of meetings
Attended additional Senior Management Team meetings

Tested emerging ideas based on lessons learned and initial recommendations from the field and reviewed literature
Field Testing

Checked emerging ideas with CEO and shared data. Persuaded CEO to accept recommendations, obtained new insights and input to counter balance
Meeting with the CEO

Experimented with new meetings protocols – Interpretations and conclusions during final trials
Deployment - Final meetings with teams

Established whether the research problem has been solved or otherwise and if research questions have been answered
Final Reflections (Self)

The data collected was qualitative because of the social nature of this study. The study principle comprised working with data inductively where causal evidence advanced arguments from empirical observations, helping understand why and dissecting different perspectives. This gave patterns to help theorize. On the coding practice for instance, I sought to see what explanations I could find on people's actions from the data. This approach was chosen to work seamlessly within a normal meeting context.

The 5 methods for data collection expanded data gathering and complemented each other. Jick (1979) advocates combining methods in studying the same phenomenon in order to concretize results to reflect the reality through cross referencing. Citing (Peirce 1906) whose thinking is articulated by Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011), an iterative process of transposing observations, participants' accounts and relevant theory was applied. Convergence in these sources of information as recommended by Thurmond (2001) was necessary to link and bring one meaning to data when analyzed collectively. These methods were therefore adapted for "introspection and analysis" as supported by Norris (1997).

A detailed schedule of events to supplement the broad research approach shown in Fig 1 is presented on Table 1. Activities that were undertaken are listed in a chronological order showing the timeline for their accomplishment with a provision for their traction. These methods were not imposed on the study out of personal preference but dictated upon by what was required to reveal the issues. I applied myself to Crawford (2014) guidance on who I needed to collect data from and why, how to effectively collect the data and how that data could finally be analyzed.

The methods used were observations, video recording and interviews. Reflective journaling happened on all data from the other 4 methods to subject them to critical thinking and evaluation. Field tests were used to examine appropriateness of the recommendations. This flow is highlighted on Table 1. Speaking to the CEO for instance helped test out the earlier findings (explained in the discussion chapter). This gave the study the sense of an action inquiry and was evident through observations, actions and reflection on outcomes. A detailed explanation on why I adopted the 5 methods is discussed in a later part of this chapter. The transcription of the interviews, video recordings, journaling and observation provided a descriptive record of findings. Filtration and elucidation of the same happens in the Discussion Chapter. Pope *et al* (2000) refers to the initial raw data as interim and sequential analysis for successive investigations.

Table 1. The Summary of Research Design.

	Activity	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6	Wk 7	Wk 8	Wk9	Wk 10	Wk 11	Wk 12	Wk 13+
1	Obtain approval to do research	*												
2	Select and obtain consent of informants/issue participant information sheet	*												
3	Planning and preparation	*	*											
4	Develop research questions	*												
5	determine the study sites	*												
6	determine the sample		*											
7	Develop protocol		*											
8	Research tools development		*											
9	Develop and adapt interview guides			*										
10	Planning and logistics			*										
11	Select interviewees			*										
12	Development research instruments & interview questions to guide data collection.			*										
13	Collect data observation video recording				*	*	*	*	*	*				
14	Collect data interviews				*	*	*	*	*	*				
15	Collect data journaling using a schedule of questions.				*	*	*	*	*	*				
16	Informal engagement after meeting conversations.				*	*	*	*	*	*				
17	Collect CEO data									*				
18	Transcribe interviews											*	*	
19	Collect Additional data										*	*	*	
20	Analyze data											*	*	*
21	field tests and finalize research											*	*	*
22	Write findings													*

The table was designed to respond to the research questions and explore what puzzled me. The methods sought to know why meetings that are task based with little social emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk, when managerial openness and a two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African organisation and how such an establishment can create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff. I arranged the study activities as outlined above. This allowed a progressive build up and also provided a logical sequence. Some activities ran concurrently where work segments correlate such as 'planning and logistics', 'selection of interviewees', 'development of research instruments and interview questions to guide data collection'.

Originally, I had 3 broad questions that I later established were too expansive to support the study and address the issues. These were 1) why junior staff stay quiet in senior management meetings 2) what situations make senior executives dominate conversations and 3) whether there are meetings that consistently go badly needing new "technologies" as corrective actions. The final questions were developed from these three upon re-tuning. This was to make them more specific and actionable hence they were refined for specificity to help advance an arguable thesis. More crucial, there was the need to properly construct and satisfy a growing curiosity of an educational and practitioner problem. Below, Table 2 shows how the research questions were linked to methods for effective data collection.

Methods used to answer research questions: Table. 2

	Research Question	Observation	Interview	Video recording	Journaling	Field Tests
1	Why do meetings that are task based with little social emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk?	✓	✓	✓		
2	When does managerial openness and two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African led organization?	✓	✓		✓	✓
3	How can an African styled organization create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff?		✓		✓	✓

These questions were chosen for their proximity to the research problem. From the table above, the questions can draw data from all the five sources and effectively respond to the problem under study.

They were researchable and measurable hence facilitate a meaningful investigation. These questions offered scope to excavate the data, evaluate and provide responsive action. I was therefore guided by what I was asking and the data I needed to provide answers Richards, (2005).

As people interpret work problems differently, obtaining a common and broad understanding is important prior to sifting to the central issue. But given their proximity to work related tasks, junior staff are uniquely positioned to understand related problems. Their voice and opinion is focal to remedying work related issues. It was therefore important for junior staff to communicate what they know without fear to help assuage problems as argued by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012). To coagulate this thinking, Ramsey (2016) acknowledges this phenomenon whilst embracing (Eisler 1989) argument that talk brings forth the differences in thought and also connects arguments to give and show linkages. On their part, Schoeneborn (2011) cites (Taylor 1999) to argue that junior staff can help bridge this gap by creating micro level organizational interactions through talk.

In order to establish the underlying issues and to compliment the analysis using the theoretical frameworks from selected readings, I sought responses from these participants that were personal in nature in-order to extract real life stories to corroborate evidence from primary data. This project took place within a continuing work context and did not change any dynamic that may make the participants act in a different way than they would on a typical work day. This methodology was indispensable if the study was to make credible findings. This includes recommended actions that will help the organization function better and make the CEO more effective.

Research sample

The CEO, senior management, supervisors, junior staff and subordinate staff attended senior management team meetings. On average, the meetings had 12 to 15 participants. This being the normal composition, I used it as the sample size for the study idyllically a theoretical setting although the representation was illustrative of the entire organization population. The meeting attendance was by invitation only, ordinarily from the CEO. However, most of the 12-15 participants met regularly hence providing the much needed continuity and consistency. As commended by Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013), this study covered 6 diverse meetings over six months period. The interaction data was collected in the meetings that lasted 4 hours on average.

The normal attendees comprised of the CEO, his Executive Assistant, Director Partnerships and Programmes, HR Administration Manager, 2 - 4 Regional Managers, County Officers, Manager Finance, Communication and Marketing Manager and select interns and advocacy officers (see ICL organization structure in Appendix 1). The study population had wide-ranging demographics in seniority, age, gender and ethnic composition. This included longevity of employment which was equally varied. Keeping the study small in order to provide for a detailed engagement was intentional to help unearth the social pressures and power dynamics that play out as suggested by Islam and Zyphur (2005) and in detail.

To concretize the study, participants were briefed and the quality of data assured and reinforced by expressly making it known that there were no personal incentives to be offered to participants. To create the impetus for voluntary immersion however, participants were made aware of the value their contribution would add to the body of knowledge. This included an opportunity to better the organizations and advance scholarly work. For data collection, I identified gender as a key factor that influences voice given cultural psychological obstacles. This among others was to help establish what data sets and the class of raw data the study needed to conduct for meaningful investigation. Ethnic minorities with regards to marginalization, work experience, terms of engagement and length of service were also explored to provide usable data. On this, I was guided by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012) claim that greater familiarity with work operations enhances staff confidence to speak up.

The Information the study set out to find

The information collected in-order to answer the research questions were contextual as they related to the circumstances in which events was taking place. They were also perceptual mainly as understood by participants. This concept came from a scholarly contact, the former Chief Justice of Kenya Dr. Willy Mutunga. On demographics, the age of participants were noted, their seniority, length of service and gender to establish the connection to the question of silence. Another source of data were policy and process documents showing the guiding principles of practice at ICL. These were analyzed for veracity, checked against normal practice. The recommendations for improvement were tested for efficacy so as to modify the guidelines as necessary.

While probing the policies, the findings were counter checked against official guidelines. As an example, domination of senior staff during meetings or the refusal to take suggestions from junior staff in

decisions made was considered alongside the clause in the human resource manual on treating others as respectable colleagues. Other aspects include culture as documented compared to the actual practice, organization structure and tier relationships as compared to common practice. Collectively, these data would identify the problem areas to inform how policies can be enforced or reinforced. To better diagnose the problem, the different aspects in the team meetings were assembled. The facets included what was said and by whom, how it was said, the response if any and what was also not said. Other features that were noted were non-verbal such as gestures, general behavior and intonation. An interesting aspect is who staff went to for clarity and how they carried themselves in the process.

Understanding temperament and how it affected voice was a useful piece of data. Measured by tone and gestures, the general mood determined the confidence levels. This tests how enabling the environment was for talk. To consolidate findings from observations, participants' views on what they felt or thought was happening at meetings was solicited. I took the conversations outside official meetings. These included casual interactions or informal exchanges. These interactions would provide a greater likelihood of participants to respond to more sensitive questions. Another set of data came from conceptual reinforcements drawn from personal experiences from the participants and myself. These reflections altered understanding and gave greater perspective on the issues. Data was then synthesized with theory and the input of staff.

How methods were deployed and how they complimented each other.

This section explains the 5 methods of data collection, the practical matters in using them and how they complimented each other. The five methods were observation, interviews, video recording, journaling and field testing. In choosing the methods, the need to corroborate data was a major consideration making the choice of methods and techniques complementary. Every method was used to collect data that responded to each research question and authenticated the other contributing to the buildup of the process. Dialogue was developed across the five methods as borrowed from Mumford (2014) and Murcott (1997). The key questions in this qualitative research can be used to explain how and why I went about the study in the manner that I did.

The decisions on methods were justified by other published sources. Creswell and Dana (2000) for instant stated that journaling pre-empts and self-discloses assumptions, beliefs, and biases that may

subconsciously shape the inquiry therefore making the additional methods important for a balanced outlook. Journaling helped remove my bias in the data from other methods as the study progressed. Citing (Fetterman 1989), they contend that working with and observing people gives research its validity and vitality. Repeated observation helped gain a credible account by building a holistic case. On video recording, Garcez *et al* (2011) cited (Loizos 2008) to support its feasibility because a set of human action is difficult to comprehensively describe by sheer observation. Adding this captures an aspect that may go unnoticed by other techniques.

To discuss the methods and starting with observation, it was applied as the primary method with the other four acting as supplementary to approve or disapprove initial findings. This involved active examination of the goings on at meetings that were documented through note taking. Observations provided distinct data that could not be drawn by the other methods. This included feelings, emotion, visible connections and temperament. Tensions and excitement were also seen and felt. Alshenqeet (2014) underscored the importance of capturing elements such as attitude, views and the prospects of the participant with a major bearing. This method drew out deep issues, mainly behavioral and also allowed for a three hundred and sixty degree surveillance reducing the probability of missing essential data.

Being the primary data collection method as asserted by Gold (1958), observation looked at verbal interaction, participants' body language and facial expressions to assists in comprehending what was happening Gorse & Emmitt (2007). The study could not be fully captured by observation alone (Knoblauch and Schnettler 2012) cited in Mumford (2014) and so required other methods. During observations however, notice was taken on moments where junior officers said something that changed the course of conversations including how that developed. This was to help examine reasons why as this was unique. Observation offered a face-to-face interaction allowing examination of the body language or "chemistry", essentially how junior staff and their superiors related sub-consciously. I used observation to invite participants to give their reflections at end of meetings to obtain alternative perspective as suggested by Liu and Maitlis (2014).

Note taking while observing meetings required great attention to what was happening, and what was causing it to happen. Communication patterns shaping conversations and how the group made decisions

was also under scrutiny. This was to aid interrogate the reasons certain things turned out as they did. It was important for instance to establish who sets the tone and the agenda in meetings and why, how dissent is treated, whether arguments are progressive and followed through, if and how conclusions through consensus are arrived for decision making. Other aspects I looked out for were conversational aspects such as telling against selling and asking, talking verses listening and feeling statements versus thought statements. I primarily captured what was observed and not my interpretation of them.

Certain issues were unclear during observations at meetings. This required follow up by phone. In this effort, participants were asked to share what they felt or thought had happened in a meeting inviting their reflections and understanding of the context. I interrogated what they thought about the team and why they conducted themselves in a certain way, the quality of a meeting including facilitation by the CEO. This helped verify or discount initial observations. I noted that phone calls provided a safe space for participants to articulate themselves although useful tips from non-verbal cues was lost. There was however a higher feeling of safety leading to increased openness. This was contrary to observations where reading respondents facial expressions and gestures helped decipher data. The other methods were then used to reduce misanalysis from subjective observation. This was because surveillance was not impartial. As put by Iacono *et al* (2009), field notes presupposed a degree of emotional detachment from the issues as it captured behaviors that occurred naturally allowing accurate reports.

Audio-video recording complemented observations offering an opportunity for repeat scrutiny. The recordings allowed diverse insights to emerge. Each recording was viewed at least three times to get a sense of the kind and range of emotions displayed as proposed by Liu and Maitlis (2014). Recordings also offered an avenue for participants to share their understanding. Overall, the video served to record the event, behavior, establish response categories and obtain participant insights through in-depth reviews on respondents' attitude and beliefs on what they felt was going on. (Dicks *et al* 2006) is cited by Mumford (2014) as arguing that:

> "Unedited recordings have a sense of standing for themselves without researcher mediation
> even though what one notices in the detail is subjective and dependent on the viewer."

This called for caution although the method helped reduce prejudice by testing my interpretation against that of others. Consequently, this provided a "less ambiguous focus on the research questions

area of interest" and also helped corroborate the findings bringing forth different perspectives. This is because meaning was assigned to the data based on what was seen or witnessed Jewitt (2012).

Recordings also captured oral pronouncements that could be replayed over and over again to determine accuracy in understanding. The video also helped in inferring gestures, mannerisms and temperament all which are complex to amass or collate as asserted by Garcez *et al* (2011). Liu and Maitlis (2014) hypothesized that through video recording, one could capture emotions that are being displayed in a holistic and consistent manner helped by other cues. Examples of signals that could help decode data include glaring eyes, raised voice, eye contact, what and where people are looking and what people who are not talking are doing. The device captured micro-behaviors, interactions and spontaneous emotions citing (Johnson *et al* 2007 and Cohen 2010). The possibility of their re-examination helped compare data with those from other sources allowing triangulation. The video recording was considered not for what it made clear, but in what they helped challenge and disrupt in the assumptions made. Baraldi (2013) affirmed that video makes it possible to collect large amount of naturally occurring interactions hence easy to adduce evidence and make analytical linkages.

Trying to write what was seen in video recordings was laborious, complex and problematic as it diluted or exaggerated the events. The project timelines were also extremely tight to do it well. What I thought I saw and what I felt was happening as I reviewed the recorded clips kept evolving and so documenting actuality was difficult since my understanding of the clips kept changing. The transcription could therefore not be recorded verbatim. I elected instead to undertake considerable reflection to argue internally on what I thought I was seeing and what perplexed me. I elected to determine the meaning of excerpts of data from the video recordings based on additional data from other sources that supported my interpretations. I placed a threshold of three solid pieces of evidence to justify the inferences I made. I however left the data from the recordings intact to retain the richness and not to distort context. A few participants and external friends were also asked to give insights on what they thought was happening in the recordings whilst maintaining confidentiality. This provided uncorrupted perspective.

The visual recording of social interaction provided a "talking back" dialogic window showing multiple narratives Mumford (2014). As she asserted, the medium helped with the synchronicity between verbal and non-verbal action that would allow scrutiny of tiny fragments of footage as argued by Jewitt (2011).

The recording had the precision and clarity that text didn't but was also prone to varied narratives depending on the lens through which the proceeding was viewed every other time. This visual recording captured the soft data that text could not. For example, a wry smile may connote a problem or a sense of being unsure. This could only be given validity and reliability when checked against data from other sources such as observations or interviews.

Other measures were taken to give recordings credibility. As advocated by Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012), participants were asked to ignore the camera, talk and behave as they do normally. They were analyzed reflexively to corroborate or discount observations. As the recorded footage were being reviewed, new questions emerged, perceptions changed and my understanding grew. This interplay was critically scrutinized. In conformance with Mumford (2014) suggestion, the camera was placed at a vintage position to ensure focus is not on one section but a full coverage of proceedings. A one tripod-mounted camera was set up to be unobtrusive. The risk of self-effacing acts by participants eager to alter their behavior to appear favorable was identified.

With data from observations and video recording, a concrete foundation to conduct interviews was established. I conducted structured interview using a template with preset questions guided by the research questions. This was formulated to obtain the experiences of study participants. The questionnaire covered their beliefs, understanding and feelings on work related issues. This method offered an added avenue to provide a near accurate picture using personal stories as added evidence.

An interview process was to trigger responses that were perilous as they encouraged participants to share personal encounters. A questionnaire was administered. The questionnaires had three sections made of closed questions, open ended questions and the unscripted part for participants to share what was important to them in the context of the study (see Appendix 2). The first part with 10 questions sought to know what junior staff felt on very specific issues confined to a yes or no answers. A major problem was a wide-ranging understanding of what was meant by a question. Participants had varied understanding compelling me to give context. The benefit however was the ability to retrieve soft data such as emotions, feelings or behavior. Interviews brought credibility and helped substantiate data from other sources.

For this stream of data collection, I gathered demographic data of participants. These were gender, age, period of employment and tenure. Every respondent was assigned a unique identifier to protect their data and identity. The levels of education was not considered because this kind of question had negative insinuation and could sabotage the study. To consolidate the data, participants' post-meeting interview accounts were used to explore their sense making and what they thought was implied Mumford (2014) in other data. For the interviewees, they were asked to elaborate what they said and how and why it was important to them.

An iterative process was adapted essentially to clarify the nature and range of the variances Edmondson (2003) in the answers that participants gave in interviews. This was to establish commonality and areas of differences to subject findings to more scrutiny. To optimize drawing out data, I adopted Milliken *et al* (2003) model of interviewing 9 staff. These were 6 junior officers, 2 middle level managers and one senior manager. This model investigated communication along hierarchies:

> "The interviews were conducted at a convenient location for participants then the text transcribed focusing on direct answers to questions posed (Gersick *et al* 2000). It included a segment on what participants thought their colleagues felt about an issue in order to expand the pool of data and better learn the collective dynamics of silence" Milliken *et al* (2003).

Prior to every interview, a brief description of the study was given as advised by Milliken *et al* (2003) and participants assured of confidential. The process began with general questions and moved to the more specific. This approach was deliberate in order to help build confidence and momentum towards the more discomforting questions. This way, I captured raw data augmented by personal stories that were important in exemplifying the situation. The interview with the CEO helped obtain an alternative view buoyed by the issues raised by participants.

The three research questions gave rise to sub-questions fragmented to answer the main questions. In the structure, I started with observation at meetings, informal conversations with staff away from the meetings, interviews with junior staff and senior staff to the CEO as a logical buildup. This helped counter check and cross examine evidence from the very initial stages to the apex of interrogation.

Examples of the questions included a) how staff felt conversation happened in their meetings, b) whether discussions were one way, c) how meetings were structured and who talked and why. Staff were also invited to speak about the difficulties they faced in the meetings. This included how ICL could facilitate meetings better to accommodate the voices of all staff. Whether participants felt their colleagues were also uncomfortable raising issues in meetings was examined. Direct questions were asked to get junior staff to tell stories of meetings they had really enjoyed participating in or those they felt excluded in and their reasons why. To ensure the consistency of the answers given, cross referencing was done by interviewing the same people on more than one occasion. This caused the study to determine if anything about their responses had changed and if so why. To decrease priming effects caused by question context or item embedding two versions of the questions were employed and as advocated by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), this counterbalanced the interview and brought clarity. Responses were recorded by taking notes noting to ask the same question twice to ensure context was understood and all ambiguity removed. As proposed by Mumford (2014), there was an exit interview at the end of this process.

There are instances where respondents did not provide the yes or no answers choosing to explain their answers instead. For ease of administration and data management, the reluctance to give an explicit answer was taken as hesitation to be honest and so the answer with the negative connotation was taken as a true representation of participants feeling. For instance, if a respondent said that he or she was unsure of an answer to a question or gave an unclear response normally, I marked their answer with a response that signify a negative Milliken *et al* (2003). Those answers with express meanings were isolated and assigned a code for more investigation. The last section in the questionnaire allowed participants to share what was important to them and invited stories where real life experience was shared. Kendall and Kendall (2012) asserts that people see stories in personally meaningful ways and they can become a basis of reacting to or matching with other data.

On journaling, self-reflection was applied to evaluate the interviews, observations and video recordings. This involved seeing how situations developed from their initial state and querying what caused it to happen. In every phase of data collection, compartmentalized by methods, my reflective action inspired what to investigate. The thought process was duly documented for rigor and relevance. The theoretical memo represented their documentation. This increased the pool of data providing different but rich

dimensions of developing arguments. Journaling helped counter check data guided by the question predicated by "why" and "what if." This is where critical thinking occurred. Journaling helped question my thinking further critiquing and appraising my assumptions and prejudice and allowing deep intuition.

In reflective journaling, the emerging understanding of the research as it evolved Ortlipp (2008) was documented. This helped retune the perception on what was developing in the study and the research process in its entirety by documenting and reflecting on experiences as a way of thinking, understanding and learning as argued by Hayman *et al* (2012). Ortlipp (2008) maintained that keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity. Journaling helped examine earlier assumptions, questioned the study goals and severely tested the belief systems and subjectivities in relation to the research questions. This helped mitigate against the risk of skewing arguments towards preferred directions. During journaling, an interpretivist approach to collecting data was used. This involved social construction of events with subjective examinations. This decision was made because subjectivity was part of the study. There was the danger of a selective use of organizational narratives to amplify or reinforce participants' preconceived ideas or formed assumptions Kendall and Kendall (2012) and the prejudice in their interpretation.

Finally, paper based data such as policies and manuals were reviewed to augment primary findings from the field work. They represented the official rules, regulations and aspirations of the organization on pertinent but work related issues. These included board minutes, ICL strategic plan, the human resource management manual, training and development plan, performance management, organization values and the discipline and grievance policy. Comparisons were drawn between the variations in policy and actual events in the field. Testing the recommended actions was the final method. This featured discussions with the CEO in view of the initial findings in the field and recommendations for action. These were tested for efficacy in solving the problem as identified. The field testing was a unique method of data collection in this study but there is no documented precedence found for reference however, it complimented the four methods.

The methods complimented each other giving the data credibility. The interview responses were for example cross checked against observations and the analysis of the video recordings to make a determination of what was truly happening by use of evidence. To give weighting to the implications of

findings from the first part of the questionnaire and to bring perspective, the responses from participants was quantified in percentage to establish the significance of an issue across interviewees which was then applied comparatively with other data. Direct quotes, summations and paraphrased text from transcripts were used to interpret findings against other sources of data. Todd (1979) asserted that multiple viewpoints on a phenomenon provided greater accuracy.

Events that happened relative to other activities were noted for their causation. The goal was to identify a problem and analyze root cause using multiple data from different sources to explore areas that merit further action to reach an acceptable conclusion. A balanced outlook was pursued by obtaining the CEO's perspective. This was to discount presupposition about participants' views and counterpoise the data to create other avenues of interrogation. These were supported by codes to represent an issue of significance and to facilitate the developing of a broad storyline.

Methods such as a case study, surveys and focus groups were not used as they risked exposing participants' identity. As shown by Morgan (1997), focus group review observes group interaction and data can easily be attached to an individual. Case studies was considered less generalizable because of dynamism of situations. But using the video recordings helped to store data that could be reviewed repeatedly and that could help come to different interpretations whereas, administering the questionnaire provoked deep reflection and brought hidden data such as deep feelings and discomforting information to the fore.

Participants being made aware of my role as purely academic was intended to alleviate the fear that I may have influence over them an example being during their performance evaluation. It was therefore important to give assurance through participant information sheet and consent form. To overcome power distance, I managed to retrieve the data for this study by building trust and rapport that helped inspire confidence.

How data was analyzed and synthesized

I passed three different sets of analytical routines for this project. These were act 4 teams coding, the standard practices for qualitative data analysis and Interaction Process Analysis. These three approaches were integrated in organizing and management. Coding was performed using act 4 teams coding

scheme for team meetings (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Wilenbrock 2012) as cited by Lehmann-Willenbrock *et al* (2013). Using the act 4 teams concept, four types of data on team interaction were identified. These were problem focused statements, procedural statements, socio emotional statements, and action-oriented statements as shown by Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012). These are key constituents of talk that were sufficient to bring different perspectives in the study. From the research questions, participants' responses would help establish extent of their dissatisfaction in highlighted segments. From the four, 50 codes were classified from the data. The act 4 teams coding scheme was applicable across wide range of group interaction leading to a stream of sequentially coded behaviors.

Act 4 team's model helped address research questions and highlighted behavioral categories. These categories were then applied in the video interactions to interpret data. Suitable for group settings discussing problems and seeking to make decisions, act 4 teams provided insights into temporal dynamics and moment to moment verbal conduct Kauffeld *et al* (2018). This further helped in sequencing and annotating video data. The unit of analysis constituted the smallest meaningful segment of behaviour highlighting social dynamics at meetings.

For open ended questions, the standard practices for qualitative data analysis by Miles and Huberman (1994) was applied. An example of a question was "what are the types of issues that respondents felt they could not raise and the reasons for this reluctance?" Of the issues that emerged some had to be split to provide more granular information to provide a fine-grained distinction as recommended by Milliken *et al* (2003). This was to ensure no aspect of divergent data was lost. As a second example, in response to the question "why are you silent in meetings?" responses included one did not understand the issues, others were apprehensive that decisions had been made ahead of time an indication that meetings are called to sanitize decisions. The response had two opposite dimensions hence assigned two distinct codes. The first text "not understanding" was taken to mean "lack of focus." The second portion of text was classified as "way forward already decided." This ration can be considered to mean lack of "inclusivity." After several iterations, a checklist capturing all issues from the transcripts was developed for further examination.

Miles and Huberman (1994) definition of analysis is three-fold i.e. data reduction, data display and drawing of conclusions. Data reduction happened throughout the study essentially reducing the number

of data records and eliminating those that are invalid. This can also be anticipated prior to collection. Data reduction refers to selecting, abstracting and transforming data from transcriptions. As collection continued, further episodes of reduction occurred such as summations, coding and teasing out themes, developing clusters and writing memos after every field work. Reduction also entailed making decisions on data meant for coding, establishing and understanding patterns for final conclusions to be drawn. The same process has been termed "data condensation" (Tesch 1990) as cited by Miles and Huberman (1994).

Finally, data was analyzed using Bales (1950) Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) method that studies small groups' interpersonal interaction. As proposed by Liu and Maitlis (2014), the analysis was primarily grounded in the observational data such as video recordings and transcripts. Upon labeling usable text, data was compiled and organized. This was the basis for developing an analytical thread that united and integrated the major themes. IPA gave an accurate assessment of relationships, patterns, distributions including areas of convergence and contradictions. As an observer, I recorded the source and target of expressive acts and classified them into twelve pre-determined categories for example showing friendliness, displaying tension, expressing acceptance, providing suggestions and asking for opinion for more analysis.

These three approaches were integrated from a causal, relational and methodological dimension. I developed knowledge and insights previously unavailable in a single analytical approach by corroborating the outcomes of the three forms of analysis. In this 3 approaches, integration of the analysis was done at both the understanding and reporting level largely through cross pollination of data, joint analysis and visualization of the possible end states. This meant deeper cohesion and broader understanding that resulted in a more holistic analysis of issues. Accordingly, there were complimentary findings that gave stimulus for further development during data integration.

How codes developed and findings evolved.

This part provides a step by step descriptive statement of data analysis, coding assignment and theme development. I did preliminary work in advance of assigning codes on data. This offered insight, intuition and prior impressions to code Creswell (2007). A guiding principle came from Thomas (2003) advocating super ordinate, parallel and subordinate categories based on commonalities or causal relationships to

analyzing codes. There were 270 codes at the beginning of the study that steadily and systemically came down to 76, 60, 18, to the final 4 themes. Words, phrases and paragraphs that met a pre-determined criteria were isolated and marked with a code. The study covered wide responses which were later reduced to identifiable points based on their uniqueness and later reduced based on commonalities. There was also a data exclusion standard. These were texts that were either too broad or insignificant. Codes such as 'a need to be organized', 'focus on few items', and 'digression' were dropped because they were covered by other codes such as "poor management." Their delineations were blurred making it difficult to draw the difference.

In some cases it was difficult to classify and code data with specificity. Participants were invited to give their perspective for context. This is because the initial coding involved data interpretation. Codes did not only describe what I sought to find out but also described what was found upon synthesizing data. For interviews, participants were quizzed after observing them in two separate meetings and on reviewing sections of video recordings. This helped with a crucial appraisal and reflection ahead of the interviews. These interviews were done at ICL offices and in private locations. They lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. To build confidence, an interview was preceded by a declaration that the study was debunking a question on organisational growth as dependent on talk and inclusivity considering the low social emotional connections.

Transcripts from the 4 methods were read 4 times before and during the coding exercise with each reading enhancing the development of the codes towards telling a story. The initial data making up the codes were entered verbatim into a table designed to highlight the family tree of codes, the categories that emerged and the final themes. This was to simplify and track the classifications to show how they developed. Fragments included quotes from participants as well as text. Examples are the word 'repetition' and the phrase 'being thrown under the bus.' These gave descriptions of participants' responses and descriptions of the context in which these responses were given. These were eventually coded as 'lack of traction and focus' and 'fear' respectively in the first analysis.

Codes were developed in two ways either according to the meaning assigned to data or the actual content common with phrases. Each fragment was coded with one label although some had more specifically those with multiple aspects. The initial coding process was fast and relatively easy covering

broad ideas. Everything was coded including those that could not be sustained. On the third level of coding, I made comparisons, adjusted, dropped or complemented data as necessary. Terms such as avoiding the spotlight and staying in the shadows were represented by synonyms. Words such as anxiety were linked with closely related words as they led to the deduction of a 'climate of fear'. On the 4th version of coding, the definitions were clearer and only a few more new codes came up triggered by additional questions for new context.

The coded texts were undertaken in the style of a grounded theory approach. The category headings were generated ensuring all of the data was accounted for minor modifications being made following discussions with participants. This was after labelling where phrases and sentence were a lot more preferred than words as they captured complete ideas not needing a lot of explanation to convey meaning.

I applied intuition to give meaning to data. Each step in coding had a higher level of generality before funnelling down to reveal explicit and implicit meanings on refining information. I identified links to various elements of data showing relationships and using participants' perspective on their particular experiences to ascribe meaning. Reflexivity helped question data and the understanding indorsed. Codes such as "harsh responses", "care not to complicate an issue" and "tension that one might be thrown under the bus" represented "uncertainty." On combining with "unquestioning respect of authority" led the study to a sub-theme of "fear of not knowing." The codes initially grouped as "willingness to contribute with reservations" produced the climate of fear as a theme.

Codes were grouped into 16 themes initially before being condensed to 4. Every analytical theme was supported by several sub-themes. The theme lack of focus with fragments as shown on table 4 for instance had sub themes like meeting preparedness, willingness to contribute and misalignment of priorities. Upon full compilation, I examined the meaning of each theme and its relations with the others to correlate and see if the variables have a causal relationship. This was authenticated by juxtaposing, comparing and contrasting the data. In the categories segment and just as was done with the codes, I entered the construction phase where I assigned a label to each cluster covering a similar or near similar message and placing them in common folders. This is where the level of abstraction of data analysis was improved and the themes created. This took grouping of a large range of codes with similarity that could

be generalized despite their variety of detail. The theme became the recurrent unifying idea that characterized experiences as shown in text.

Codes such as 'keeping quiet because of the complexity of the issues" was repeated severally albeit differently highlighting a pattern in multiple situations such as 'lack of capacity.' This equally resulted to themes developed through intellectual judgment. The themes also captured something important in relation to the overall research question. A multi-faceted question "do you have the confidence to contribute your ideas?" was used to unveil the staff capacity to engage at senior levels bringing a counter balance to findings. Equally, I compared and contrasted coded text and asked myself what this was about or an example of and how it differed from other data to see what theme it represented. This helped detect consistent and overarching themes that eventually told the story.

On how themes were determined, I adopted Thomas & Harden (2008) free coding of findings, their organisation into related areas to construct themes. I also found the themes through intuition. Reading and rereading transcripts helped develop constructs presented in data. I pulled out the trend of the participants' perspectives and traced back using direct quotations from transcription. Writing reflective notes allowed me to examine the evidence and the sources however, I remained guarded on my own standpoint to ensure important data was not lost or distorted in the process. Themes were also developed from repeated words. Looking at the words people used repeatedly helped understand what people were talking about. I took the words that occurred a lot as salient in the minds of respondents. The word focus and its synonyms for example was cited 15 times in the transcribed text. Put in context, the repeated use of this word was understood to mean inability to maintain attention in a sustained manner occasioning a theme.

On the final four themes, each encapsulated the essences of what it was about and signalled aspects of data each theme captures in relation to the research question. For example, a total of 23 codes were compressed to establish one category styled "inclusivity and involvement." These codes were initially divided into three sub-themes being exclusion, actively involved and lack of inclusivity. The data that brought them about were for instance, 'opinions not valued' and "prolonged monologue" for the first sub-theme, "discouraged to talk" for the second and discouragement and "CEO directing staff" for the

third respectively. These were classified as such because of the meanings that came up repeatedly from data. The same applied to the other themes as they responded to the research questions.

LIMITATIONS OF METHODOLOGY

There were difficulties in the study. The methods and other aspects of the study had problems from very specific to general. One very challenging complication was moderator bias that skewed observations and the arguments made to fit a certain narrative or align with my pre-understanding. Inevitably, I was prejudiced in my thinking. This was informed and confined to my previous experiences. I was also blind to the real occurrence seeing events as either normal or making them meet a certain criteria within my understanding. I had the misguided notion that I knew the fix to the problems because of my years in practice. The deviant outlook was difficult to surmount but pivotal in shaping the study. This is because a critical outlook would better determine what was seen or heard, what was thought as happening and how it was felt the problem can be solved differently. This limitation became more profound with role duality making full objectivity problematic. There was therefore a need to question the thinking behind my thinking. Since my mindset was powered by my past experience, there was a need for verifiable data that helps to argue for merit. Viewing an occurrence through multiple lens to appropriate meaning, accounts of participants' realities Creswell and Miller (2000) would either be approved or disapproved with justification.

Another limitation from (Van Dyne *et al* 2003) cited in Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) was employee silence during data collection. Silence has been attributed to either employees not having anything to say or a tacit agreement with the status quo borne out of fear and uncertainty (Tangirala and Ramanujam, 2008). This made it difficult to get information. It was problematic to cognize why staff hold back questions, ideas, information, or opinions as stated in Dalal (2005).

Also remarkable was the attribution to errors in the observer's understanding and assessment of employee deviance. More complex and highly limiting is where employees publicly "express" agreement with the viewpoints of others within their workgroup or seniors whereas they contradict the very same privately, surreptitiously suppressing hidden thoughts according to (Hewlin 2003 and Zand 1972) as cited by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008). As a result, the evaluation of an employee's silence may not have been accurate. As an observer, such ratings were more likely to reflect my broad impressions and

implicit theories about the employees rather than any independent assessments of the internal private choice of the employee to remain silent as asserted by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008).

Other peripheral limitations were the constraint of time and the irregularity of those attending the senior management team meetings whose inconsistency affected correctness of data collected. It was also apparent that participants put an act during video recording, offering 'safe' responses. This led to socially acceptable acts and responses misrepresenting outcomes including body language in certain instances. There was also a genuine concern with the possibility of biased interpretations of the responses and other data. It was common for participants to react and give responses based on what had happened to them most recently. A good event attracted positive responses. This ignored the fact that recent happenings were not the norm but isolated events making such data outright outliers. This was caused by an orientation to recall latest happenings. The following actions however compensated these limitations:

1) Measures to protect and maintain confidentiality for staff were instituted.
2) Perspectives were put through critical thinking and assessed by others.
3) Study undertaken within a normal meeting context where they encountered what they were already exposed to.
4) The study model ensured voluntary participation with freedom to exit without explaining.

Methodological limitations were also recognized. As avidly put by Garcez *et al* (2011), video footage were not evidence of reality but productions almost as subjective as a field journal. To moderate, recordings were subjected to critical evaluation and triangulation. It was noted that when behavior is observed and recorded, participants' mental processes in the discussion are influenced to putting an "act" as observed in meeting 3. This is corroborated by (Wicklund 1975) cited by Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) who argued that most staff admitted to fear of inversion of privacy leading to a self-depreciative behavior during video recordings. These limitations did not however alter the overall significance of the conclusion.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To adhere to the truth, collaboration and accountability, appropriate measures were instituted. First the participants were recruited through a non-coercive process with a 7 day reflective period in which they could agree, decline or discontinue participation without consequence. This period had no theoretical backing but simply an allowance to share concerns. Formal authority for the study was sought from the ICL Africa CEO and the Board for access to organizational facilities and the staff to extract required data. My role as a consultant at ICL provided an autonomy to think through problems, take action and explore the consequence of those actions without hindrance. This was because the anticipated discomfort was not greater than any ordinarily encountered in the daily work life of participants.

To allay ethical concerns, an ethics approval form, participant consent form and participant information sheet from the University of Liverpool were duly processed. Participants were made to understand approach to the study with the emphasis that it was purely voluntary. An express undertaking was made on maintaining confidentiality during engagement with participants and their data. The protection of the identification of participants during and after the study was guaranteed.

A register of participants was maintained for records and controlled with strictness. However with the senior staff being in attendance at all meetings, the data of participants was still exposed. The follow up conversations that revealed the more discomforting information, the detailed meeting proceedings and the interpretations was however protected. The records for those that had not accepted participation in the study were expunged. Equally, where participants were unhappy, their contribution were not to be transcribed. However, no participants raised any concerns for the duration of the study.

Another assurance was the granting of a formal letter of engagement from ICL Africa. The letter was an express authority to join the organization as the Academic Consultant. To consolidate, the participants signed the consent form signifying their agreement to be part of the study. A Participant Information Sheet was shared with the participants to give them a detailed understanding of the project and its implications. To recruit, each participant was approached on a one on one basis to obtain their informed decision and to answer any questions that they had. Participants were made aware of my commitment to complete the study within six months. This ensured that participants understood the magnitude of the challenge with a provision for participants to also escalate any issues as they saw fit through a

process. Besides accepting the terms and conditions of the study, participants got relief from the ethics approval process of research by the University.

On completion of administering these instruments of data collection, the raw data collected was systematically organized to facilitate examination. This was to help come to some useful conclusions and recommendations on what was found, establish patterns and the relationships. The four themes were identified to unify learning and ensure a viable research statement.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.

INTRODUCTION.

This chapter shows how the study arrived at the four themes and the subsequent parts discusses them in detail followed by CEO perspective, what I learned from analysing the themes, the recommendations and conclusion.

How the Themes emerged from Data

The process from initial codes to the second stream of codes and eventually to the sub-themes helped convey the final themes. The data led me inductively and from the pursuant analysis steered my conclusions. The entire process was emergent unveiling the research journey that I travelled. Coding, which is the "critical link" between data collection and their explanation of meaning (Charmaz 2001) cited by Sadana (2016) formed a major part of the process. For this study, codes symbolically assigned a summative, salient or an essence-capturing meaning for portions of text. The first cycle of coding ranged from a single word, a sentence to a full paragraph and images. The second phase of the coding process was through analytic memos and reconfiguration of the codes themselves classified and condensed along certain commonalities or assigned different inference upon further analysis and reflection. These better illustrated the issues which upon sense making, themes emerged to explain data. These was done when the research was halfway through. The data collected were to answer the 3 key research questions. These were: 1) why do meetings that are task based with little social emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk; 2) when does managerial openness and two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African led organization, and; 3) how can an African styled organization create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff.

This part highlights sections of data, how they coalesced around specific research questions and the themes they developed. The tables provide a snapshot of data generated that also served as evidence to support findings upon analysis. Starting with the theme climate of fear Table 3, it highlights the work place malaise manifest by fear and uneasiness. The situation that cause silence is explained while tacitly suggesting scope for phenomenal turnaround through relationship building. As an example the phrase "CEO instilling fear" helped search the body of text for additional data within the transcripts to additionally prove "fear" such as one way communication. Other codes in support of this code came

from words such as "afraid", "brave", "worried", "concerned", "avoiding consequence" and "the risk of being labelled" - all connoting a sense of anxiety and uncertainty as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. A Climate of Fear

Theme - A Climate of Fear
Data for Research questions 1
1. Prolonged silence and anxiety. 2. Preferential treatment others feeling as outsiders. 3. One man made decisions alone. 4. Environment not for conducive for free talk. 5. Dismissing suggestions, contributions not valued. 6. Side talk over tea breaks with quiet lamentation. 7. Looking subdued, felt like being put on the spot. 8. Scared to ask questions directly. 9. Fear of conflict. 10. Feeling of not being competent and staff speak always in support of CEO. 11. One way communicating. 12. Afraid, fearful, worried, concerned, consequence, being labeled, panic, anxiety and caution. Insensitive, hierarchical culture. 13. Being measured in speaking. 14. Discouraged to talk/victimization.
Data for Research questions 3
1. CEO interjected to influence outcome. 2. "I don't want to be viewed as confrontational." 3. "I must avoid the spotlight and stay in the shadows." 4. Penalties during performance reviews. 5. More amenable, talking to CEO felt like a scold, Responses were harsh. 6. Let your concerns be your own problems…."being honest makes the problem bigger." 7. Low Staff morale and self-esteem.

A couple of these words and their synonyms were repeated severally. The recurrence revealed and confirmed a fundamental problem gravitating around being fearful. Upon physically sorting other examples of expressions and images into piles of similar meaning in the second coding process, additional words arose. This gave greater sense to the original codes with words and phrases such as panic, anxiety and being cautious. They all converged to a common theme that symbolised a state of panic. Identical phrases included "being harsh", "dismissive responses" from the CEO, and a need to "be careful." These were striking in the minds of respondents. Additionally, the codes came from participant perspective that were both negative and indifferent. These demonstrated and qualified a respondent's

assertions showing disapproval with "the insensitive way in which the CEO corrects us in meetings" and a feeling of being "very frustrated but remaining timid."

The above alluded to disenfranchisement from subjugation mainly from fear of punitive action. There was a distaste of monologue conversations that was prevalent and which isolated junior staff. This was made profound by the insensitivity to participants' emotional wellbeing as shown by CEO's declaration that it did not matter whether one was sick, they had to attend meetings otherwise their absence will be met with stern disciplinary action." To ease analysis, these labels were assigned to this cluster by virtue of covering codes that communicated similar meanings. Eventually, they helped to make a determination on what the greater meaning was.

The issues were relatively the same in the theme lack of focus. The theme showed encumbrances to effectively delivering meeting objectives. This led to an indignant resignation of participants that impacted work. I read piles of text from transcripts and noted words and synonyms that participants used severally to express lack of focus. For example, study partakers variously referred to the issue of repetitions in meetings as a problem. It was common for discussions in previous meetings to find their way back in the current meeting without reasonable cause. I understood this to mean lack of structures to logically guide meetings for completeness. The codes indicated that this issue was important to participants being a recurring theme at ICL meetings. Lack of focus became a unifying idea characterizing the experience of most participants. The comparison of data, codes and the 2nd level codes generated and suggested a plausible theme highlighting absence of attention and genuine application of self towards progressive engagements. Over and above the code relating to repetitions, a participant volunteered other pressing concerns affecting focus with the pronouncement that most issues of discussions remained unresolved. Alternatively, they were not conclusively disposed of. Supporting data that best amplify this concern are listed on Table 4 below. Lack of focus was a subtle admission that meetings lack leadership and that conversations had irretrievably failed.

Table 4. <u>Lack of Focus.</u>

Theme - Lack of Focus.
Data for Research question 1
1. Minimal and slow progress. 2. Straying from agenda and little urgency. 3. Frustrated of non-official discussions. 4. Monologue by CEO and few dominant voices. 5. Apathy from uncoordinated structure and unclear objectives. 6. No follow up of previous actions 7. Issues important to staff unattended. 8. Meetings did not change work experience hence taken less seriously. 9. Agreed actions not practical often out of context. 10. Fidelity to the agenda. 11. No preparation and poor planning and presentation without prior warning. 12. Uncertainty, avoid upsetting CEO through contradictions. 13. Irrelevance and little consultation. 14. Mental absence and low capacity of junior staff. 15. No structure on who is to speaks. 16. Relevant people not present and relevance of participants not considered.
Data for Research question 2
1. Pressing issues were ignored and time not observed. 2. Issues requiring resources were never discussed. 3. CEO introduced matters not listed for discussions. 4. No policies to govern meetings - No guidelines to running meetings. 5. Meetings limited in content. "I leave a meeting not knowing what was achieved and whether I was needed." 6. Agenda not shared on time, not followed and objectives seldom met. 7. Overlap of issues being discussed. 8. Repetitions. 9. No continuity in the conversations - logical buildup of arguments. 10. Expurgate arguments midstream. 11. Excessive digression. "Unwarranted answers, thin, too detailed or amorphous." 12. No post meeting reviews, status updates.
Data for Research questions 3
1. All inclusive agenda setting. 2. Policies and processes. 3. Make topics central. "Keep agenda light and drive for outputs." **4.** Coordinated deliberations.

Codes such as poor time management, lack of clarity, unclear objectives and no structure were repeated in a way that showed a pattern from multiple situations. There consolidation brought out broader issues

that best explained the trend. On connecting these with another set of second level codes such as lack of meeting preparedness and a multiple attention to issues affecting a smooth flow of discussions, I was able to crystalize this with related data whose interpretation brought a unified understanding that helped establish this theme. Similarly, other codes coming from an argument from Ivana, a study participant that "I was lost and others too", the introduction of unrelated items from the original agenda and lack of direction on what should come to senior management team meetings occurred. These helped develop and consolidate the theme.

Upon sorting, these codes ended up in piles of similar meaning showing lack of a structured approach. Lack of orderliness on who speaks and why tilted focus on what was important particular to the CEO. From these, the labels that gave a sense of the main idea developed. Some vital sub-themes that emerged connecting to the main theme included incompleteness from not addressing the most important issues, not progressive in building arguments and little strategic content arising from insignificance of strategic discourse. These consisted summaries and examples drawn from participants' accounts and were the elements that built this theme. In addition to thinking that facilitative methods in meetings could help, I started to notice that ill structured and often repeated topics bored people, and although the CEO recognized the problem, he appeared unable to give up his 'big man' identity to help focus people. This showed lack of clarity and disorganisation as admitted to by the CEO himself.

Next was power dynamics. This signified how authority was exercised and the results. The relationships among the codes was connected by a participant's declaration that "I can't contradict the boss since being disagreeable is seen as negative and conceited." To explain, the following features of participants' accounts embodied their perceptions and experiences. Most were relevant and were attuned to a research question which was how an African styled organization can create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff. Codes such as "my way or no way" a crumpled body language seen by the gait of a participant on video and the sitting arrangement showing the power arrangements were relevant labels attached to what I found in words, image and used phrases from the sequence of text being analysed. Coding the text in this way helped build my understanding of the data. They were then classified into an expanded code 2 upgrading the sub-theme to dominance of the CEO. The consolidation on commonalities led to a higher level of categorisation of two sub-themes being a limited say for staff and restrictive traditional protocols. More data is offered on Table 5 covering elements

such as a silent observers, listeners, a feeling of being inferior and expected conformity indexed to give reference.

Table 5. Dynamics of Power and influence

Theme - Dynamics of Power and influence
Data for Research question 1
1. Central command. 2. Pay for work engagement. 3. Long established relationships thrive. 4. One may be called in for appraisal, performance review used as a tool. 5. Let bosses speak as a matter of protocol. 6. Sitting arrangements at SMT. 7. Authoritative gestures. 8. Staff are reprimanded, bullied. 9. CEO directives. 10. Insubordination. 11. A top down tone. 12. Use of self-effacing language. 13. The big man mentality. 14. Patronizing and condescending - uncivil words such as "not very good manners" 15. Protocol to not speak after your supervisor.
Data for Research question 2
1. Power distance. "careful with what we say"
Data for Research question 3
1. "Junior staff put up a show" and "divergent opinion cause friction."

These data developed from reading transcriptions and assigning meaning whilst looking for abstractions in participants' accounts. This was followed by reflective action that led me to interrogate a participant's response on why they do not contribute their ideas in the senior management team meetings. Arguments such as "he is the owner and in any case, the CEO is pushing a certain narrative" or "decisions were already made by the time we convene" sufficed.

For involvement and inclusivity, the theme brings attention to decision making. The comment made by Harry a participant that "my opinion is not sought or welcome apart from those issues that are specific to my area" in an interview was particularly helpful in elucidating his account. This was coded as lack of active listening initially and upon intense reflection I assigned it a broader meaning which was not

inviting participants input also treated as the second code. Armed by other 2nd level codes such as who talks, how they talk and why helped establish two sub-themes styled as unilateral decision making and pre-conceived outcomes making these meetings appear as formalities designed to sanitise CEO position on a matter. On sense making, I devised the theme of Involvement and Inclusivity motivated mainly by the lack of it and which encapsulates the bigger issue afflicting ICL as itemised on Table 6.

Table 6. Inclusivity and involvement

Theme - Inclusivity and involvement
Data for Research question 1
1. Staff found conversations too technical and complex.
2. Staff not invited to participate.
3. Not involved in decision making/no consultation.
4. CEO did all the talking. "….most people ask what their relevance is.
5. Lack of advance knowledge on what is up for discussion.
6. "Shut from talking" A dialogue of two for spells of time to the exclusion of others.
7. Speaking depended on one's personality.
Data for Research question 2
1. Seldom get listened to.
2. Often put on my defense.
3. Irritated by the opposing remarks hence the CEO directs conversations.
Data for Research question 3
1. Raising issues lead to polarization.
2. CEO prefer to communicate directly.

The key characteristic of this theme was the systematic process of coding and a description of the social reality. As an example, Gloria, a participant feeling "alienated" attested to CEO submission that "meetings were very complex and only a few staff could handle" which he found frustrating. This part had a high degree of generality that required unification of ideas. This helped scrutinize a thread of underlying meaning discovered at the interpretative level of coding and this was because most were based on subjective understandings of participants and my interpretation of the data as the researcher.

Built from a category of data encompassing doubt on whether staff opinion is valued and in the selective acceptance of ideas and inclusion in decision making, a primary product of analytical process was used at the beginning of the theme development to broadly classify these findings. These were purely a

simple description of participants' accounts followed by the more implicit and abstract theme requiring some interpretation. The constructs recognized and presented an illustrative second code styled as a "feeling of inadequacy" emanating from meeting preparedness and "complexity of the issues." This helped trace the participants' perspectives mainly direct quotations from the transcriptions such as "most are prompted but others keep quiet because of the complexity of the issues" and "what are we talking about, what is my relevance?" This brought about the sub-themes of lack of capacity and strong personality and the need for safety preferring to stay in the shadows. For this theme, looking in these pool of data helped recognise explicit and implicit ideas that led to my judgement considered from a raft of possible meanings. Consolidating them also aided the final clue towards developing this theme giving credence to the inconsistency inferred. The next section delves into greater detail on the themes based on a greater portfolio of evidence.

LACK OF FOCUS

Do meetings with little social engagement bring inclusivity in talk? Little progress is made from senior management team meetings. Guided by what developed this theme, discussions in meetings often drifted from listed agenda items occasionally leading to staff disinterest and disengagement. For example, in one video footage, a male participant looked frustrated, his chin held on two palms of his hands as he looks down with elbows resting on the table as participants discussed the political situation in Kisumu town that followed the general elections 7 years ago. This discussion was not related to ICL business transaction neither was it associated to the value chain proposition that was under discussions. In the African context, this body language symbolized exasperation. Amplified by a participant's roving eyes from one wall to the other, rubbing his neck aggressively as he stairs blankly on the wall It was clear the meeting had detoured as Harry, a study participant later confirmed.

A section of staff appeared to enjoy the meetings and were animated in their contribution but which were unrelated to the items listed for discussion. On a side interview with one participant over coffee, he expressed disenchantment with the quality of meetings that motivated silence arguing that "when it is not clear what we are discussing and why, I don't know what is expected of me, I feel that the issues that were important to me are overlooked yet I have no sufficient social capital with the CEO to register my concerns." He admitted that some staff enjoyed the casual coming as interjections from the CEO in between serious discussions. A staff admitted that the easy chat "removed pressure on participants by

reducing tension" removing focus from the major issues. As a result, they allowed it to escalate. Benita admitted that "this offered relief and reduced time allocated to discussing the main issues which worked for me as I do not have to worry about what I have not done that I am required to report about."

Progression and the buildup of conversations was slow. As highlighted, discussions often diverted to unrelated issues away from the agenda items listed for discussions. In other situations, talk was a monologue where the CEO did most of the talking while staff listened. Dialogue was limited to a few voices that were seen as dominant but frequently spoke in support of the CEO which explained the apathy. On the sixth meeting for example and following a protracted exchange between the CEO and two of his protégés, the video recording and field observations showed disenchanted staff. They were engaging with their electronic devices with side conversations. Fred is seen whispering to Ivana. They exchange glances, fall into muted laughter as the CEO spoke. Esther, is fiddling with her phone. Asked to explain, Fred confessed to feeling isolated. He did not understand "what the CEO was talking about and what actions he expects from us" a result of which "I find myself wandering" he adds.

A puzzling incident ensued in meeting 5. The CEO strode out of the meeting briefly and events that followed gave the indication that staff had no temerity to indulge him in raising their concerns as they took advantage of his absence to vent among themselves. It also revealed the extent to which focus in meetings on the projects ICL undertakes was low. Esther laments the delay in completing a project 2 years later stating "why are we still discussing this document two years on and are we really resolute on completing it?" Desperate, she adds that "at this point I don't know what else to say." I followed this up with her via a telephone conversation and she blamed the situation on uncoordinated meetings with no effective provisions for follow up. "We never realize the benefits of the projects we do" she said. Although ICL undertook several projects at a time, Charles shared that "senior management meetings focused on a few" lamenting that staff issues that arose were not addressed "further alienating them."

On her part, Benita's claim gave more credence to the question of focus arguing that decisions are not well executed. According to her, in many occasions, a "change" on how things should be done was agreed but as soon as the new process was approved and commenced, "staff reverted to the old ways of doing things." The lapse gave comfort from disruptions and as a result, staff took meetings "less seriously" and so it made no sense to give suggestions," she stated. This was reiterated by David who

expressed that "the meetings change the way we do things for a period of time then we go back to the old ways which is disconcerting for me." Meetings failed to change his work experience. Harry being a lot more direct and bringing a twist to the argument said "the agreed actions are normally not practical since issues are discussed in a way that does not give clear directions." Ivana similarly questioned the value junior staff add in these meetings and admitted feeling acquiescent.

Harry felt that discussions were kept out of context by staff to deflect from the real issues and avoid being exposed negatively. The evidence for this assertion was however not obtained from the data collected, I established that there was no fidelity to the agenda. For instance, in the 4th meeting of the study the CEO sneaked an item for discussion in the morning of the meeting without warning. Consequently and looking perplexed, Ivana is seen in the video recording looking at Gloria with quizzing eyes. She had no prior notice that the CEO would have her make a presentation. This was another item sneaked in for discussions. "This put me in a difficult situation" she later remarked but admitted lacking the courage to refuse to present. To emphasize this point, in meeting 1, a discussions on funding a programme by supporting volunteers listed in the agenda was not complete when the CEO introduced yet a new item for discussion by inviting an IT consulting firm to make a presentation not previously listed for deliberations.

Poor planning was common with little regard to orderly administration of meetings according to David. At ICL, I detected an autocratic leadership approach where business is transacted at the behest and urgings of the leader. The Kenya African tradition of staying quiet in the presence of senior leadership was evident highlighting the different social stratifications. The stoic nature of ICL was a reality in how leaders and teams organize at the work place making it difficult to engage effectively. It was therefore difficult to guarantee uncertainty avoidance. As a result of poor planning, staff were uncertain. To be asked to do a presentation without warning was an ambush to the participant. In frustration, her eyes, voice and tone were tense. She was low on confidence as she stammered. This ignominy is further manifest with Harry being cynical in his pronouncement that "I am not clear on what meeting I was called for or what it planned to achieve." On a subsequent telephone conversation, he confesses that "I do not know why this meeting was called, what it was designed to achieve and why I was invited to attend in the first place." This is corroborated by Charles in meeting 3. He confides that he did not know why he was asked to attend the day's meeting as he was not familiar with the issues under discussion

nor were the issues relevant to his department. He could however not bring this to the attention of the CEO.

To magnify this disconnect, a senior manager lamented that the CEO did not consult others ahead of meetings. "I get equally surprised at what has been listed for discussions, my concerns are never considered when formulating the agenda" he adds. In a few occasions the CEO is seen indulging staff although it was half spirited and mostly when they appeared to be wandering away. To put participants on check, he asked such questions as "are we together?" in the middle of his address to staff. This question was rhetorical according to David arguing the CEO did not wait for a response moving to the next item swiftly. In another example, he asks what participants felt about a presentation he did in a previous meeting regarding a revised organization structure. His tone is directing, apparently seeking agreement on his decision. According to Ivana, this issue "was not open to debate and inviting our feedback was a formality." The staff know that a "decision has already been made" even when called upon to give their thoughts.

Viewed in the video recording of meeting 4, the body language of majority of staff showed mental absence. Four participants were seen looking down and fiddling with their hands and pens during the entire duration of this meeting. They were also careful not to be seen to correct the CEO or question his decisions. Sometimes the silence was out of expediency to be seen in good light. Ivana argued thus "let me not speak as I don't want to complicate the issue any further…. and this is because it has taken so much time already." In her admission, she did not want to upset the CEO. This was her response to the question on whether she ever felt constrained to speak out honestly and if she thought discussions were structured and focused.

Streamlining the meetings and ensuring open participation by staff was also hindered by staff capacity. Gloria, a middle level manager opined that low capacity of junior staff was a deterrent to quality discussions and focus, "I go for a meeting and come out at the end feeling it was a waste." She also felt that staff contribution was weak and could not sustain an effective focus on the issues that were most important. There was for instance a conflict between Gloria argument on the need for training of volunteers on the matter of the procedural manual in the management of HIV and AIDs. She was

responding to Ann comments about lack of impact assessment criteria for HIV prevalence in the regions that ICL served.

Senior staff avoided contradicting the CEO. They avoided direct eye contact for fear of drawing his attention. This partly demonstrated the fiasco that was the focus required to sustain conversations at meetings. In meeting 1 for instance, a senior manager joins his junior colleagues in scribbling abstract drawings on their work books, a staff is seen tapping their fingers on the table as the other is biting their nails and scratching the lower part of their jaw then the chin as the CEO spoke. This is in an effort to self-disguise and shows a heightened level of discomfort. We see this repeated in meeting 3 where the eyes of Director of planning are gazing blankly across the room moving to the bare tables for long periods. He occasionally raised his eyes to the ceiling seemingly in thought but later confessed to avoiding the CEO.

In the theme low focus, I collected data to also establish whether new approaches to meetings and managerial openness could promote voice and improve focus. These findings if attended to offers scope to sharpen attention and increase voice at meetings. As a start, it was expected that the CEO thinking and ideas would attract attention and support from other staff. For this to be reversed and allow free engagement, there was need for new meeting technologies. As stated by David a participant, the concern where the most pressing issues in the organization were ignored at the senior management team meetings needed amend. He argues that the "easier issues were discussed conclusively but those that required resources were aborted midstream." I observed meetings lacking in structure leading to irregular outcomes. As noted in all meetings, time to discuss agenda items was not followed. The CEO adopted his preferred format in leading conversations and that included introducing items not listed in the agenda for discussion. There were no policies to govern meetings or other reference points to guide meetings at ICL.

Discussions were based on what the CEO wanted to communicate. These did not encompass the concerns of the rest of staff as highlighted by Ann. In an interview with her, Ann registered apprehension that the meetings solved the main problems affecting ICL. This was echoed by Charles who spoke of "minimal focus to the focal and general issues afflicting ICL." There was the incident at the hallway after meeting 4 when Charles stated that there was no involvement of staff in deciding what was important for discussions. He reiterated that this accounted for the disinterest and poor focus by

staff. More expressional was when a senior manager asserted that "I leave a meeting not knowing whether I was needed in the first place." Asked whether he was satisfied with the outcomes of senior management meetings, Fred responded, "no, the agenda was not shared ahead of time and when shared it was not followed." He felt participants were subdued from voicing, "we are careful with what we say lest we offend the CEO and attract his ire." The meeting objectives were seldom met hence needing a change of tact in managing focus at meetings.

The frequency of meetings was high. Official meetings were held fortnightly but numerous others were ad hoc. These translated to an additional 2 to 3 meetings a day. According to Esther, this was overwhelming to staff who needed time to action decisions and also to do other aspects of their work. Instructively, there were overlaps on items being discussed with a lot of repetitions hampering real "progress" according to Ivana. As seen earlier, revision of the organization structure in the strategic plan appeared for discussions at three separate meetings. In her frustration, Ann exclaimed, "why are we doing this again, did we not discuss this two weeks ago?" More puzzling, the CEO is seen admitting on a recorded video clip that the item had been discussed before but he was bringing it up again to place more emphasis on the change he was proposing.

There was little continuity in conversations at meetings. There was no logical buildup of arguments leading to distortions and reduced focus. There was a tendency to expurgate arguments midstream. An example is found in a conversation between the CEO, Esther and Benita in meeting 3. This evidences a disjointed discussion. The discussion seeks to resolve issues emerging from a value chain proposition of ICL farming produce that have been pending for a long period. The discussion developed as follows, starting with an admission from the CEO that the expected benefits from the project had not been realized and choosing to restart the process all over again:

> CEO - "Julian and Benita will help us with a marketing plan for our value chain"
>
> Benita - "A marketing plan will require a full understanding of the value chain proposition"
>
> CE0 - "Esther has been working on it in last 6 months; she should have something to work with"
>
> Esther - "I have not been able to establish the cost of production and the target markets"
>
> CEO - "Julian and Gloria will help you put that together working with the other consultants"
>
> Benita - "So does the marketing tool wait for these other piece of work?"
>
> CEO - "No you proceed as I had mentioned earlier"

Benita – The seals will require training.

CEO – "That will not be necessary, let's work with the core team……."

The discussion starts from a need to market a product to a pricing models then swiftly moves to an unrelated issue on the use of field officers for training in a different project. The participants simply move along however Benita looks puzzled. She rolls her eyes directing her blank stare at me. This exemplified lack of effective turn taking as argued by Allen and Rogelberg (2013). Lack of management openness see issues such as this remaining unresolved according to Esther.

Time management was the other issue as meetings went beyond stipulated time. This was due to digressions from the main issues. Adherence to time allocation and compliance to the agenda would correct this anomaly if well applied according to Ivana. Fred and Ann shared that often, there was an over indulgence with issues unrelated to main topic of discussion at meetings. Most participants took a simplistic view on major issues, and were less sophisticated in their arguments as they dwelled on what is already known, what Ann called "the obvious" leading to loss of interest and the focus required of participants. Staff openness is required to address this disorder she adds.

Delving deeper on time management, the poor stewardship of time affected the staff focus at meetings. For instance, the 6th meeting was scheduled to terminate at 1.00 pm but having commenced at 8.00 a.m. it went on until 6.00 pm. An agenda item scheduled to take 30 minutes was discussed beyond 2 hours leading to a constraint in time to deliberate other matters. Management openness was likewise lacking as seen in meeting 3. Here, the agenda circulated in the morning prior to the start of the meeting was significantly different from what was originally shared by the CEO's office the previous day. This caused some confusion among the participants. It appeared as though certain issues were masked in secrecy and full disclosure was a rarity. Combined, these issues impacted focus at meetings. An item listed for discussion in the agenda for 9.20 a.m. up to 10.00 a.m. did not start until 11.48 a.m. affecting the program of the day. Ivana also felt there was need to allow "implementation time" by having timely and better structured meetings. In meeting 2, the video footage shows Ann whispering "what are we discussing? Where are we? She later admitted that she had lost track and the flow of the conversation because there was no sequence in talk. With no schedule on how meetings would be conducted, the timelines and who would present at meetings was bound to fail. The meetings had no logical order or actionable conclusions.

There was an issue on objectives and expected outcomes. These were never defined ahead of meetings explaining why focus was a problem. At end of meetings, there were no post meeting reviews. There was lack of continuity from meeting to meeting proving uncoordinated effort and lack of traction. Ivana claimed some speakers "spoke for too long saying nothing" affecting the quality of an already formless meeting. Evidenced by all 6 meetings, there were no updates from previous meetings to show progress.

Lack of inclusivity and focus called for new meeting approaches. This was demonstrated in an interview. Here, Gloria exposed the inner thinking of staff who felt disengaged stating that:

> "In meetings, one thinks they have solved the problem when they have actually and inadvertently created another, I am just seated here making the numbers. I leave meetings frustrated not looking forward to the next."

She was responding to a question on whether she felt junior staff were consulted. This is made more profound when on two occasions the Finance and HR managers were listed as making a presentation at a meeting when they were not in attendance.

There were other findings on how an African organization can improve the situation to boost focus in meetings in-order to create an environment conducive for talk. The findings contribute to the recommendations for actions that sprang from lessons learned. The field observations and feedback from participants showed the agenda making as an appropriate place to start. Not prepared, Fred felt that the early circulation of the agenda was essential to structure conversations and maintain focus at meetings. Supporting policies, processes and procedures were necessary to steer meetings. Ivana shared a story about a meeting she attended in another organization which she felt was well managed:

> "In this organization, there was a discussion concept, a pre agreed list of what would be discussed for the purposes of preparation, items discussed within the allotted time and all participants taking turns." She continues:

> "Participants disagreed readily but respectfully, the agenda was shared ahead of time and was adhered to, a recap on issues agreed and a collective decision recorded."

This showed focus and creates a conducive environment for talk. Participants spoke of the need to make meetings more relevant by addressing topics central to the organization and participants and following through to encourage voice through focus. This would lead to "better time management and focused discussions" according to Fred.

Meetings need harmonization. This would work if the ICL CEO managed them within a conventional framework. To illustrate, consider a situation that Esther, a study participant encountered. She had to contend with demands from the CEO that she thought were unrealistic. Earlier on, she had developed a value chain proposition that the CEO wanted used to generate revenue. From the resulting product, the CEO placed a target of Kenya shillings 500,000.00 in sales per month. This was in the early stages of the new product. The product had not been marketed extensively and neither had it been tested for entry into the market however, Esther was not granted latitude to argue her case. In exasperation, she exclaimed albeit in private, "where will this cash come from?" The issue was not debated as was expected according to Esther. As a rejoinder, Fred felt progressing discussions can be achieved where "the CEO involves others in discussions without dictating and also ensuring an all-encompassing agenda when crafting items for discussion." David adds that "it is about treating people equally and respectfully, allowing them to ventilate and argue their case" in order to give meetings the much needed focus.

Ann felt a need to "keep agenda light and drive for outputs." She asserted that planning was important. With a reducing proportion of old staff to the young and with rapid technological advancement; change on how leaders manage people at meetings was eminent. Dr. Willy Mutunga argued that the old school managers need to change how they pursue meetings to encompass mutuality adding that "you always get different results with focus and inclusion." This resonated with the CEO earlier concerns on lack of preparedness. He is seen on the video clip urging the team by pleading "let's be organized" even as he asks "why are we always unprepared?" According to Benita discussions should focus on daily tasks and spare strategic and technical matters to more senior participants. Appearing disenchanted in meeting 3, Ivana pleaded the need for coordination lamenting "the CEO does things that I have no idea where it is headed….I am lost."

A need for new approaches emphasizing management openness was also evident from the disproportionate responses and information that came from inquiries. Ivana felt that answers were "unwarranted as they were either too thin, too detailed or altogether amorphous" losing the meetings time. To emphasize this point, Fred equated the energy expended in discussing simple issues to a "case of killing a mosquito with a hammer" or "chasing a squirrel instead of an antelope" an indication of misplaced priorities. On this count, Esther and Benita thought meetings were unresponsive. It was disconcerting when in meeting 4, a discussion on service delivery at the regional levels deteriorated into

discussing politics. This went on for 45 minutes negatively impacting two other agenda items. In frustration, Ivana whispers and asks "honestly, where should we be investing our energy and time?"

A CLIMATE OF FEAR

Climate of fear emerged as a theme. The findings under this theme highlight how little social engagements bring inclusivity in talk. This was propelled by the first research question. For context, fear is marked by a state of anxiety which at times goes wrong when an individual anticipates a threat of harm negatively affecting them. At ICL, staff response to fear was maintaining silence. Proximity to the CEO was a factor as it affected how people relate and behave around the CEO specifically in meetings. According to a participant by the name Benita, some staff enjoyed preferential treatment and received greater listening from the CEO making it easier to talk at meetings. But for others, "I feel like an outsider with nothing to say when this group speaks" claimed Esther referring to the small clique that dominates conversations in meetings and who have unfettered access to the CEO. According to Harry, "junior staff rarely spoke as they lacked social capital to engage and this escalated fear" in his thinking. This was made more complex when the CEO thought through issues and made decisions alone. Harry saw it as "isolationist."

Fear made dyadic consultations difficult. In support of this assertion, the staff shared that they had ideas and suggestions that could improve work at ICL but held back. This is best explained by my observations in meeting 4 where the CEO is seen dismissing an opinion from a junior staff, this he did by gently waving away his right hand with a smug smile on his face. In this incident, a budgetary provision for an upcoming project was in dispute. The staff responsible felt the funds allocation he had proposed was adequate enumerating his reasons why. The CEO waved away the merits of his argument expressly giving direction on what will be done instead. On the video footage providing an account of this incident, the staff looked both disappointed and embarrassed. In an apparent look of frustration, he clasped his hands under his chin bending his head to avoid eye contact. Although a staff lobbied to have Kenya Shillings 350 expended to each volunteer field officer undertaking a health assignment in field work and for their expenses, a decision was made to stick with Kenya shillings 250 proposed by CEO. Curtly, the CEO had responded that "just leave it at 250 Kenya Shillings" urging meeting participants to move "away from this conversation." This notwithstanding the merits of the staff proposal. Earlier, an attempt by the concerned staff to present an itemized budget to support his request was rebuffed with

the CEO responding thus "yes you have a point but get your trainers from the 55 officers in our resource pool and pay the 250 Kenya Shillings" effectively ending the discussion. The proposer was seen putting up his hand to interject but gently placed it down in compliance. Asked the reason for his action, he reiterated that he did not "want to be at odds with the CEO." On a side meeting, Fred later whispered that the CEO decision was wrong and that the project would fail although he did not have the courage to pronounce himself on what he thought.

In this episode, staff avoided direct engagement with the CEO for fear of an altercation. Other staff gazed on the ceiling, some were entangled in small talk with their colleagues whereas others exhibited nonchalance evident by their disengagement and a subdued body language with one lamenting softly on the side. There were also long spells of silence. Esther epitomized the sense of fear as she openly looked sympathetic to her colleague. During the exchange, her hands clasped, gazed at her elbow scratching them on occasions as seen in the video recording. On replaying the clip, we can see her a lot more clearly looking disenchanted, rubbing her forehead with the tip of her thump with her eyes glued on the table looking down as the CEO spoke. Sensing the tension, the CEO introduces another topic and asks Esther an unrelated question in an effort to divert the conversation. Asking her why the value chain proposition had failed was diversionary but the tone used jolts her as she is caught unawares. In her fearful response, she utters a few words albeit incoherently. Unconvinced, the CEO comments about her poor work ethos. This effectively brings the earlier budget conversation to an end. Meanwhile Esther is uneasy fearing she could be in trouble as she later confides.

In meeting 5, the CEO declined a suggestion made by staff on how to use the Balanced Score Card during performance appraisal. As a practitioner, I was in agreement that Charles was making a valid point when he posited that the organization consider extending the probation period for new staff from three to six months to give them ample time for orientation before expecting results. He felt it was expensive and unreasonable to recruit a staff only to terminate their contract after 3 months due to "poor" performance arguing that "orientation is just coming to an end in that period." He insisted that "three months was not sufficient to gauge the performance of a new employee." The CEO ignored his comments and referred the participants to the work of Jim Collins in the book "From Good to Great." He argued that organizations had to be tough on none performers. The participants went into a studious silence, occasionally exchanging glances. Ann disapprovingly twists her lower lip squeezing her eyes and

avoids eye contact with the CEO. She later admits that she cannot dare verbalize her reservations as she "risked sanctions."

Staff behavior was characteristic of a confidence laden group. Long silence punctuated by the avoidance of direct eye contact with the CEO was indicative of a problem. Pretense to read from or write on their note books and at times browsing the internet signaled a desire to disengage a sign of fear. Although classified as fear, I also detected lack of confidence apparently from lack of knowledge and technical skills. Most staff stayed silent out of fear. This became apparent from use of self-effacing language, a desire to play safe according to Ivana to cover their shortcomings. Fearing conflict and hesitant to confront the CEO to provide clarity on certain issues, Harry claimed that "there are certain areas of discussions which I don't feel competent and comfortable to participate in" adding that he felt constrained and afraid as he did not wish to offend the boss or appear not knowledgeable. According to Esther, staff were afraid because of "low social and emotional connection with their boss."

African organization can improve this situation and create an environment conducive for talk and devoid of fear. Several acts were observed that perpetuated a state of fear. As an example, the CEO interjected severally when staff spoke. It was often an attempt to steer the conversation in a pre-determined direction to influence the outcome. To assuage the problem, Harry felt the need for a consultative approach to meetings. We have seen evidence of participants refraining from openly disagreeing with the CEO for fear of retaliation. In meeting 1 for instance, there was a discussion on how best to handle the donors of ICL who were unhappy with the reporting format of their joint programmes. This came up in a meeting where the CEO had castigated staff on how they handled their partnership with a section of donors. The staff felt differently on the contentious reporting model which was developed by the CEO himself. The CEO also managed the donor relationship and was responsible for the information systems. When the CEO submitted that a staff was not applying the protocols as expected of him in reporting, a sense of fear and confusion engulfed the meeting. Harry who was tasked with drawing and sharing reports confided in private that he did not agree with the CEO arguing that the new process he was recommending was impractical. He admitted however that "I cannot bring this up at the meeting" adding "I don't want to be viewed as confrontational." On a follow up telephone conversation with Esther later that day, she responded as below:

"The position taken, and the process as presented by the CEO at the meeting was wrong and confusing as it will cost the organization a lot of money in a wasteful activity."

She admits that "I have no courage to bring this up on the floor of the meeting." Harry felt that with proper consultation, and in an environment that allow diverse views, junior staff should seek clarity directly with the CEO. "The CEO must then be reciprocal without appearing confrontational to reduce anxiety" he adds.

Because of fear to voice, Fred felt that nothing changed from meetings at ICL. On the question "how we do things here" in relation to partner organizations, he responded in part:

"We have conflict with donor organization that I can't possible raise in our meetings since I should avoid the spotlight and stay in the shadows."

There was fear that a discussion of this nature may lead to a malicious action by the CEO such as:

"My being scrutinized with a view to establish what I was not doing right in order to apply penalties during my performance review" added Fred.

On what must change, Fred mentioned that the CEO needed to be more amenable as talking to him often "felt like a scold." This should address what Gloria felt were "responses that were harsh and not accommodating." Esther had earlier reiterated the need to attune to "official" thinking. During our interview, she reiterated that:

"By raising an issue you are reporting and exposing your bosses."

Staff needed protection from labeling that were career limiting. Further, performance appraisal must not be used as a tool to penalize staff as stated by Fred. Because of fear, apathy was evident. During an interview, a respondent made the statement "Why bother." She felt that taking a stance was not worth it. Another participant argued thus:

"You let your concerns be your own problems….being honest makes the problem bigger and so I must minimize the potential for damage."

This is confirmed by Harry's assertion that:

"There are things you can't do like contradicting your boss."

Although 8 out of 9 staff affirmed that they were not afraid to speak, majority kept silent. There was an opportunity to create an environment where staff can talk by making their concerns a subject of the organization growth by aligning with their thoughts whilst defusing fear.

THE DYNAMICS OF POWER AND INFLUENCE

Authority and influence manifested as a theme. This constituency of data emphasized the consequence of the social feature of management in bringing inclusivity in talk. This theme is seen from the lens of power and the distance it creates between the CEO and the staff. Power distance refers to the implied rules of engagement that are protocol based where structures are established. A high power distance commands and controls its subjects. At ICL, I spotted power distance in the social and structural settings. The structure had a 5 tier organizational design and as a result, relational management was not a strong component and neither was emotional connectivity. The structure portrayed a central command from where orders are issued and cascaded confirming a purely pay for work philosophy.

Other trappings offered a glimpse of rituals that perpetuate power and influence. The organization structure for instance showed a distinction of the employer and employee essentially those who "tell" and those who are "told." Conversely, the organizational structure defined interactions at ICL which in effect determined the extent of voice. It helps explain why majority of junior staff did not challenge the CEO and as argued earlier:

"One may be called in for appraisal" according to Fred.

This meant that the CEO had the tool to exert pressure on staff or discipline those seen to be in conflict with his intentions for the organization akin to a 'carrot and stick.' I find this to be true since as argued by Gloria during a post meeting review, junior staff let their bosses speak as a matter of protocol reiterating that:

"I don't want to consistently contradict the boss as a matter of respect and etiquette."

From the video recordings, one can hear utterances and see gestures that shows who commands power. This is deconstructed in meeting 1 where the CEO is pacing in a room during a meeting with hands in his pockets as he spoke, this as the rest of staff sat pensively. He gesticulates with authority as he puts his point across in a menacing manner albeit subtle way. This included looking directly at a participant as he paced slowly backward and forward across the open space in the room with a boisterous gait. Asked why they looked contemplative, a junior staff declared that the CEO was their benefactor and had to appear submissive as he controlled the resources for which they were dependent. In an interview, Esther said being disagreeable was risky reiterating that:

"I am afraid that it could be perceived as negative and arrogant, and that it would be to pinpoint a weakness on the part of the CEO and in any event, the CEO is pushing a certain narrative and a decision has already been made even as we discuss the issue so I just comply."

Fred stated in another interview that several staff had been reprimanded, others suffered the consequences of their acts or pronouncements in dissimilar but decisive ways from verbal and written reprimands, low budgetary allocation, withheld pay increments and termination of employment.

On replaying the video recording in meeting six, the CEO looked tense every time a participant said something remotely different from his sentiments. This became complicated as the CEO did not expressly seek concurrence with his own views on official matters and the pseudo political discussions. In a private less formal conversation, Fred shared that every manager at every level in the hierarchy expected full compliance from their junior colleagues. This attest to the cultural wiring of ICL as it is replicated at the top as was observed by Fred during field work adding:

"We engage with care, challenging the boss is seen as insubordination."

Charles was more direct in his assessment suggesting in an interview that:

"When someone believes so much in his ways and methods like the CEO does, you cannot be the one to mess it up."

On her part, Benita felt that CEO talks with a top down tone which often whipped staff towards a certain line of thought. More often, his word and decision was final. This made his invitation to others to give their inputs insincere as seen in the video recording of meeting 2. In a telephone conversation of 20th May 2018, a senior member of management admitted that staff lacked the freedom to voice candidly. They did not share genuine concerns due to previous experiences thereby promoting falsehood. The sales staff were particularly notorious. They shared misleading reports to show high sales in an attempt to cover up poor performance for fear of reprisal" he asserted.

Relational management was another important aspect in managing power dynamics. Staff engaged differently with the CEO but most limited to official interactions. According to Benita, a section of staff enjoyed preferential treatment whereas the majority were treated less favorably at meetings. This forced them to be cautious. In meeting 6 for example, the CEO was displeased by a section of staff who failed to attend an early morning meeting. In his terse statement, he lambasted staff but it was observed that those close to him were calm and unperturbed while those outside a certain social

proximity were visibly anxious. Asked later to explain what he thought had happened in this meeting, Fred shared that those that had no personal relationship with the CEO feared retribution a lot more than others. As evidence he adds that:

> "A typical lunch appointment with the CEO is scary as it turns to a question and answer session …… which I would rather avoid as it puts me under intense pressure, a constant reminder of where I stand with him."

This goes to show how even a meeting on a social setting could be difficult while others "enjoy CEO patronage" he adds. Charles observed that poor preparedness, complexity of topics under discussion and intra-relationships affect talk.

Knowledge deficiency also led to luck of confidence affecting distribution of power. When Benita stated that she did not understand the issues being discussed in the 4th meeting, it alluded to how not knowing affects relationships with senior management. In this respect, staff looked timid in the video footage and did not challenge the CEO afraid they could be wrong. Benita rhetorically asked "will I make sense?" A senior manager used self-effacing language to extricate himself from a difficult conversation. When the Director of partnerships and programmes was asked why Charles had to travel 450 kms for a meeting that he felt he lacked the competence to effectively participate, he responded that "we have an organization to build." The comment did not reverberate with Charles. The Director later confessed that not much was achieved with staff invited from far flung areas as most had limited knowledge. "We only submit as asked of us" he declared.

Cultural nuances delineate power. The big man mentality is common and epitomizes power. This is punctuated by unwillingness to listen, compromise or include others. To bring perspective, the big man leads and others follow without question. Being submissive was expected. In the African traditions, certain mannerisms showed that one was in the presence of reverence. As seen in a video tape, staff folded their arms, leaned on the table while others slumped on the chairs with legs closely clasped showing vulnerability. This was a sign they were subordinate. Although seen as propagating a climate of fear as submitted earlier, this event was also associated with a demonstration of power. The big man attitude was also displayed when the CEO made it known that:

> "All staff must attend the meetings whether sick or suffering stomach upset until we establish that one was unable to participate."

With the emphasis on attendance, staff nodded in agreement. Although this was common in African led organizations, Harry admitted that it was mechanical as staff showed congruence even when disagreeable.

According to Ann, the CEO addressed the senior management in a patronizing manner and on occasions in a "condescending way." This happened in the presence of all staff. In a video recording, we earlier saw Harry posit that contradicting senior management had repercussions stating:

> "I don't share my concerns for fear of how I may be perceived" always wondering "is it what the CEO wants to hear?"

This was indicative of how power dynamics play out. This was his response to a question on his greatest fear in voicing. In the process, he showed the power wielded by the CEO. In meeting 2 and 5, one observes that in the CEOs short absence, staff are a lot more animated in the way they converse with active participation by all. The mood changed as soon as the CEO stepped back into the meeting room.

New approaches to meetings and managerial openness will promote voice by diluting the intrigues of power and influence as shown in this finding. Meeting agendas required review according to Ann so that the decisions on the discursive items is not centred around one person. This is confirmed by Esther who saw fidelity to the agenda as a technology that can improve the situation. On her part, Benita felt she was included in conversations only when her "expert opinion was needed" and only because she will be tasked to implement what she says within her department. She admits that this was rare and that the entire process of engaging and trusting others to do a good job needed to be less tightly controlled.

An African organization can improve the situation and create an environment conducive for talk by neutralising the trappings of power. Being "good" had benefits such as favors from the CEO. Benita supports this claim stating that "I smile before speaking to look pleasant and to have it easy." This is mainly to win acceptance. Esther's thinking that meetings should debate and not blindly validate what CEO thought or wanted could be counterproductive however relationships building emerged as an important item for successful meetings. Fred alluded in this interview that "staff engage in a cautious way" but more perplexing and contrary to what was observed, staff with close proximity to the CEO were not able to apply this advantage to confront the big issues in a truthful manner according to Gloria.

The director indicated that these meetings were CEO's way of managing the day to day activities at the organization, essentially a way to pass his message and not necessarily a forum to share common concerns, "a one man politburo" he asserted. He did not think the CEO was coherent or convincing but was duty bound to support him. The director felt that the "CEO used meetings to manage staff and the day to day activities at the organization." He also acknowledged that staff capacity frustrated the quality of talk. This is proven by Ann's actions in meeting 3 where she is seen unable to respond to a technical query regarding a strategic partner that has led to a bad report discussed earlier in this chapter. In this exchange, Ann's display of low confidence is evident. The Director asserts that:

> "Junior staff put up a show in meetings to demonstrate commitment when nothing really gets done" held true.

This justifies the argument on power as a factor on talk. This is because the CEO big man tag keeps junior staff quiet. Asked for instance what she had stayed silent about, Ann responded that the fact that junior staff sat in the same meetings with their supervisors caused them anxiety and tension. They could therefore not garner sufficient courage to talk frankly about their departments. This is replicated higher up and corroborated by Benita assertion in an interview that a divergent opinion causes friction arguing that "one can easily be thrown under the bus." This was because staff underwent unpleasant experiences in the past leading to unfair performance reviews and labelling such as "dream killer" according to Ivana.

INCLUSIVITY AND INVOLVEMENT

Inclusivity and involvement as a theme highlighted the aspect of meetings with little social engagement and inclusivity. The data elucidate findings that show pertinent details relating to staff inclusion at meetings. Staff capacity and capability emerged as a key dynamics. This included their attributes, skills, competencies, experience and knowledge relative to the strategic, tactical and transactional issues under discussion. Being deficient, staff active involvement was limited and this propagated silence and exclusion. Ann admits that staff felt conversations were too technical, high level or complex. In many instances, unless issues being discussed affected a respective department, staff chose to keep quiet. To demonstrate this, Fred argued that:

> "The CEO does not invite me to participate on broad issues or those that affect other departments."

Study participants were not involved in decision making as the CEO made unilaterally decisions. On occasions, ideas later rendered impractical were pushed for implementation by the CEO but failed during execution because the junior staff tasked with putting them into practice were excluded. Often, they waited until the CEO directives failed to offer their solutions. At this time, the CEO was a lot more receptive and was keen on what the very people he had earlier ignored had to say. This was when a problem had reached a crisis point. Only then did he invite self-audit. Charles held that:

> "When his suggestion failed, the CEO came back to us at meetings to now ask how we can fix the mess and only then would I expect my suggestions to be considered useful."

Esther agreed with this argument reiterating that the only time staff interacted in meetings is when there was a crisis. In response to a follow up question that sought to know whether the ICL meeting environment was sympathetic to contrary opinion, Gloria claimed that the CEO did all the talking stating that:

> "It is like a church sermon and it leads most people to ask what their relevance in meetings is?"

Ivana fuses this point by arguing that the CEO did not attach much value to staff contribution on work place problems. He preferred listening to his own voice, "it is always a monologue" Gloria asserted. This is explained in detail in the section analyzing CEO perspective in the discussion chapter and demonstrates why staff were unable to engage productively.

Most junior staff found SMT discussions complex admitting lacking the aptitude to engage at this level and so had little to say. Luck of deep knowledge sufficed as a hindrance. According to Harry, the complexity in technical issues was made more profound as few staff had the obligatory competencies to understand. Harry for instance divulged that he had no understanding of East Africa to contribute to a discussion on regional expansion arguing "I don't know the criteria for market entry." On department related problems, Benita alludes difficulties faced trying to address issues out of her purview. From the interview question "what kind of difficulties did you have in meetings?" and "do you stay silent because you have nothing to say?" The responses were varied but "not knowing" and limited understanding of issues was overwhelming coupled with low relational processes and low levels of professionalism that also affected the extent the CEO includes and involves others.

New approaches to meetings and managerial openness stimulate voice as it upholds Inclusivity and involvement. This study found compelling evidence on ICL failure to include others and later provides a

plethora of managerial actions that can improve the situation. In meeting 4, more than half of the participants did not make any contribution during discussions. Those that spoke were the usual dominant voices with close association to the CEO. On reviewing a video footage, we see two senior members of management quiet for very long periods of time. A nudge by Esther for Director Planning to react to a statement by the CEO is met with silence. Another five staff were studiously quiet. They seemed to have something to say as they kept glancing at each other in a quizzing manner although the CEO failed to invite their input. According to Esther, those who actively participate in official debates enjoyed benefaction from the CEO and had "a level of familiarity." She proceeds to state that:

"I seldom got listened to but swiftly put on my defense about my projects."

She also made reference to comments attributed to the CEO discussed in another incident above. That is when the CEO dismissed an argument by a junior staff regarding funding a project feigning constraints of time. The comment that ignored the prodding of a junior staff stated:

"We have taken considerable time on this issue and we need to move on from here."

Time management and equal opportunity to speak up suggests openness and introduces rigor in the management of meetings. This can significantly increase participation of a bigger pool of people. We saw in meeting 3 the CEO rushing a presentation that was important to both the presenter and a section of staff. When the presenter was halfway in his presentation, the CEO eager to move to the next item signaled with a wave of his open palm. He directed that there will be "just two more minutes to discuss this project update" a result of which the presenter fails to complete the presentation altogether. Accordingly, the information the presenter sought to share, the suggestions and concerns failed to reach the intended audience including the CEO himself. Charles lamented that the CEO's action made him feel inadequate and excluded. This was replicated in meeting 4. During a scheduled presentation on the balance score card, the CEO not inspired by the arguments being advanced also remarked dismissively:

"If we can finish that in 20 minutes please!"

This in spite of the fact that the presentation had been scheduled to take an hour and a half. Given this atmosphere, the staff I sampled shared that on many occasions, they felt unable to participate in discussions or raise issues. They thought that the CEO temperament curtailed staff openness. "Being rushed in this way felt like not being valued at all" according to Ivana adding "the CEO propensity to singly control meetings was a deterrent to open conversations."

Can an African organization improve this situation through a policy of a deliberate and genuine involvement? The dilemma that arises is whether raising issues may lead to polarization Isaacs (1993). Ivana felt that staff with strong personalities spoke readily being close to the CEO. In an interview with the CEO about senior staff and their involvement in meetings, the CEO regretted that:

> "Senior management cannot communicate my vision to the staff and so I prefer to include others to communicate directly, using meetings to train and build future capacity."

According to Charles however, cultural practices curtailed inclusion in conversations. Staff instead relegated themselves to taking instructions.

OTHER SOURCES OF DATA

This part captures findings from ICL documents. The review showed why silence thrives causing meetings to fail. The performance management procedures highlighted strategies for monitoring and evaluation. It's designed to help identify work problems and how to solve them to achieve set targets as well as establish employees' potential and their area of development. ICL sees performance appraisal as a constructive method of enhancing organizational growth and job satisfaction and as a form of formal engagement. The appraisal is designed to be an open discussion between the appraised and the appraiser. There is a provision for employees to give feedback on what they think about their work, their seniors and the support they get including constraints at work requiring solving. At ICL, the performance appraisal template covered tasks and their assessment criteria. It made no provision for a double loop feedback. The template did not provide a section for staff to articulate the support they require to do their job well. However, there was a section that discusses the personal development plan for the staff being appraised to address their training needs. Employees also rate their own performance on a balanced score card. Soft skills such as team work, empathy, leadership traits or courage to challenging status quo are listed as desirable attributes in ICL Human Resource Manual.

The policy for discipline and grievance offers staff an opportunity to share their concerns. Normally, a committee is constituted to hear grievances and make a determination. This could either be a disciplinary or performance related issue. At ICL, appeals are provided for and allowance made for escalation to the CEO if one was dissatisfied. The ICL procedure lists major work offences as "those determined by the management." I noted that employees were not permitted to behave in a manner insulting to the employer. This was not clearly articulated or explained and so a genuine challenge to

seniors can be misunderstood under this rule. The ICL corporate engagement strategy 2016-18 did not address the human resource capacity requirements. It however envisaged a continuous and meaningful engagement with large corporate bodies that fund ICL. The organization lists strong technical expertise and professional staff with vast experience as a strength boasting low staff attrition and strong allies in the alumni.

The standard operating manuals placed the responsibility to develop staff with the managers of departments in which they serve. It states that "HR department shall develop and maintain an annual training calendar" basing the training on performance appraisal to achieve organization's strategic objectives. There were however no tools for training needs assessment neither was there provision or investment for training and human resource development. The structure shows a HR function that does administration, procurement and front office management. Training and development was part of the HR mandate but had no substantive job holder. In the field, the programmes had a training outreach with dedicated trainers. There was an advocacy officer sitting in Partnership and Communication unit.

ICL admits that to implement the strategy, they need to interrogate the required investment in additional human resource capacity to respond to existing opportunities. In the strategy plan 2013-2017, ICL positioned itself as contributing to social economic and political pillars in the Kenyan vision of 2030. It argued that the greatest resource ICL has to meet its strategic objectives was its human resource. The document does not outline how this is to be achieved. The human resource management manual provided further insights on how the guide could impact voice and facilitate better meetings. The objective was given in the preamble as enabling better communication in the organization. Training and development was emphasized but an interview with Charles found there was no scheduled plan for expanding skills. The solutions listed included on job training, coaching and mentorship and continuous professional development with periodic training and evaluation. The manual says employees who believe they have been treated unjustly shall meet first with their supervisor to try and settle the problem amicably. Most grievances arose from "misunderstanding, inaccurate or lack of information and untested assumptions" according to the manual.

THE LESSONS ICL NEEDED TO LEARN AND ATTEND TO.

The 4 lessons ICL should attend to came from four findings. Although they had no direct connection with the initial codes, they find their placement within the research problem, research questions and the sense made of the data. These were taken as key lessons as they were aloft and would promote pursuance of desired outcomes precluding those not wanted. They also connect with the findings. When shared with participants, they confirmed them as the most pertinent and most likely to redeem the organization if acted upon. These were:

1. Meetings were not productive and so ICL required an effective meeting structure not just agenda setting. These include developing and enacting obligatory policies and processes. This was because the agenda was not followed and issues previously discussed came up in subsequent meetings. It was also common for the CEO to deviate into unexpected topics.

2. Staff lacked requisite knowhow and confidence to engage in senior level meetings and to solve work problems mainly because they were afraid to contradict the boss or voice their reservations. The CEO felt that he could not depend on senior staff to bring change.

3. Silence at ICL had no inkling to African culture instead, it affected all ranks of staff including senior management. Like junior staff, senior staff spoke only when spoken to and kept silent in meetings. Silence affected both gender, contractual and permanent staff alike making culture less of a factor.

4. Junior staff exhibited less voice in the presence of the CEO, were disengaged during meetings and feared to upset the status quo. They were also afraid of exposing their ignorance.

To bring perspective the lack of procedures and fear to engage signified the need for a new meeting management process that champion management openness. The CEO indictment of senior staff explains why silence was prevalent across board. Viewed against the research questions, lessons learned were found to effectively correspond to the study objectives. The recommendations that were formulated to address these lessons were tested for accuracy, applicability and potential to improve the situation. These were the main issues in need of managerial action and they also presented the biggest scope for change.

These lessons were important because they captured the state of operations at ICL. The data that substantiated these 4 lessons were the most pivotal in examining the problem. They also brought more

accuracy to the conclusion that the study finally drew. The findings were transferable in other situations making these lessons pertinent. Finally, the data and evidence raised other incisive questions that is discussed and analyzed in the discussion chapter. These lessons responded to guiding questions such as what ICL can do differently, what they should stop doing altogether and what they should continue to do more of. The lessons developed from conceptual underpinnings offer scope for optimistic change.

RESULTS FROM SPEAKING WITH THE CEO

There were other findings from CEO's perspective. This is included in this chapter to counter primary data from the field and other sources essentially offering the CEO a right of reply. The alternative perspective helped synthesize evidence. These three sources of data led to the main conclusion in the discussion chapter by comparing and contrasting findings and to arrive at a unified deduction from the sense made of the material. Although the evidence shows the CEO was forceful and unreceptive to alternate thinking, speaking to him revealed a puzzling dimension. He confessed to being frustrated with the issues the study had underscored and felt misunderstood. Because of the low capacity of staff as shown above, the CEO claimed he used meetings as a platform for "training." This is however discounted by the participants who claim that it was his style to micro manage.

He admitted dismissing suggestions from junior staff as he had no conviction that they had viable solutions to the problems. He was also frustrated by what he referred to as lack of confidence in his staff which he felt was s a major impediment to engaging them effectively in conversations. The CEO could not place sufficient reliance on senior staff to cascade his messages to junior colleagues. Inevitably, he invited all categories of staff to senior management team meetings to hear the messages directly from him. This was a promotive aspect lauded by Jian *et al* (2012) as an incentive to raise their profile and gain the confidence. Although the primary findings showed that the ICL hierarchical structure and its traditional connotations had significance, associated rites and rituals such as the sitting arrangement constricted voice. Notably, the CEO felt there was no power distance as he engages junior staff directly. The CEO reiterated that participation of his staff in discussions at meetings were of paramount importance. It can be construed that the CEO meant well judging by the following statement dispelling fears of detachment: This description is expanded in chapter 5.

"I want staff to discuss issues openly but they lack the requisite depth which I find disturbing."

He felt that staff don't confront issues and often shared information without giving solutions. The CEO reiterated that he endeavors to manage himself to be a better leader reiterating that he reflects on his actions after every meeting and asks himself difficult questions such as:

"What worked and what did not work, am I doing the right thing and how can I be better?"

An important angle in this investigation was to review ICL business performance in an effort to link it to how staff talk. This was also important in helping understanding how the outcomes related to the findings made. The investigations revealed inefficiencies shown by a high cost of operations and a failed meetings management system making the meetings at ICL expensive to run. The average hourly rate for SMT meetings was 230 dollars an hour averaging USD 920 per day and USD 7360 per month way above the average revenues the organization generated. The additional cost in meeting rooms and utilities was estimated at USD 1000 per month. There was a huge opportunity cost from staff not voicing. This is supported by Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willebrock (2012) assertion that better meetings are linked with higher team output. This correlation was however not proven as it was outside the scope of this study.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.

INTRODUCTION

Starting from lessons learned and linking them to recommendations for field testing, this chapter explains and evaluate results showing how they relate to literature and research questions and making an argument in support of the conclusion. To restate, the study set out to investigate the phenomenon of silence by junior staff in senior management team meetings. The section connects to the introduction chapter by answering the three main research questions which were why meetings that are task based with little social emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk; when managerial openness and a two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African led organization, and; how an African styled organisation can create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff. Sub-questions emerging through in-depth analysis of the findings are also featured. The results are further synthesized for sense making and an argument advanced for the final interpretations as justification. The structure in this chapter covers interpretations of what the results meant, what I found that challenges and questions literature, implications of findings for practice, testing and insights from the tests, contribution for practice, recommendations for action and finally conclusion.

The first step in answering my research questions was to evaluate the 4 final findings in chapter 4 in relation to the research problem. In the last chapter I encountered three component of findings that needed synchronizing. These were the field data, policy documents and CEO perspective. Effectively, the analytical process was manual covering sense making, triangulation and authentication of evidence. Findings were also compared to literature and the theoretical underpinnings. For example, data was applied to analyse practice and theory such as LMX. Being a qualitative study, this was a process where third opinion from participants was sought. There was no known software to process the variety of data towards an automated deductions.

The main findings are summarized as those with the largest possibility to bring change when corrective measures are deployed. These findings were: lack of structures, policies and processes to conduct meetings in a way that promotes voice, low capacity of staff in comprehending what is happening at senior management team meetings and a climate of fear. To help broaden my understanding on what I thought was happening, the literature I read informed the inquiry and supported the recommendations.

This led to experiments in a test environment. The connection between thematic analysis and the 4 lessons that ICL should attend to as outlined in the findings chapter came from patterns that emerged from data later assigned meaning and categorized into broad themes. The experiences distilled from the study helped to develop appropriate action. The remedial advice also came from interim actions taken and the outcomes during the study.

The learnings moved readers' understanding of the research problem forward, an improvement from what it was in the introduction. These were important aspects that offered context to debates and arguments that followed referencing previous literature as it compares study results with findings from other studies. To further expound and venture in a territory not before examined, the analysis include CEO's responses on findings, his perspective drawing the similarities and differences for a meaningful and balanced deductions. Ideas from literature were considered, those that could be implemented, those that needed modification before implementation and those that had little probability for adoption. This approach makes clear the results and positions the debate that arises above previous studies.

The format in this section was largely guided by the structure in the findings chapter however, the sub categories were considered from the need to answer the research questions using relevant sub-headings. Although not consistent with the findings chapter, the sub-headings were to help readers navigate the main issues that respond to research questions. The entire reflective process was steered by intuitive and perceptive questions such as "what is this about, how does it differ or compare from other thinking, what is the data saying that should guide the thinking, what does this represent, what is seen as going on and what is being conveyed?" Others were how the data compares with what was expected as findings, what was learned, what to do next with the reasons why.

BROAD INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS.

This section debunks findings. It addresses and assesses the research questions to evaluate the results. It also ascertains the relevance of the findings and the contribution made to achieve the research objectives. The results had a huge significance as they provided answers to the research questions which was the central issue to be resolved. The original research questions were intended to address the research problem. Investigating the precise research questions offered answers to and resolved the

broader research problem. The information that became available was analysed leading to the formulation of my opinion and supporting arguments, essentially to help make sense of what I thought was happening. Findings such as the need for a structured approach to meetings, low capacity of junior staff and fear of retribution represented some of the specific results that answered key questions. Two sub-questions however remained unanswered as they were either out of scope or could not be sufficiently addressed by the data. These were how success in meetings can be measured and the correlation if any between the quality of meetings, decision making and their outcomes.

The most important findings were also the lessons ICL need attend to. The 4 lessons were consolidated to those that were most straight forward and relatable to the data. These are discussed in the previous chapter. In summary, meetings were unstructured and lacked focus and harmony, staff had low capability, and senior level management exhibited similar traits of silence as were the junior staff showing signs of fear whereas staff remained largely disengaged during meetings. Besides being direct response to the research questions, they were unexpected. They therefore provoked stretched thinking triggering additional questions. They also brought context to the research problem and helped explain silence and apathy in ICL meetings.

A principle outcome where meetings were not structured was evident by poor facilitation, lack of a sustained follow up, repetitions and slow progress in build-up to conversations. Slow progress meant issues under discussions took too long to conclude often going back and forth. In many occasions, the meetings failed to arrive at a unified resolution. Some findings showed that the quality of meetings was necessary in expanding participation although the capacity of participants to engage at senior levels was a prerequisite. This was contingent on an enabling environment catalyzed by a deliberate approach to spur participation such as a relational process that inspires a social emotional attachment and also training and development. To succeed, ICL need deploy better management practices that wins unwavering attention of participants such as focusing on what is relevant. In my interpretation, better management practices needs complimenting with managing relationships. This include empowering staff to enhance confidence in order to motivate them pronounce themselves on what they felt was important and was afflicting the organization. However, lack of a clear demarcation between junior staff and their senior colleagues as highlighted could breed derision and further fracture work ethics.

On junior staff keeping quiet in meetings, the project suggests an inherent fear of upsetting the status quo or exposing oneself in an unfavorable way. This were being confrontational or sounding not knowledgeable. Staff were afraid of the consequences of being contentious and in conflict with the CEO. In my subsidiary questions, I discovered diminished confidence emanating from power distance which traditionally stipulates behavior expected towards those in authority. An example is documented in the incident on performance management in the findings chapter. Manifest by their tone, mannerisms and demeanor, the junior staff understood the extent to which their thinking was tolerated and steered away from expressing discord. By showing vast and unrivalled knowledge, the CEO stopped listening, won all arguments but lost active participation in the process. Feeling less knowledgeable was indicative of pessimism that their thinking cannot match that of the CEO making silence a desirable option.

The data drawn from the HR manual highlighted a set of corporate values. Despite a value system that alluded to cohesion and collaboration, the organization and the CEO acted differently leading to disaffiliation and disintegration. Although subtle, acts of discord, disharmony and dissociation perpetuated by the CEO were evident. The documented values that were to serve a moderating role appeared to fail thereby enabling antecedents of relational management on paper and not in practice. This revealed a cosmetic dressing even though the staff expect these values to be sacrosanct. Given these contradictions, the CEO invited cynicism, resentment and indifference to the detriment of the organization.

A lot of importance was placed on a certain aspect of the findings. Although critical, ICL did not measure the impact of staff contribution at meetings such as suggestions, ideas and concerns with the outcomes both qualitative and quantitative. This catapulted the problem. More significant, there was no audit to assess the value derived from these meetings. It was difficult to enumerate the significance of relationships, the extent to which deliberations align to the greater organizational goal, prevailing work culture and ethics and the general systems that govern work and meetings. It forced a need to change "how we do things around here" according to Harry a study participant. This was important because it helped provide answers to the questions being investigated principally because by measuring impact ICL should be able to improve their operations. These gave an indication on why things have not changed.

Most staff aligned their arguments with the thinking of the CEO at meetings. This was compounded by CEO being the founder and owner of the organization. The culture seen at ICL was systemic having been propagated for close to 15 years. This explains why the CEO was protective of his ways which is important because it shows why changing his ways would be difficult. Accepting change could also mean an admission of failure which was not common in African led organizations and it also explains why the CEO was resisting the changes recommended. For the CEO to succeed and for these difficulties to be surmounted, it was important to address power distance by bridging the gap if the staff are to openly challenge their seniors. Literature shows that voice was stronger where power distance was low and knowledge gaps among staff was narrow. This allows a healthy contest that should save the organization from catastrophe.

Because of the intrigues associated with teams at meetings, Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) saw a need to go beyond instructing staff and managing impressions, ideally the staff trying to impress their seniors. Relatable issues were seen upon speaking to Ivana. She spoke of managing the CEO impression of her by keeping quiet so as not to expose herself. Other staff deflected the key issues during discussions to hide their failures and protect their fluffing work performance. Consequently, "meetings did not change the way things are done here" according to her. Speaking to Fred, actions that were agreed "were not practical." This was because the politics punctuated by a choreographed exchange often led to self-depreciation behavior resulting to an overzealous knack to impress. These carefully orchestrated talk came with other consequences of managing inklings. Previous research showed that to be effective in how we converse, parties *"acted from a place of knowing to first embrace shared meaning in order to deal with future problems"* Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011). This is however negated by self-serving conversations. The importance of this is that when decisions are not made through broad and honest inclusion, edicts are passed down denying ICL the much needed diversity of thought.

The additional data that came from documented material helped alter and consolidate my opinion and motivation. Their analysis with data from the field work was problematic. Training and development was shown as a department in the ICL organizational structure although operationally, it was nonexistent. ICL also maintained a training calendar that include on job training, coaching and mentoring and continuous professional development. There were however no training materials or curriculum for learning. Further analysis showed that there was no capacity for ICL to manage training. This made it

difficult to harmonize what the documents said against for instance ICL proclamation that their staff were a source of "strength" in their SWOT analysis. Here, they were described as "self-starters with vast experience" in the strategic plan. This is complicated by a finding discussed in chapter 4 that the CEO cast doubt on staff suitability to deliver ICL objectives. Open forums and the open door policy articulated in the Human Resource policy and meant to catalyze talk never materialized as the CEO was fixated to setting his own agenda thereby constricting open discussions.

The performance management tool as written had a section on personal development and discipline management. It highlighted soft skills required of staff to promote issues such as "problem solving." This could only be done through "challenging the status quo." As a result, my enthrallment with the documents was altered. I established a big divide between the policy papers and actual enforcement in the field. For context, policy papers are defined as a rule book that provides a framework to addressing pertinent issues in organization. They help in compliance which the study found to be a major issue. This angle was important because it showed a breach of trust that leads to breakdown in talk.

"Free and open conversations stimulate thought and productive engagement." This were utterances by the former Kenyan Chief Justice Willy Mutunga. This was supported by the study which found that creating a good communicative and facilitative environment oblige staff to engage meaningfully. This is based on good intentions that is reciprocal. What I understood from this is the insinuation that a poor listening behavior, dominance and arrogating oneself the role of a perennial expert deflates others from active participation. This finding becomes redundant when other factors are put into consideration such as low technical expertise, knowledge and ones proximity to power.

The staff that expressed different views were labelled. This identified them with deviant behavior. Such phrases included being difficult, unresponsive, unhelpful or obstinate. This classification isolated them forcing them to relent. The result was that issues remained unresolved and the use of wicked questions as advocated by Kimball (2013) was lost removing any prospect of a "collective organization" however, the data did not support it as a viable option.

ICL rites and rituals also provided grounds for silence. These took different forms but the study focused on the individual characteristics and the organizational characteristics that Milliken *et al* (2003) attested

to. The reason this was relevant was that ICL's culture is founded on the traits and characteristics of its top leadership in this case the CEO. This was identified more with low tolerance and a top down approach in solving work place based problems. I understood this to mean the CEO thinking overrides organizational policies making him the definitive decision maker. It explains why the values as espoused in the HR manual of 2016 – 2018 are not enforced. The individual characteristics were centered on one man and therefore ICL value system espoused in trust, team work and professionalism were found to be lacking. This duplicity called for investigation because the declaration in the HR manual that staff at ICL were the most important asset is contradicted by the individual characteristic at the organization. The organizational characteristics such as the management model and the authority pattern embodied in the structure were subsumed in the colossus image that of the CEO. The relevance of these guiding principles in promoting a relational culture that propagates talk must therefore be scrutinized.

Some of the findings were unexpected whereas others exceeded expectations. For instance, just like their junior counterparts, senior staff feared to voice. It turned out that this is a common phenomenon. Milliken *et al* established that being silent is very common. They demonstrated from data sampled that 85 per cent of people said they have felt unable to raise an issue or concern with their bosses at one time or the other. This was even more manifest when they felt that the issue was important to them citing fear and feeling a sense of futility. This was largely caused by a protectionist instinct that looked to avoid adversity with others. An unexpected finding that was also exciting because of its uniqueness was impaired confidence. The evidence shows that staff had low capacity in given aspects of their work. Academic journals from scholars and practitioners for this study blamed silence on other factors and not necessarily the capacity to engage efficiently. The data attests to this but also contradicts Van Dyne and Lepine (1998) argument that primarily blames silence on the cultural dynamics being gender education and traditional beliefs.

These findings were unexpected as they were also incidental coming from an activity that was not directly related. They were outside the assumptions that initially steered my work. These included long held beliefs, prejudice and my pre-understanding. These created limitations based on the lens with which I analysed the data effectively confining the extent to which I viewed data however what was least expected emerged. I was not able to link these findings or relate them to the research questions. The questions why meetings create a non-inclusive environment for talk and the one that sought to

establish how managerial openness promote employee voice provided unrelated insights that went beyond the scope of these questions. They also led to two additional sub-questions for further examination and deeper perspective that resulted to the unexpected results. This revealed issues around knowledge, experience and generally the environment.

The significance of the unexpected results to the overall study is that they invited an alternative line of enquiry. Obtaining the CEO perspective also helped achieve this. By seeking to find why the CEO made unilateral decisions and guided by a need to gain a balanced outlook on the main issues, this line of inquiry opened another line of interrogation and data analysis. This action was unprecedented since from the literature reviewed, none had pursued this line of investigation in this area of study. A sub-question on how African led organizations facilitate upward movement of information by staff developed and gave impetus to another line of investigation. The findings that emerged were also unanticipated. It occurred that the CEO used meeting for training staff since he felt they did not have the competencies to solving work related problems in a comprehensive way. Overall the results met the study expectations because they responded expansively to the study objectives.

This data in this research project showed cause and effect. For example, when the CEO failed to consult and chose to think alone, the effect was that most staff will be silent and not engage. The cause in this example was for instance lack of requisite capacity. These variables are connected although the relationship is not absolute. Crunching the datasets led to an emergence of themes when classified along commonalities.

The pattern led to discovering distinctions present in sets of data leading to the construction of near accurate classifications of what I felt and thought was happening. The argument for instance that power and influence was a major determinant on how conversations happened is justified by responses from 2 participants one stating they do not "oppose the CEO arguments since a decision will already have been made." This is corroborated by claims from Sesanti (2010) acknowledging (Musalika 1994) and Morrison and Milliken (2000) citing (Keltner *et al* 2000) on excessive respect for African tradition that power relations dictates people's propensity to freely interact. From these, I was able to ascribe meaning supported additionally by data.

Conflicting data also stood out. An example is where the CEO argue that engaging all staff in SMT meetings was an effort to train, allow direct messaging and obtain feedback whereas an interview with Director Planning and a section of staff showed it as purely CEOs style of management in order to exert control. Staff often aligned their thinking to that of the CEO and so the assertion on training is contestable. Ubuntu and the authoritarian aspect of African leadership is also in conflict pitting collectivism and authoritarianism. Bolden and Kirk (2009) argued that African leadership is grounded on legitimizing unequal distribution of their authority. These contradictions were a result of cultural and western models of management.

Making sense of findings from the CEO.

The data collected in the field helped shape the conversation I had with the CEO and persuade him on new ways of managing meetings. The greater contribution to practice is found in the CEO perspective, the founder syndrome being a great factor. This added to the body of knowledge and the principles of practice. The planning of ICL business was always in accordance to the wishes of the CEO. Having to deal with the owner presented a problem according to the staff and this diminished their courage to speak. The contradictions between staff assertions and the accounts of the CEO discussed hereon offer a new frontier for learning and gives greater impetus for practice.

On using these meetings to drive training, the CEO supported his claim by asserting that staff never offered workable solutions to work place problems. Instead, he saw staff as more adjusted to simply passing information. Even more enlightening, the CEO had no confidence on senior staff to either cascade or disseminate information. Accordingly, they were unable to carry out his instructions effectively. It therefore became vital to ascertain why the CEO felt that junior staff should speak out more and openly even when he felt they do not give back much in value. This paradox was difficult to decipher.

As the founder, the CEO was skeptical about his own policies and procedures. The irony was that the procedural documents were developed under his stewardship. In failing to adhere to his own policies and disregarding ICL processes, it can be argued that the CEO was admitting to not finding the guiding documents responsive to the day to day work demands at ICL. This was an organization that operated within the confines and personality of the leader. In summary, the study agrees with two perspectives

presented by both sides i.e. the staff and Senior Executives. Although CEO thinking is in contrast with that of his staff, it nonetheless comes somewhere between both sides in their perception of what they thought was happening. Although he argued that he reflects on his meetings with a view to improve, it was not possible to quantify or qualify how these reflections improved ICL fortunes since there was no such evidence from the data. The results however draws attention to the unintended effects of big-manism underscored by breakdown in communication.

Hierarchical structures cause less voice and reduce constructive concerns according to Islam and Zypur (2005). From this constructive concern, a secondary question is conjured. Although the writers claim was synonymous and specific to European and American based culture, the significance from an Africa and tribal context was instigated. In a tradition that champions collectivism, how does the power arrangement influence discussions and how does it drive voice? Both scholars and practitioners argue that flatter organization structures stimulate conversation much better because of the collapsed structural barriers although knowledge gap, a critical issue remained an outstanding factor. The data showed that the CEO had a high grasp of the issues akin to a depository of knowledge on work place solutions according to Fred. Certain challenges came with high knowledge gaps at ICL.

The theme climate of fear suggests the CEO was intolerant to alternative thinking. This was not entirely accurate. It was established that a sense of not knowing caused anxiety and numbed most participants to silence. This was also common because of misaligned expectations that turned out as a key component for conflict and discomfort. A relatable literature Morrison *et al* (2011) claimed that talk among groups is a social process but was also influenced by individual and contextual matters. In my understanding, reciprocity came from a place of commonality in this case shared knowledge from where the differences in perception can be bridged for mutuality. In this study, both parties failed to exhibit and exercise requisite attributes that promote voice thereby sabotaging the process in an environment already constrained with a contributive platform.

All evidence points to a state of "inspection" where the supervisor is involved in every aspect of the organization and makes all decisions. This explains CEO claim on the need to train junior staff and their own admission on limited capability. Upon deep reflection, I felt that a structured approach to involve others, trust and a degree of accountability in junior staff can remove the need for inspection. This

thought is found in Detert and Burris (2007) argument that leadership behavior plays a pivotal part in affecting voice and to eliminating suspicion. Inspection must be moderated by setting a tone of collectivism and responsibility.

Resources and how they are allocated influences how people talk. Staff seek favorable decisions and so they fashion conversations in a way that win them favor. Talking to David, punitive action was often applied using formal processes. A good example was the use of performance management and withholding of the budget. David claimed that in not acting as expected, staff risked "being called in." Performance management determines reward and recognition and has consequence. David felt that the CEO used such instruments to reward, allocate resources and enforce compliance. At ICL, appraisals determine pay, bonuses, continued employability along with other benefits. On analyzing the data on performance contracting, it was discovered that there was little fidelity to the process and instead it was used tactically to send a message on what was expected and required of staff. This however was not corroborated in the CEO findings.

Resource dependency was therefore central to staff behavior and how they interact. There was however no support of contextual data on how resource allocation affected voice in meetings. Establishing what influenced or incentivized how people spoke was important in order to make accurate inference. This is because staff behavior is subjective and is induced by other events in the environment. This also underlines the implied values of the organization. From the performance management plans, ICL focused on tangible deliveries such as resource mobilization, financial management and implementation of programmes within scope, budget and time. The softer skills were not considered pertinent. These are team work, collaboration and innovation all which were a catalyst to voice. There was also no evidence from the field work that these skills were of significance even though they are critical for better meetings management and conversations.

ICL was invigorating with fun filled moments that lite up meetings. This was normally activated by the CEO but was not enough to accelerate talk. Morrison articulated the importance of a pro-social behavior in organizations which showed genuine empathy, sharing and cooperation. Overall, the show of camaraderie by the CEO was an attempt to portray a semblance of team work and to also feel connected to the staff. The study found that the CEO did not embrace a pro-social behavior. This made

me cognizant of the cultural dynamic. According to Bolden & Kirk (2005), western management and leadership theories plays down indigenous values even though civility was thought of as contagious and as Glaser and Tartell (2014) stated:

"We invite the opinion of others to shape and formulate requisite actions and offer direction." Equally important, the ethical leadership was found to promote employee voice Yixin Hu *et al* (2018), an attribute ICL CEO needed to espouse.

What I found that challenges and questions the literature

Looked at relative to existing body of knowledge, the answers from my research work matched with previous studies in various ways. My findings conformed to what was already known such as LMX dyadic relationships Kimball (2013) and work place criticizing statements that cause conflict Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012). The ICL project showed how preferential treatment of staff is practiced to the exclusion of others. Those with low social capital had their suggestions dismissed out rightly by the CEO without due consideration. My work improved what was already known since the data brought out different dimensions hence expanding knowledge. In high power distance Ghosh (2011) for instance showed that the uneven distribution of authority was accentuated by huge knowledge gaps. The resultant relational practices dictated social interactions and therefore a different set of finding unique to this study was the staff intellectual capacity.

More of this is seen in the exceptional findings discussed above however the CEO perspective on silence was a key departure from similar work. By obtaining the CEO's insight on the issues that were revealed from the primary data, we are able to balance the data, the sense made of the data and the theories that develop on consolidation. This was due to different outlooks of the issues by junior staff on better ways to manage meetings. The expanded pool of data collected is unprecedented mainly a product of secondary questions that arose and which provided an avenue for further examination. As a result, the study helped find solutions on trending work place issues leading to the development of unique models and approaches that corrects the problem. To contextualize my findings within previous research and theory, the added influence illuminated against the criteria of prior knowledge shows a phenomenon afflicting senior executives as it does junior staff. Also pertinent was the finding that CEO loyalists and sycophants were appreciated while realists castigated as seen in previous studies.

A few findings challenged and questioned the literature. For example, the CEO did not trust staff including senior executives to speak out in a way that resolves work place problems even though he wants "staff to discuss issues openly." There was evidence that the Kenyan African culture did not influence how junior staff engaged with their seniors. It also emerged that documented procedures on human resource management necessary to enable an environment of talk was not applied. It turned out to be redundant. This challenged the thinking that structures and procedures catalyze talk. The questions they raise relative to literature is the relevance of collectivism and authoritarianism in an African led organization that is shaped in a European model. Does social hierarchy fashioned in the tiered system of the west negate collectivism to uphold individualism also referred to as I –centric instead? How African cultural traits manifest in an organization founded in the principles of the west was of interest. Whether the CEO protectionist predisposition impede his thought and judgment when engaging with general staff was a question for exploration to further expanse what is already known.

In the work of Jian *et al* (2012), we identified a weakness in their conclusion on psychological safety where they propagate mutual positivity. Based on what was established in the field, staff apprehension and a leadership that lacked trust could not unite people thereby raising other questions. This puts the structured process advocated by Allen and Rogelberg (2013) under scrutiny. On their part, Kuada (2010) saw culture as providing a frame of reference for behaviour of staff. I understood this to mean that national culture drives organizational and personal conduct. In the study however, this was annulled by the finding that staff complied with CEO directives without question. This showed a standing conflict between collectivism and individualism, two diverse concepts that cannot separately define the national culture vis a vis that of ICL. Further tests are required to demystify this divide. Kuada recommendation for future research was an "understanding of the complexity of cultural rules of behaviour and their importance to the success of leadership since most practices dragged backwards effective management approaches."

How else did my research compare to others and why? Bolden and Kirk (2009) citing (Gemill & Oakley 1992) describe African leadership as "an alienating social myth" that is used to maintain status relationships and legitimize the unequal distribution of power and resources. This contradicts the "Ubuntu" phenomenon of collectivism Msila (2014) where the good of the society is prioritized. The merits of these concepts are argued above. Equated to what I found in the field, both staff and the

leadership pursued self-serving interests which offends Bolden and Kirk and Msila thinking. Comparatively though, my study outcomes relates more with Bolden and Kirks assertion on highly centralized power structures linked partially to big-manism and which attests to social status, dominance and control.

Some findings were consistent or similar to existing literature. As an example on conflict avoidance, the CEO jokes at meetings to lighten the environment and catalyse talk. In most instances however, the discussions digressed and became more casual even though mutual respect was maintained. Staff used this as an avenue to avoid talk that discusses difficult issues in their dockets or overlook matters that expose them unfavourably. This was a carbon replica of Bang (2012) argument on "detour", pretence to evade difficult conversations to maintain harmony. Liu and Maitlis (2014) pointed on collective amusement to provoke a fun environment that ease people to talk by reducing disproportionate fear, what Sesanti (2010) termed as excessive respect without being quizzical.

In drawing similarities, I placed special attention on selecting studies whose objectives were comparable to my own, the circumstances in which data was collected, the methods noting that most studies had a European and American cultural bias. The studies I selected are those exposed to similar treatment and the relationships include how data was correlated and corroborated. Most had same conclusions and similarities of causation. This still led to different outcomes such as the case in Allen and Rogelberg (2013) where "managers' facilitation of meetings related to employee engagement through psychological meaningfulness, safety, and availability." As for similar studies exposed to different treatments such as methods and sample sizes, there was nothing that stood out in comparison with what I found although inferences and the sense made was dependent on the uniqueness of evidence.

There were other Ideas I read that looked most helpful to understand the phenomenon. The current state of the literature established useful threads and complementary themes. One of those was the question of demographics and how they affect talk. Van Dyne and Lepine (1998) for instance brought an aspect of gender, tradition, heritage and education as a factor. They claimed that white persons, and others with at least some college experience engaged in more voice than women, non-whites and those who never went to college. My findings did not support this assertion even though I found this claims to have bearing. This can also be explained by the composition of my sample that made my findings

dissimilar. The composition of tribes was diverse but there was no unique finding on ethnic grouping. Although the sample did not have a white race representation, I found that the demographics did not alter what was found for example junior and senior staff and those educated to college level or lower.

Tribe is a cultural influence on how Africans identify, relate and act based on their heritage. Tribe, a unique identifier of classes of people was disregarded by participants and therefore remained a non-factor. Although membership is determined by attributes associated with descent, tribe did not offer additional impetus different from what has been shown on race. The variance with the findings of Van Dyne and Lepine can therefore be attributed to cultures in the west from where their study is fashioned. They credited knowledge, technical expertise, experience and other competencies as a differentiator and although this may be true in certain aspects, it was not fully tested in my project.

Burris ((2012) attests to managerial reactions to employees speaking up as being harsher for those engaging in challenging voice compared to those with a conforming voice. This was true at ICL although "hostility" towards them was restrained. At ICL, I expected a transformative style of leadership given the age and education level of the presiding CEO. He betrayed elitist attributes but Burris made me realize that social constructs affect human behavior and define personalities. Association with power, the intrigue of distancing and control of resources had the capability to alienate leaders giving them a sense of invincibility.

On power distance, Huang (2003), management's openness and employee tendency to withhold their opinions is contingent on national culture. Similar to Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008), fear of negative consequences is articulated in their work. Age, organizational tenure, and employment category did not influence employee silence resonating with the findings in this study. Milliken *et al* (2003) found that the issues that employees don't communicate upward were similar to those I found in this study. These included issues that brings one into direct conflict with CEO thinking.

The study findings showed support for a Baran *et al* (2012) and Bang (2012) assertions. They recognized that when supervisors display interactional fairness, employees develop better relationships with them and will be more willing to contribute to goal accomplishment. This is a principle of LMX. Ivana, a participant argued that relationships worked for just a few staff who took it as a license to dominate. In

interpreting Baran *et al* theory on organizational justice and citizenship behavior, I am led to believe that exclusionist tendencies at ICL alludes to one's inability to exercise their right to make known their concerns and in waiving that right restricts their personal development and that of the organization as evident at ICL.

Participants' prefer to inform and explain Gorse and Emmitt (2007) rather than suggest or solve. This is a problem because as argued by Baraldi (2013), decision making is a communicative process, a coordination of a participative practice revealing that without inclusivity in talk, a common set of features causing silence will emerge. I was persuaded to agree on Nixon and Littlepage (1992) seeing procedures as critical for effective meetings. This include open communication, a task-oriented focus, timeliness and overall a systematic approach. Personal characteristics were an important addition as they moved my understanding of the research problem forward. My methods lessened the likelihood that the findings pronounced in other studies would occur here. This is predicated on the views of diverse theorists who in different ways have argued that silence signals futility because power cannot induce positive psychological state in employees Tangirala and Ramanujam (2012).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In every sub-section under this part, I begin by examining the definitions of key concepts that were considered as interventions for correcting the situation at ICL. I then move to explain how these were applied, the reasons why and the extent of their practicality. This part discusses actions that were most appropriate to resolve the research problem and those that were tested in the field. There was a plethora of possibilities classified as actions ICL should take but probably can't, actions that were worth testing, those that ICL should take and why and the eventual outcomes. Most actions required modification which in essence gave the study its originality. Overall, these are recommendations, endorsements or critical suggestions regarding the best course of action to improve the situation at ICL.

Actions ICL should take but probably can't

Team syntegrity was a feasible option to tackle silence, a social interaction that predisposes participants towards shared agreement among varied and sometimes conflicting interests. This is without compromising the legitimate claims and integrity of those interests. Team syntegrity lays down a protocol to support decision making processes in a participative, non-hierarchical way as shown by

Espinosa and Harnden (2007). For ICL, this means collapsing the hierarchical structure that delineate power and normalizes relational processes. Team syntegrity also reflects democratic management. This is supported by a communicative protocol that facilitates participatory dialogue to build consensus from a diversity of thought. Implementing this concept at ICL will be problematic because there was no shared vision by all. It is further complicated since syntegrity assumes equality of meeting participants across all levels of seniority. The CEO agreed to test recommendation upon the mapping of a new process to support their implementation. Another issue was the low capacity of staff to embrace a foreign ideology although multiple perspectives is instrumental to meaningful change.

Future search could not be implemented. As explained by Polanyi (2002), it highlights common interests and needs, deepens participants' understanding and acceptance of others' experiences. Future search also interprets information generated collectively. This was ideal but difficult to adapt because there was no common mission among staff at ICL and the CEO. Further, all groups that converge in meetings are not teams as shown by Bell and Tunnicliff (1996) making future space an intricate proposition. Participants did not also command same level of influence in groups and most constructed themselves as individualistic incapable of being collective in thought.

Open space' trait of moving groups from 'we have no idea' to action (Transitional network.org) makes it difficult to implement where agendas are set on the floor of the meeting. Ordinarily it is designed for people to feel heard and not just communicated to, according to Euchner (2014). The required action for ICL is to develop a process that identifies issues that all participants relate to and care about at plenary. But like brain storming, open space generates new ideas and solutions around a specific domain unlike at ICL where the CEO singularly makes decisions.

Actions that were worth testing

Leadersful organizations was an action worth taking however the capacity of staff to lead meetings was low. The skills could however be taught internally at no cost. In leaderful practice, the capacity of all people to contribute is unlocked. Another feasible action was to use tempered radicals. This involves nominating a courageous individual with requisite skills to upset the dominant culture while in talk intent on changing the situation. This recommendation had no cost implications. The two proposals can help build capacity. Harry for instance was knowledgeable but shy and he found speaking to groups of

people overwhelming. With leaderful practice, he could reflect and focus on his strengths as he drives his personal development to correct areas of weakness. The concept brings clarity, ensures participation, offers collective decisions and provokes difficult conversations.

Establishing protocols and predictable routines allows better preparations. Allen and Rogelberg (2013) showed that:

> "How managers use or facilitate their group meetings promotes the psychological conditions necessary for an engaged workforce."

The CEO claimed meetings were spontaneous and this was evident from lack of order as there were no guidelines. A need to introduce a disciplined approach based on best practice from other jurisdictions has arisen. An orderly process would include setting agendas and following it, pronouncing expectations at the beginning of meetings and managing those expectations, reviewing previous meetings, auditing results and previous actions as agreed, agreeing next set of actions and their deadlines and conducting a post meeting review. A policy framework on facilitation of meetings was therefore essential.

This is aided by Coghlan and Brannick (2010) who cites others to argue that the effective facilitation of meetings motivates voice. This is built in the premise that "participative approach to work organization is necessary for increasing industrial democracy" Greenwood & Levin (1998) in order to improve work situation. Other contributory ideas was the collaborative management research citing (Shaani *et al*, 2008) on "how behavior and style of managers affect outcomes." It made sense to apply the Co-generative Action Research Model Greenwood & Levin (1998) centered on employee and employer engagement in seeking solutions in work place problems.

There are other attributes of interpersonal conversation such as intimacy, interactivity, inclusion, and intentionality Groysberg and Slind (2012). These are the softer skills required to accelerate voice. With the right Intentions, presence, interaction and closeness among colleagues at different levels the organization will prosper. However, intention alone is not sufficient. The leadership will need to be transparent. All participants will require enablement through up skilling ventures such as training and development coupled by a team spirit that upholds trust. This concept will require a deliberate effort, behavioral change and the unwavering discipline to keep to tasks.

Liu and Maitlis (2014) 'generative' strategizing process advocate open discussion, multi-dimensional proposals and the thorough exploration of issues to keep staff interested. It was thought that a democratic process could achieve this vision where everyone has a say in decision making. Although this presents other challenges such as propagating popular vote that is more populist than issue centric. It is also unsettling that although opinions and ideas may have merit, they will be affected by high power distance. Contrary to the expectations of this study however, I did not find a direct interaction between a democratic practice and voicing. This was likely due to lack of intentionality in respecting diversity and also dissent. Open discussion require incentivization and uncertainty avoidance to boost confidence.

Islam and Zyphur (2005) claim that those with power paid less attention to others leading to 'solo conversation' as declared by a study participant. This leads to disinterest from other participants leading to low output. The CEO should unlearn habits that stifle free expression such as a patronizing attitude by enacting a structured process. Structure brings predictability using well documented and enforced processes and policies even though in this study, their efficacy was questioned. The risk however is that processes risk mechanizing meetings. A modified approach would be a lot more ideal where procedures are people centric, customized to ICL uniqueness. To encapsulate, it is believed that voice can be maximized by both formal and informal mechanisms as illustrated by Liang *et al* (2012) although the formal approach espouses consultations. The training of the CEO on Action Centered Leadership will be a useful intervention. This covers active listening.

The micro level interaction in meetings at ICL Africa is low despite the spirit of comradeship exhibited on occasions. The meeting content depended on the CEO and discussions were top down dispelling the notion that the camaraderie works. This highlighted misaligned expectations and exposed the fact that staff did not have sufficient skills and knowledge to relate or drive an argument in a persuasive manner. A top down approach gave structure although it was limiting and diminished much needed creativity. To influence temerity, good preparation, content and good relations would accentuate voice.

The actions ICL should take and why.

The findings highlighted that silence had a hierarchical dimension. The study results revealed the adverse effects of power distance which require management action to bridge. A socialist philosophy, collectivist culture known as ubuntu was useful because it breaks barriers on mutuality. It facilitates

open communication with a double loop feedback. As further evidence of power distance, the interview responses also suggested knowledge distance between the CEO and staff due to differences in the depth of education and experience. A training schedule was needed incorporating training in such areas as assertiveness and meeting preparedness. Others were presentation, effective communication, persuasion and influencing. Management courses that transfer critical knowledge such as one fashioned around the 7 habits of highly effective people would be significant in effecting positive change. Training would help in meeting preparedness and skills transfer towards a better meeting facilitation process.

It was common for broader objectives and expectations for meetings not to be clear ahead of meetings. A new meetings management approach such as guidelines and a policy framework is a critical component. The founder syndrome at ICL impeded the successful roll out of a systematic approach to meetings management. A revised meeting process will therefore include an inclusive process of agenda setting and its early circulation prior to meetings. Presenters should be accorded time to prepare. There is a need to provide for simulation with the CEO ahead of meetings and the expected outcomes should include an increased focus.

Meetings required a reliable method of measurement to gauge success. Where measurement becomes an integral part of meeting management, the leaders will endeavor to meet the objectives. This is because measurement forces accountability. For example, to ensure that all participants contribute, that they agree on the actions from discussions, give ownership for actions, place timelines, review actions, timely execution of actions, a good traction mechanism and inclusion in decision making would help bring progress. Revisiting the argument that people want to be heard and not just communicated to Euchner (2014), measurement makes this possible and will help institutionalize the practice at ICL. This way, participants are kept interested in meeting proceedings.

Another important aspect is auditing. This include elements such as interpersonal treatment and how decisions made are explained according to Baran *et al* (2012). The items to be measured and their comparisons will present controversies. For instance, how does one determine temperament in meetings and how is it measured? Ultimately, how are these used in determining the extent to which ICL objectives have been delivered? I established from a section of literature that different stakeholders have a different interests in the organization and so these variations must be harmonized to determine

success. Systems such as beyond measurement 4thgeneration Koch (1994) focuses and argues for all stakeholders affected by evaluations with regard to how it addresses their claims, concerns and issues. The qualitative nature of meetings is seen as a critical barrier to effective measurement because they are less tangible. Koch (1994) cites (Guba & Lincohi 1989) in directing focus on all 'stakeholders' to agree on a common criteria for evaluation.

For effectiveness in talk at ICL, letting junior staff share their views first before the CEO enhanced voice. No one felt bounded within the parameters of safety predicated in the CEO position on an issue. In this experiment, it was evident that when the CEO spoke first ahead of everyone else, junior staff found it difficult to make their opinions known for fear of reprisals, according to Fred. Nixon and Littlepage (1992) warns that a leader should orchestrate the meeting, but should not endorse a particular proposal or point of view ahead of others as this may lead to an unhealthy control. They cite (Dunsing 1977) to argue that if the leader has tight control, dialogue will be cut off. People respond better if not restricted by the thinking of their seniors. This is reflected not just in how respondents talked about the fear of contradicting the CEO but also in the need to be authentic. Leader endorsement of solution can decrease the effectiveness of consultations by limiting the options that are explored according to Janis 1982 cited in Nixon and Littlepage (1992).

Nixon and Littlepage (1992) in agreement with (Doyle & Straus 1976) found that leader partiality can lead to a "rubber-stamp" situation where meetings endorse the CEO suggestions without question. Speaking ahead of the CEO allows the staff to command the stage to make their thoughts known. For the leader, it is important to know what staff want. This is supported by (Tropman 1980) who argues that a leader should not "direct and play" as cited by Nixon and Littlepage (1992). However, this may not be practical and requires further examination as most speakers relegate meaningful and logical argument to a less priority. When junior staff talk first, the CEO can raise questions that shape their thinking and challenge opinions in an environment that is less adulterated. This is intended to ensure comprehensive thought and that everyone is heard.

Management sees staff as being self-interested Morrison and Milliken (2000). Equally, staff are resigned because they feel their concerns don't matter. Silence reinforces a feeling of futility Milliken *et al* (2003) and so creating an enabling employee climate is critical. Drawing from the spiral of silence theory where

"speaking was significantly influenced by their own perception of the dominant opinion about an issue" it was found that the perception of likely future opinion determines how staff communicate. The supplementary data highlighting policies that govern engagement were far from sufficient. The entire deck of documentation requires re-engineering to attune to the needs and aspirations of ICL. Collectively, the findings suggest that there is need to create a safe space anchored on policy documents to self-regulate in order to catalyze talk.

A sub-question that arose was how junior staff castigated by the CEO can overcome their fear to voice? This is triggered by a follow up on the primary question that asked how to improve the situation at ICL in order to illuminate. ICL staff lacked courage to ask difficult questions or challenge the thinking of the CEO. As a result, deploying tempered radicals was worthy of consideration. These resource persons within teams had the sole responsibility to engineer opposing thinking to stimulate debate. This would help participants who coil under fear such as Esther who lamented that, "I cannot tell the CEO the truth in the presence of my line manager" for fear of retribution. With a decoy, an invigorating debate ensues and provokes the less confident staff to voice. This brings to reality Detert and Burris (2007) assertion that voice stem from employees' dissatisfaction in their work situation. The outcomes envisaged however are unlikely to be achieved if there is no clear understanding between the CEO and the tempered radical. Agreeing on a broad script and drafting rules of engagement will remove suspicion.

Applying the concept of leaderful organizations Raelin (2005) was also an option. Rotating the chairmanship of meetings allows each participant to lead a conversation and in effect to voice their feelings, concerns, ideas or opinions. This compels the CEO to be an active listener and contribute to the proceedings like the rest of staff without prejudice. In leaderful organizations, team dynamics is enhanced.

The establishment of an Ombudsman was another opportunity for change. Through them, delicate, sensitive or controversial matters from junior staff can be escalated to senior management. An ombudsman represents others Milliken *et al* (2003). Shojaiea *et al* (2011) suggested submitting concerns or ideas to a third party for onward broadcast as a safer mechanism to communicating upward. This could fail because it does not change the arrangements of power. The ombudsman reports to the CEO and so status quo remains. The notion that an intermediary can bridge the gap is inconsistent with

normal organizational structures however, an independent resource person providing technical expertise to bring convergence of thought in talk is a welcome relief.

Outcomes of the tests

Field tests were used as a method to determine what can and cannot work and the reasons why. This section analyses these trials and the outcomes. Early preparations and involving others in agenda setting and timely circulation to participants was a success. The staff felt this prepared them to participate on issues that were important to them and the organization. More significant, the staff were called to lead discussions on those issues that they felt were important to them in the meetings. However, I found that whenever staff spoke first, the CEO interjected when he was unhappy with suggestions coming from junior staff. His anxiety can be seen from a habit of biting his lower lip eyes fixed on the ceiling. This failed because the CEO had little patience and inadvertently forced staff to succumb to his arguments midway through debates.

The development of a training and skills matrix did not require major investments or a fundamental change in the organization structures and so was easy to deploy. The reason this worked is because training was already constituted in the human resource manual and what was required was an implementation process. Working with the HR department, we developed and deployed a skills matrix, a template used to measure the skills level of staff. The approach taken was to list the core competencies required to do a task effectively and measure them in a scale of 1-3 to test proficiency. Other items included skills, knowledge and attributes that were relevant for conversation and meeting preparedness. A score of 1 represented a state of not having been trained or a state of lacking knowhow, 2 and 3 stood for commenced training and fully competent respectively. The scores were computed and those with scores below 2 were issued a training plan. The score calculations was context specific and did not consider other perspectives such as education and length of service.

Contrary to expectations, most recommendations failed because of organizational inertia. The static aspect of ICL was entrenched by deep power plays and traditional cultural beliefs that resisted change. The CEO maintained the old habits notwithstanding these recommendations. The proposal on tempered radicals for instance failed because only few staff had the skills. Efforts to train them failed because staff saw it as unfamiliar territory. The meeting management process for which protocols were developed

also failed because the CEO reneged and went back to the old ways of doing things with staff confirming that nothing had changed.

What the CEO made of the ideas

The initial focus of the study was limited to what junior staff felt about meetings. Here, sub-sequent questions arose to capture the CEOs own reactions to the ideas. The additional questions gave the study greater context and without presupposing outcomes, they helped filter the initial questions based on the answers given in the first instance. From the additional findings thereon, it can be stated that staff needed to be altruistic by not seeking self-benefits but pursue measures that make ICL better.

This section discusses what the CEO felt about the recommended actions. Although excited by the corrective measures, the CEO was skeptical. His major concern was capacity, implications to ICL culture and the limited resources. The CEO felt that it was useful for ICL to allow staff to engage "I want staff to speak out." One interpretation of the results is that each side found fault with the other and so change was needed on both sides. As an example, the CEO felt that deploying tempered radicals was a brilliant idea and wanted it rolled out even though staff had reservations. To move this forward, we agreed to remove self-protectionist concerns as shown in Morrison (2011) among employees such as waiting to be spoken to as a start.

 The CEO saw leadersful organization as a form of empowerment even though the Director of Planning did not share his optimism. The Director felt that staff said what the CEO wanted to hear. This is confirmed when the CEO cascade of official messages gave no latitude for deliberation. With founder syndrome, it was difficult to make methods of engagement transparent and even more difficult accommodating decisions initiated by others. This was pivotal as it laid bare the power wielded by the CEO and the power distance that ensued.

Also concerning was the CEO feeling that adopting leaderful organization would undermine his authority and reduce his influence. He was however receptive to revising the policy papers to make them "living documents" that are usable. Initially, he had argued that ICL had policies and processes that govern meetings but when challenged about their practical usefulness, he admitted that there was need to improve although it was "not an immediate priority." To the central question on the need for new

approaches, ICL manuals required review e.g. the performance management tool. A functional inquiry also occurred i.e. how decreased power increases voice? Since the CEO was old with a traditional approach to leadership, it was too much to expect rapid change. This was complicated more by limited resources.

On the establishment of an Ombudsman, the CEO perceived the idea as foreign and a subversion to his authority. It was an unattractive intervention for him. He felt that ICL 5 tier organization structure already made it less likely for junior staff to communicate upwards Israr and Gao (2018). He maintained that an external third party was not feasible as it would jeopardize ICL escalation matrix. He saw it as a fixture that would impede ICL internal affairs. Besides, it was his opinion that senior supervisors at ICL can mediate when necessary.

The decision to let others speak up first was received with reservation but the CEO wanted to experiment with it. He feared that if allowed, staff would derail critical conversations to focus on what was important to them. He remained open however to allowing it as a learning experience. The CEO was self-aware of his unconventional way of communicating what displeased him which sabotaged meetings. These included suggestive eye contacts and shrugging of shoulders. The staff understood this to mean disapproval and so adjusted their line of thinking accordingly. He remained skeptical however that anything would change.

The CEO agreed on a need to set "an all-inclusive agenda" ensuring timely circulation to promote participation. He also felt that the team could do a better job of staff preparedness but admitted that there was a need for clarity on the role of junior staff at these meetings and clarity on what was expected of them. He acknowledged the need for developing facilitation skills at meeting and setting parameters that contribute to staff input stating "we want to progress from just voicing to productive meetings" by moving away from a paternalistic system Bolden and Kirk (2009). The CEO committed to pursue this action within three months of receiving the plan.

A recommendation to engage consultants was made, experts in both procedural and policy writing but the CEO felt the work could be done internally due to limitations of funds. I had reservations on ICL internal capacity. The CEO was apprehensive about the essence of policy documents. Whilst the CEO

argued that "I engage with staff at all levels" to counter the issue of power distance, the assessment was that the endeavor was not mutually beneficial and the staff did not feel likewise. More significant, he was not entirely convinced on the question of creating a voice climate Donaghey *et al* (2011) through a pro-social behavior Morrison (2011). He insisted that he made goals clear to attract voice from even the senior managers but didn't seem to see tangible results hence the apprehension. Finally, he felt that he could use me as a consultant instead essentially to involve me as an auditor of these meetings. I knew the CEO to be unreceptive to genuine change making this request untenable.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR PRACTICE AND LITERATURE

The findings contributed to policy, practice and theory. They were used as ideas or criticism that require action. They were also applied for the sedimentation of insights. There were four ways the study could be delivered effectively at ICL. These were dissemination workshops, policy development briefs, technical assistance to decision makers and face to face engagements. If action is not taken and the research problem continues as is, there is the danger of severe consequence. The managerial Implications looks at the results against recommended actions and also highlights where action is not required. The results suggest a plethora of issues such as sub-optimal performance and so the potential future outcome may impact business continuity if the situation is left unchecked. This includes organisational growth, succession planning, staff retention and exits, profits and staff morale. As a result therefore, "employees must be aware of the impact of their own contribution to promote a more effective conversation" Bushe & Marshak, (2009).

ICL growth has stagnated in recent years. They have suffered a high staff turnover blamed on discontent. The brand equity has diminished over time and their programmes have grown less in stature. These were evident from the balance sheet, cash flows, funding from donor agencies and staff productivity. For example, the programme promoting leadership and governance was underfunded in 2018 and the outreach personnel that were contracted down sized over the period. The negative outcomes associated with this was a failed vision ostensibly due to lack of leadership and open engagement.

The theoretical implications were phenomenal. It offered a basis of understanding what the results mean and the impact the research might have on the field of interest and future research. Newly found

materials on theories provide likely areas for investigation. This include how senior leadership perceive staff and how that affects interactions at meetings. Others include challenges of low knowledge in meetings. Reservations by senior leadership in challenging the CEO thinking and possibly the African and the West cultural divide in propagating silence among the educated was another aspect. Two questions for future research were the correlation between the quality of meetings, decision making and the outcomes and how resource allocation impact voice.

For my own management practice, an account of the implications for me and the range of possible future trends include ensuring broad participation of staff and enhancing informal channels of communication. I will also encourage the use of multiple sources of information sparred by open debate. I remain cognisant of the fact that management best practice is never fully reproducible because of the situational difference, differences in technical knowledge, organizational skills and cultural norms.

Conclusion

What I set out to do was investigate the phenomenon of silence and voice and establish the remedial actions**.** Although the introduction depicted silence as an act of choice by junior staff, the study exposed structural, procedural, leadership and capacity issues as major contributors. Taken together, the significance of the criticizing statements from the results can be interpreted to mean strong unmet needs that was evident by a lethargic staff. When "I centricity", intentionality and interactivity from chapter 2 are combined with the findings such as low staff capacity, defective meeting structures and protocols and a disconcerted senior management, the conclusion is that ICL meetings and their dysfunctional settings and the poor flow of conversations are indicative of a failed system from relational disenfranchisement. This conclusion contributes to overall thesis as it highlights contradictions between staff the CEO and the policy documents. Given these complexities, and coming from sub-Saharan Africa, it can be argued that the CEO means well but evidently betrayed by deep rooted traditional beliefs on leadership. He can be described as a Leopard incapable of changing its spots. His best intentions are sabotaged by his refusal to accept change.

The conclusion is arrived by comparing and contrasting findings that led to a unified deduction. Most fundamental, the 3 research questions examining why meetings that are task based with little social

emotional engagement create a non-inclusive environment for talk, when do managerial openness and a two way dyadic relationship promote employee voice in a vertically structured African led organization and how an African styled organisation can create conditions that facilitate upward communication from staff were answered along with subsequent supplementary questions. This conclusion finds its location in the existing body of knowledge but also offers new practitioner insights.

Finally, the study did not achieve much as it was not able to fully break the research problem neither could it successfully oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the short period. The reasons were that the study was to establish the functioning of a community of people Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) within a work context that was intricate. Given that some recommendations failed, the remedial actions were taken as inconclusive. The application of the study findings was limited by contextual conditions such as team compositions and the history. Being culture blind also influenced my perceptions. This was a limitation given the pre-conceived assertions and conclusions blindsiding me from a "new reality" on what was happening right before my eyes. In closing, although success was not realized in turning the fortunes of ICL by the time the project was completed, overall the study mattered. The research disinterred salient issues affecting voice at ICL and uncovered findings not seen in previous studies.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING AND CHANGE.

This section assesses how I will improve as a leader from this experience. It explains how I will handle conversations in future, manage meetings and interact better in teams. This is based on reflections on what I encountered in this project. It was not just about identifying what can be improved but understanding the circumstances in which I was operating to better package content in my meetings for greater acceptance. I have taken full charge of my own learning from the study. I will continue to examine my past experience and develop new insights from issues that present themselves. More important, I have embarked on challenging my long held assumptions while committing to positive change and continuous improvement.

Initially, I thought that junior staff remained silent in senior management meetings because of respect for hierarchy and culture. This was premised in the thinking that organisations in African settings embrace the principle of command and control in management. At the end of the study however, I came to the realisation that silence in organisations was a result of other factors such as the competency levels of staff, the work environment, processes, systems and structures. From the new understanding, I learned three things about management and organisations: when we listen we learn; everyone has something to say, and; we all need affirmation to boost our confidence. More important, attending to staff ideas, concerns and suggestions is crucial. Debates, taking action on suggestions and involvement in decision making boosts staff confidence as it gives a semblance of involvement. This made me see the value of tolerance effectively increasing my threshold for active listening to accommodate diverse views. This would help in building arguments better and connecting discussions. Increasingly, I am respectful of processes.

The dynamics of power and influence revealed a connection with personal relationships and the essence of emotional connectivity. I am now conscious of how I relate and I am more intentional in emotional intelligence in order to create a space that is safe for talk. Training will also be an ongoing process and will run concurrently with other aspects of work particularly meetings. I have chosen to simplify complex issues to help staff navigate difficult conversations. I have realized that social isolation mainly comes from a feeling of being inadequate leading to reservations hence causing inertia. I now accept that inclusion promotes diversity. Leaders must however retain economic and political power to help steer organizations towards the intended direction. The organization will still need insulating from unsolicited

advice not in tandem with organizational aspirations. This is despite the magnanimity and beneficence that inclusivity connotes. This realization affects my professional life in a profound way.

For best effect, I maintained a safe distance between me as a researcher and as a consultant in this project. On role duality and moderator bias, I have learned the importance of triangulation. This will help make sense of data, interrogate my thought process and more important find spaces where others can contribute. A new skill that I acquired was asking questions and the power of questions in creating our reality. Similarly an understanding of formulating sub-questions from the answers given expands and enriches content.

One item I will do differently in a similar project is being critical and consistent in my literature search which I will review within a logical structure. This study is useful for my future because of the originality and relevance to practice both organisational growth and personal development. The phenomenon of silence and voice at ICL meetings is replicated in other organizations. The misconception that the development of organizations is dependent on strategic plans, processes and human resource is now debunked as they are a product of a robust or lack of effective conversation.

Appendix 1 – ICL Organization structure.
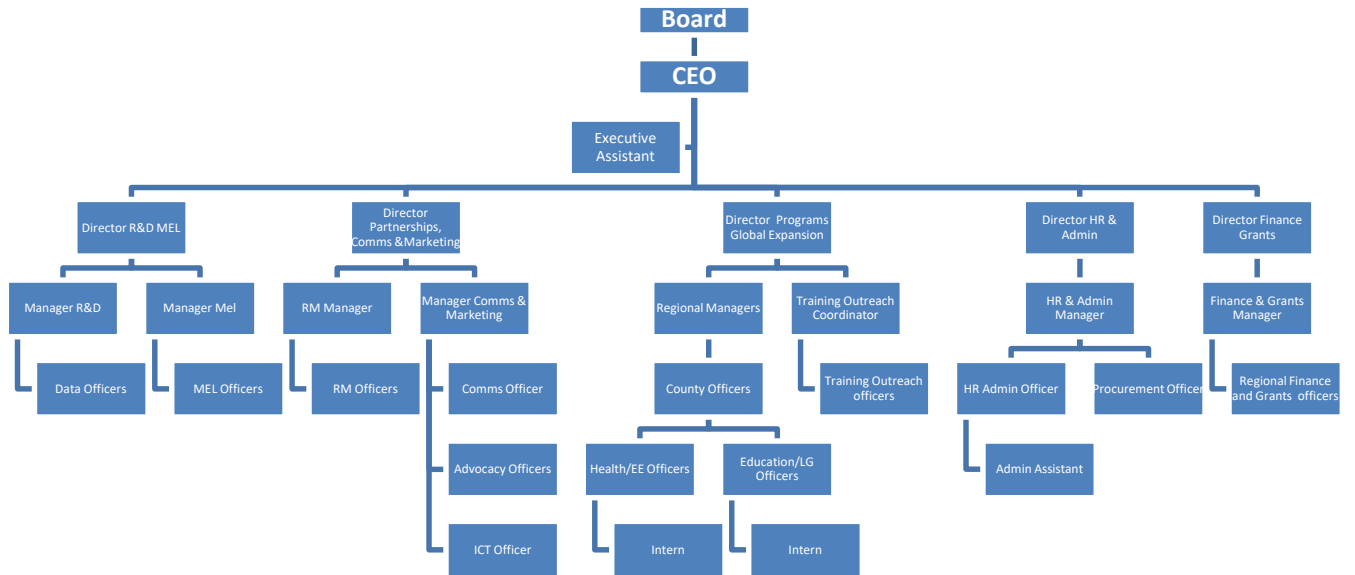
Appendix 2 – Interview Schedule (Questionnaire)

Investigating the phenomenon of silence and voice at ICL meetings

Date ………………………………………………………………..

Participant ID code ………………………………………………   Age Bracket ……………………………………………………

Period of employment at ICL between ……………………..

Section 1

Closed Questions.

	Question	Yes	No
1	Do you regularly attend Senior Management Meetings?		
2	Does the senior manager/chairman or the CEO actively invite you to speak at these meetings?		
3	Do you feel like you have something to contribute?		
4	Do you have the confidence to contribute your ideas, concerns and or feelings in the Senior Management Meetings?		
5	Do you think your contribution is valued by the Senior Management Team?		
6	Are your contributions considered and acted upon in the process of decision making?		
7	Do the other junior staff actively participate and contribute in Senior Management Meetings?		
8	Do you get to the meeting agenda prior to the meeting?		
9	Are you consulted in deciding or suggesting what should be included for discussions in the Senior Management Meetings?		
10	Do you suffer anxiety and or panic attacks during your participation in Senior Management Meeting?		
11	Do you have the courage to challenge or contradict your senior's opinions and or contributions in the meetings?		
12	Do you fear speaking up in senior management because of possible punitive consequences?		
13	Do the meetings run in a manner that is satisfactory to you or is there room for improvement in your view?		
14	Do the meetings help to solve the problems that were the subject of the conversations in the first place?		
15	Are there effective and efficient follow ups on actions agreed in the Senior Management Team meetings		
16	Do the meetings change how we do things, do they add value and increase the quality of your work and do they improve your work experience?		
17	Do ICL Senior Management Team address the most important issues in the meetings?		
18	Do you stay silent in meetings because you have nothing to say?		

Section 2 - Open Questions

How satisfied are you with the meeting's overall value in helping you improve your on-the-job effectiveness?

_____

Do other junior staff speak up in meetings and why?

_____

Should junior staff speak in these meetings and why?

_____

In your mind, are there meeting "technologies" that can improve the situation?

_____

What was your reflection on the team and the meetings – what do you think was going on at the meeting?

_____

How do conversation happens in meetings, are discussions one way, how are meetings structured, who talks/why?

_____

What difficulties do you have in meetings and how can they be facilitated differently to promote voices of juniors?

_____

What issues concern you about the meetings, are there instances that you felt unable to speak openly or honestly?

_____

What specific types of issues could you not raise with those above you in meetings and why (personal story).

_____

What events or situation leads to your decision to remain silent (employee opinion withholding)?

_____

Are there other staff who were also uncomfortable about raising those issues and why?

_____

A story on a meetings you have really enjoyed participating in or felt excluded-gone well or not and why.

_____

(Optional) How did you feel about this new approach to conducting the meeting?

_____

Does the status difference in meetings affect your ability to participate actively and contribute and why?

_____

Do you walk out of a meeting feeling like we got something accomplished and do you look forward to a meeting?

_____

50025 words

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