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# **How to Develop an Employee Communications Department**

***A Guidebook***

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# Foreword

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**“Effective internal communications enables employees to align their actions to support organizational goals, to coordinate and maximize resources, and to stay motivated” (*Best Practices in Internal Communications*).**

The purpose of the *How to Develop an Employee Communications Department: A Guidebook* is to help the corporation or firm, individual, or non-profit organization develop an employee communications department. Three of the main sources for this book were the Public Affairs Group’s 1999 *Best Practices in Internal Communications* report on internal communications; the Conference Board’s report on *Employee Communications: New Top Management Priority*; and, the e-mail and phone interviews I conducted with corporate and employee communicators at 16 companies. Additional information for this book came from secondary sources. This collected data combined with the author’s experience and knowledge and formed into the resulting document.

This book examines internal/employee communications, stressing that in order for employee communications to be effective it must be part of a larger, more holistic and strategic view of communications, incorporating both internal and external communications. This guidebook is not limited to a specific industry or market segment; instead, it reflects a general guide to employee or internal communications.

The goal of this publication is to assist communicators in recognizing the need for effective, consistent, and measurable employee communications. It is designed to help plan a practical and integrated approach to communicating internally and messaging for the right effect.

An additional goal of this project is to look beyond pure messaging and communications planning, and focus on the requirements of looking at employee communications holistically. It includes the research to seek out the “best” way of establishing employee communications in a corporate or organizational structure. This in turn will make a difference to a company or organization in need of a department, and more importantly, help to establish a philosophy about employee communications. Finally, it is the author’s wish that organizations of all sizes benefit from this project, providing them with a framework to evaluate or develop an employee communications department.

# 1

## What is Employee Communications?

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### In This Chapter:

- **Where Are We?**
- **A Brief History**
- **A Bit of Theory--How We Got Here**
- **Final Thoughts**

### **Where Are We?**

The communications revolution that is linking points around the globe is also being harnessed at every level inside organizations. Improved technology is expediting exchanges between management and employees as they confront the challenges of today's rapidly changing business climate. Many management experts agree that internal communications is essential to helping employees understand and adjust to new corporate structures, missions, and goals.

Corporate communications in major U.S. firms report that management is stepping up its demands for communications in order to reach employees during a period of unprecedented internal change. Some of the strategies in meeting these challenges include an emphasis on better customer service, a greater commitment to

producing quality products, and a new push for greater productivity inside the organization.

Adding to all of this is an accelerating pace of information and communication that is changing business. Markets emerge and disappear overnight. Product life cycles shrink. Companies are focusing on developing flexibility, quickness, and customer orientation. The result is constant reorganization.

To cope in the new environment, organizations must re-evaluate how they do many things, including communicate. Great communication should be a transparent effort and should hardly ever be noticed. An organization communicates seamlessly when employees informally communicate up, down, and across the organization continually. Responsible employees and managers should tell the company's story to customers, shareholders, the government, the community, and other audiences.

### **Creating Value with Communications**

Managers must get a better grasp on how to communicate with customers, employees, shareholders, and society: "The business schools have not taught managers to think at a strategic level beyond specific business issues. Whereas the business manager was previously taught to ask questions such as 'What business should we be in that will give us a better rate of return?' managers today need to be able to ask the follow-up questions, like 'Should we get into a business that has this much environmental baggage?' or, 'How can we change management behaviors in order to have our employees add more strategic value?' " (Corrado 1999).

The schools that produce communicators are also not providing the kind of strategic training that gives a staff communicator the skills that add value and perspective to the organization. Instead, communicators arrive at the organization's door knowing the mechanics of writing, video production, and publicity. Many cannot answer the question about how to change management behaviors to add value. Nor do

they know enough about evaluation and measurement to prove that what they do works (Corrado 1999).

As a result, management has been turning more and more to the human resource experts for help with employee communications, to the marketing department for help with marketing communications/public relations, and to the legal department for dealing with the media and other external audiences. Many in the communications profession are working feverishly today trying to demonstrate how communication can create measurable value.

Inside the organization, the old top down, authoritarian model is vanishing. Business managers know they must become business leaders who have a vision, set a mission, and establish strong values that get everybody heading in the same direction. Communications is now not just a department, but a priority. Organizational communication must be focused on not just transmitting information, but changing behavior of employees so they will do a better job of creating value for the company.

## **A Brief History—How We Got Here**

Prior to World War II, data confirming corporate efforts to communicate with employees is relatively obscure and not well documented. Although there is some evidence it was occurring in select pockets of the business world, it was nothing compared to what occurs today. Most of the employee communications material related to employee entertainment and service with content such as gossip, chit-chat about employee events, jokes, notices of local stories, and other opportunities in surrounding communities.

In 1938, Chester Barnard uttered one of the earliest and now most classic statements on the nature and importance of managerial communications: “The first function of the executive is to develop and maintain a system of communications” (Redding 1964). He continued by saying this system of communication should recognize that the communicator is “limited in the number of people with whom he can maintain effective communications.” In discussing this further, Barnard

disagreed with the popular thinking at the time that the authority of the message source alone would produce acceptance:

A person can and will accept a communication as authoritative only when four conditions simultaneously exist: (a) he can and does understand the communication; (b) at the time of his decision, he believes that it is not inconsistent with the purpose of the organization; (c) at the time of his decision, he believes it to be compatible with his personal interest as a whole; and (d) he is able mentally and physically to comply with it. (Redding 1964)

According to Charles Redfield, the subject of communication really became a force on the managerial horizon during and immediately after WW II. The thinking went like this: “The efficiency of our operation can be increased if we can only improve the morale of our employees. We can do this by improving communications with them. So let’s communicate” (Redfield 1958). Although this thinking is true today, there was a swing away from it after WW II to a more conservative position which said communication must primarily be concerned with efficiency, rather than morale.

Another change in the decade after WW II involved content. The new emphasis was on informing employees about the company plans, operations, and policies. Also included was information on growth, expansion, business outlook, and financial reports. Although service- and entertainment-type of content was not eliminated, managers realized a balance was necessary to retain readership and maintain employee interest in company communication materials.

At the end of the 1940s, the Policyholders Service Bureau of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company did a survey. Eighty-eight editors, asked to outline the underlying purposes of their company publications, spoke most frequently of such goals as:

- “To give information on company operations, policies, and problems.”
- “To draw individuals into closer contact with the company.”
- “To make employees feel they are members of a single organization.”
- “To help employees understand each other.” (Redding 1964).

Also during the 1940s, Alexander R. Heron in his book, *Sharing Information with Employees*, made an important contribution to the world of employee communications. He said, "Practically all the media for sharing information with employees [which we have discussed in previous chapters] are used to convey the same information, in the same way, at the same time, to employees as a mass" (Redding 1964). This statement reflects the still current thinking of getting the right information to the right audience, at the right time. This really is the essence of effective communications.

Management's communication to employees during the 1950s still involved providing entertainment, giving information, and performing services, but in addition was the introduction of interpretation and persuasion. Interpretation referred to management emphasizing or explaining the significance of the facts in terms of employee or reader interest. Persuasion was about urging employees or readers, based on the interpreted facts, to take specific actions or to accept management's honest ideas and opinions. Even today this argument is being waged, but it really started in the 1950s, especially as it related to union management relations, wages, and strike criteria.

Until the 1970s, communication was mainly top down and not necessarily two-way. Roger D'Aprix in his book, *The Believable Corporation*, says, "When [I] took my first communications job in 1959, I was hired into a corporate world that was autocratic, not to say tyrannical. Its leaders were powerful men who did not hesitate to use their power in subtle and not so subtle ways to control the behavior of the people who were part of their organizations." D'Aprix also references Frederick Winslow Taylor, who said a worker had to know only two things on the job: "One, who is my boss? And, two, what does he want me to do right this moment?" (D'Aprix 1977).

In 1973, management guru Peter Drucker came forward with his revolutionary idea stating, "Downward communications cannot work as it is the employee's perceptions that determine the outcome of the communication process" (Drucker 1974). The primary reason downward communications does not work, according to D'Aprix and Drucker, is that it ignores the fact that communication is the act of the recipient, that it is his or her perceptions that control the outcome of the

process: “If we continually focus on the message that we want to communicate, without regard for how that message is being perceived by the recipients, we can unintentionally create one hell of a problem for everyone” (D’Aprix 1977, 17). Drucker further makes the point that downward communications can work only after it has been informed and shaped by upward communications. In other words, downward communications is a response to the values, beliefs, and aspirations of those who are receiving the message and if the receiver does not understand those values, beliefs, and aspirations, downward communications will not work.

D’Aprix continues by pointing out that the successful communicator will always be probing the audience’s beliefs and values before he or she attempts to develop a message that will connect. In addition, any management that does not have its ear to the ground cannot hope to communicate with its people. D’Aprix concludes:

Effective employee communication is a total proposition. It is good solid management communication at every single level of the organization, with the emphasis on two-way communication between the manager and the people he or she manages. And it is also a total program of formal communications that are consistent with audience needs and concerns and that are timely and complete. Any management that does not understand this point is not going to be able to deal effectively with the problem of intra-organizational communication. (1977, 19)

## **A Bit of Theory**

Employee communications looks different today than in the past as most demonstrated in the technology being used, philosophy surrounding measurement and employee feedback, and theories of one-way and two-way communication. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the difference between the corporations that are successful versus the corporations that are not as successful boils down to two things: one, the products or services they sell, and two, their intellectual property--people. The role of employee communications is integral to both those efforts by helping companies retain the best employees by offering them a great place to work. How do employees know they are in a

great place? Much of that work belongs to the employee communications department.

### **Research Today**

Not surprisingly, most of the current research is not found in traditional textbooks. It is in articles from business, industry, and technology magazines, the popular business book press as related to corporate structure and organizational theory, as well as on the Internet. Technology is, without a doubt, at the forefront of today's current internal communications thinking and processes.

Another area of current evolution and discussion involves how to measure communications and even more important, how to incorporate the measurement into the ongoing communications systems and processes. It is not just enough to communicate anymore; good communications needs to be understood and relayed back: Was the communication effective? Did employees do what needed to be done? How do communicators know if employees understand the strategic corporate direction? All these types of questions should be addressed in the evolving employee communications department, as these questions and answers become the data point to how employee communications departments are faring in their messaging. A model for how this might work is addressed by looking at the one-way and two-way communications theory.

### **One-Way and Two-Way Communication Models**

Symmetrical and asymmetrical communications use different processes to achieve different kinds of outcomes. Both models involve two-way communication from publics to senior management, using research as a communication tool, but two distinctively different worldviews about the nature of relationships between organizations and their audiences are incorporated in each. In order for a communications department to be considered excellent it would be using both forms of communications. That way, both corporate

“propaganda” and audience feedback and input would be considered valuable.

### **Two-Way Asymmetrical**

Two-way asymmetrical communications uses attitude theory, persuasion, and manipulation to shape audience attitudes and behaviors (Dozier et al. 1995). At one extreme, two-way asymmetrical communications can help organizations persuade audiences to think and behave as the organization desires. Using this model, the scope of the communication function does not include persuading senior management to change its thinking and behavior about a particular policy or issue. In terms of game theory, organizations play asymmetrical communications as a “zero-sum” game: Your organization “wins” only if the public or publics lose (Dozier et al. 1995).

Two-way asymmetrical communications is “more sophisticated than the one-way model of communication practices, because the communicator plays an important role in gathering information about audiences for management decision making” (Dozier et al. 1995,13). Under this model the information collected about audiences is not used to modify the goals, objectives, policies, procedures, or other forms of organizational behavior; instead, it is used to develop messages that are likely to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants. Some objectives of two-way asymmetrical communications would be to “persuade an audience that your organization is right on an issue, get audiences to behave as you want, manipulate audiences scientifically and or use attitude theory in an internal campaign” (Dozier et al. 1995):

A key quality of excellence in two-way communication, with communication departments using formal and informal research to gather information about publics to interpret and share with senior management. Senior managers can use such information to manipulate or persuade publics to do as they want them to – that’s asymmetrical communication. (Dozier et al. 1995).

## **Two-Way Symmetrical**

The two-way symmetrical communications model provides a framework for ethical communications practices, without making moral or ethical judgements about organizations themselves:

“Communicators practicing the two-way symmetrical model play key roles in adjusting or adapting behaviors of dominant coalitions, thus bringing publics and dominant coalitions closer together” (Dozier, et al. 1995). The two-way symmetrical model also requires the use of knowledge and understanding of publics to counsel senior management and execute communications programs, and seeks to manage conflict and promote mutual understanding. The style of communications serves as a tool for negotiation and compromise, a way to develop “win-win” solutions for conflicts between organizations and publics:

Some of the objectives of two-way symmetrical communications would involve “negotiating with an activist audience, use theories of conflict resolution in dealing with publics, help management to understand the opinion of particular publics, and/or determine how publics react to the organization.” Symmetrical practices emphasize change in the management opinions and behaviors as well as those of audiences. (Dozier et al.1995, 46)

## **Final Thoughts**

Employers must create the sense that their employees are an important asset to the corporation or organization. This can only happen if management believes that it is true and if professionals are managing the communication effort. Until management understands and strategically plans for an integrated approach to corporate values, missions, and objectives, and until that strategy penetrates the goals of the employee communications departments, employee communicators will not succeed. Until management understands that two-way communications is effective and employee feedback is a good thing, and that asking employees what type of internal information and processes would be most helpful, management will continue to

struggle with how to get more from the employee population. Yes, employee communications departments will do communications and can continue to drive awareness and change, but the true strategic value of the integrated internal communications department will not be valued.

# 2

## Organizing the Department

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### In This Chapter:

- **Why Employee Communications?**
- **The Role of the CEO in Communications**
- **Employee Communications- -The Bottom Up**
- **Department Structure**
- **What is the Mission?**
- **A Few Thoughts on Branding**

### Why Employee Communications?

When employee communications is working best, the employee communication professionals serve the entire organization as the keepers of the vision and agents of change. They are responsible for communicating the vision and mission of the organization in ways that persuade employees to internalize a commitment to the key messages. Employee communications must align those business objectives and have the ability and capacity to communicate the growth strategies of the overall company and the lines of business to all employees.

Recognizing that effective communications requires both management and employee participation has led some firms to detail how supervisors should initiate and facilitate communication. In many major companies, executives in one or more corporate departments

are assigned specific responsibility for developing and implementing formal employee communications programs that support corporate objectives. In many corporate “mission” or “values” statements, employees are described as the firm’s most important resource. Corporate communicators often use this premise as a foundation for their activities.

## **The Role of the CEO in Communications**

Ideally, an organization’s Chief Executive Officer either is in charge of communications or directly involved. This key executive serves as the corporation’s role model for how communications are managed from the top down, outside the corporation to the world and inside the corporation to employees and other stakeholders. How CEOs model communication openness to their managers is how their managers will communicate with employees, and it goes all the way down and through the company.

The communications role is strategic and important enough to have the top of the organization as part of the planning process, primarily because they are the leaders and leadership is what helps companies get through change. Dealing with issues of international competition for world markets, high debt, lower-quality products, overstaffed management, and lower-skilled workers, there is a great need for the skill of leadership. As Peters and Waterman write in *In Search of Excellence*, “The leader needs to get people roughly headed together in the same direction. The emphasis is on setting a vision, raising emotions, and emphasizing values that will lead to success.”

To overcome any disparity between your communication agenda and senior management’s, build an editorial calendar for the next 12-18 months that does not deviate from the priorities outlined in the organization’s business plan. Include all significant corporate and industry events, from major management meetings to analysts’ briefings. Run your news story plan by the VP or CEO and other members of senior management to get their input, and check understanding and assumptions. (Howard 1998)

The major challenge for the CEO/leader is selling the corporate direction (“we want to build the highest quality product for the experienced product user”) to the company’s stakeholders. Stakeholders are employees, customers, investors, suppliers, and others who buy into that vision. Managing the implementation of the vision requires communication, but not nearly as much as selling the vision. Leadership is really about defining a new problem, not solving an old one.

Motivating employees to change requires action as well as communication. What makes people want to follow a leader has a lot to do with the amount of credibility they attach to that leader--the leader's integrity and track record, how believable the message is, and what level of energy the leader brings with that message.

The efforts of the leader will also be successful to the extent that employees feel empowered to take actions in the name of that vision. Management's job will be to help with implementation, with the systems and the organizing that will make it all work.

It has only been in the past decade that top corporate leaders have begun to understand that internal communications can directly impact the bottom line, that communication is key to managing change. There are many reasons why the CEO has been slow to embrace the importance of employee communications; a few of these are below:

- CEOs have not perceived that employee communications was important to their company’s success. Former DuPont Chairman Irving Shapiro was once quoted as saying that in the early days of the 20th century, “You could get by in business by following four rules: stick to business, stay out of trouble, join the right clubs, and don't talk to reporters.” (Corrado 1999)
- Internal communications has been wrongly perceived as a cost that does not produce a measurable return. Traditionally, communication’s impact on the bottom line has not been apparent. Communications researchers have had a difficult time establishing the links between how well a company communicates and its profitability.

- Communications has long been perceived as a technical skill, not a strategic activity. The profession that has traditionally staffed both internal and external corporate communications has been public relations and these practitioners are by trade propagandists, publicists, and former press reporters. As time went on, the job of corporate communicator began to expand to include producing newsletters, helping the advertising effort to sell a product, tracking public issues (such as environmental regulation, consumerism, and minority rights), selling the company on Wall Street, and managing crises.
- Senior managers have had a fear of a process that they can't control. Many managers have lived happily under the illusion that they own the communications channels in their business groups (their newsletters, videos, and other employee communication tools), as a result of this ownership, they can always tell the positive aspects of their businesses reality. This illusion helps keep alive the grapevine as a credible alternative to corporate manipulation of relevant information.

Thankfully, times are changing. There are many reasons why management has been forced to take risks in communicating information:

1. Management must respond to the challenges of the public information arena, especially since the media drives it. News of insider trading, major plant closings, and failed products are no longer just buried on the business pages; they are on the front pages in newspapers, on television, and on the Internet every day. Many times corporate information is out before corporate communications has a chance to say anything to their internal or external audiences---before they all know the news.
2. American business has restructured and does restructure on a daily basis. In earlier times, when management was more

hierarchical, levels of middle management served primarily as gatekeepers to senior management. The move to drive responsibility down to line management, aided by the new technologies of personal computers, facsimile machines, and telecommunications has created a faster and more voluminous communications environment within the organization. As a result, information is potentially available to everyone inside and outside the organization

Former IBM CEO Lew Gertsen each quarter writes and sends an e-mail to every IBM employee all around the world. It is his quarterly "state of the union." He announces earnings, writes about competition, current direction, and new business growth.

on a real time basis. Because of this, decision-making must be compressed to maintain competitive advantage. Also, the distance between top management and the lowest level employee is narrowing. Employees are conditioned to getting information and explanations from world leaders through television interviews, and are making those expectations of their own management as well.

3. And finally, opportunities with new technologies are providing multiple channels for reaching internal and external audiences. But companies that have not encouraged a culture conducive to frequent and informal communication are not going to help foster it, regardless of the amount of technology at their disposal.

A major responsibility of the CEO is to state a clear and concise corporate vision and aggressively communicate it to shareholders, employees, and customers. The strong commitment made by many CEOs in recent years to link employees, quality, and customers is a story that has been told many times. In industries such as manufacturing, retailing, banking, and even new technologies such as electronics, CEOs have learned the value of preaching. Today's messages are direct as competition becomes more global, aggressive, and time dependent. In some of the large companies, such as International Business Machines, General Motors, and Hewlett-Packard, senior management has realized the only way to bring

change to the culture is literally to reinvent the company. This has spawned many new startups; for example, General Motors' Saturn or Hewlett-Packard's Agilent Technologies.

The beliefs or values of the organization support the CEO's vision. For the press, the overarching value might be credibility. For a startup, the most important value might be commitment. Visible symbols are important in communicating values. For example, the Steuben Glass Company breaks every imperfect piece of crystal that has even the smallest flaw. This delivers a clear message to customers and employees about the company's values.

## **Employee Communications—The Bottom Up**

In the previous section the discussion was about the Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) role in communication. Often times, it is management's assumption to provide employees information the organization or management thinks they need to know. A better approach is to provide employees what they need to know in order to create value for the company. There may be variances between what management thinks employees know versus what employees really do understand and know. Often information sent down from the top bottlenecks at the managerial level and does not get any further. The result of this is employees do not have the information they need to support the goals of the organization or business group. Without this corporate information they cannot help the company as advocates. They do not have the information they need to link themselves and their work to the larger vision, the bigger picture.

In his article "Creating Organizations with Many Leaders," Gifford Pinchot says, "If people feel part of the corporate community, if they feel safe and cared for, if they are passionate about the mission and values and believe that others are living by them, they will generally give good service to the whole." Once information is available, determination can be made as to where employees are in relation to each organizational goal on a continuum ranging from simple awareness to goal-oriented action. Goal-oriented action is behaviorally based and demonstrated via specific actions such as productivity and

quality improvements. Once that determination is made, objectives can be established and an action plan developed.

Employees have two sets of information they need to be effective employees. One is business information: What is going on at their location? Where is the organization going? How is management going to get there? What do they need to assist that? What is their role committing to and doing that vision? The second necessity is personal information about their performance, compensation and benefits, recognition, development, and promotion. This information is more immediately important to them. It needs to be satisfied before they are willing to listen to management and management's problems. Evaluation of these individual needs can be accomplished a number of ways. These include a good upward communication system that gives employees the opportunity not only to affect the decision-making process, but also to ask questions and get answers. Methods that encourage upward communication include surveys, polls, interactive systems such as voice response or computer feedback, hotlines, and suggestion systems. There is more about these tools in Chapter 5 of this Guidebook.

## **Department Structure**

Findings from the Conference Board Survey say that of 300 major corporations, 60 percent place responsibility for employee communications in the "public affairs" arena. There are many department names for this arena, including corporate communications, public relations, or corporate relations. The reason organizations are adding employee communication to this department is because they are viewing employees as an audience, much like external audiences, shareholders, investors, concerned citizens, etc. This structure is also being used for most of the companies interviewed for this Guidebook.

Additionally, when a corporate communications department manages both internal and external communications, the messages become integrated and centralized—a more effective way to manage corporate communications. In some organizations Employee Communications report to the Human Resources department. Intel

Corporation's employee communications department is structured that way, and has developed relationships with Public Relations and Corporate Affairs. The trend in the past five years has been moving away from that model. This shift underscores the need to ensure consistent messages, detailed planning, and the effective use of media to best use the organization's resources. High performing organizations implement their communication strategies through professionals who play a strategic role.

Wherever the internal communication function resides, it is critical to success to have developed relationships with any and all departments that need to speak to employees, like payroll, finance, benefits, human resources, training, etc. And more importantly is the relationship to assist these groups with writing and editing their messages. Although they are content providers, usually they are not professional communicators and their messages are often complicated and difficult to understand. Having a communication resource at their disposal is a benefit not only to them but also to the employee audiences receiving their messages.

## What is the Mission?

Mission statements can be helpful for a communications department as they lend the top level direction and momentum toward the daily and global purpose of the department. Some mission statements are written to support corporate goals and objectives. For example, a utility company's employee communication mission would be "To help the company achieve its corporate goals by providing news and information that maintains quality, productivity, and morale."

At Sun Microsystems the Employee Communications department's mission is to "Arm employee-evangelists with knowledge of Sun's products, markets, vision, and culture. At 3Com the mission is to "Bring communication to employees anytime, anywhere in support of business objectives."

For others the mission is broader, making no specific reference to corporate goals and objectives. For example, an electronics company would use, “To keep employees informed and a part of company activities.”

Some companies use ownership and partnership-team spirit-in their mission statements. A bank would use this mission statement: “Our program is designed to create a sense of belonging within the organization--adjectives such as warm, personal, professional, and motivational best describe our mission.”

Additional “real life” mission statements are listed below:

To create and enhance team spirit, explain company actions, develop support of company culture, and introduce/explain change. (a bank)

To ensure that all employees have access to key information and share a common identity in order to: maximize productivity, promote morale, and understand company goals. (an energy company)

To help the company achieve its corporate goals by providing news and information that maintains quality, productivity, and morale. (a utility company)

To inform, educate, motivate, and inspire employees. (a bank)

To create and nourish an environment that encourages the exchange of information and ideas up, down, and across organization lines. (a bank)

To inform employees of business goals, performance, and issues, so that employees will align themselves with the company as partners. (a durable goods manufacturer)

To inform employees of the company's vision and values and present examples of our people applying the values, achieving business objectives and fostering teamwork. (a durable goods manufacturer)

To help management achieve its business objectives through the support of informed, productive, proud employees who understand and endorse the company's activities and positions; to recognize employees' achievements. (an energy company)

To promote programs that: a) keep employees abreast of corporate objectives and goals; b) promote/recognize employee involvement at the professional and community service level; and c)

give employees the opportunity and vehicles to communicate concerns and opinions to management. (a bank)

## A Few Thoughts on Branding

One of the favorite topics around any corporate marketing organization surrounds branding. It is the white-hot buzzword in every organization large and small. People increasingly frequently reach out for brands they trust to provide consistency and make life easier. A research firm, Interbrand, identified the top 60 brands in the world. Listed in the table are the top 10:

1) Coca Cola	6) Disney
2) Microsoft	7) Intel
3) IBM	8) McDonald's
4) General Electric	9) AT&T
5) Ford	10) Marlboro

So, how are companies linking their internal and external branding efforts? Most companies are just now starting to link the internal and external branding efforts. In 1995, Lynn Upshaw started the conversation linking internal and external branding by stating, "Although a brand identity lives within the lives of its users and prospects, it is born among the people of the parent company. This is where the brand is created and where, ideally, it is sustained with continuous and enthusiastic support from every company employee who has a role to play in its development and marketing." Upshaw believes that employees of a company that market a product or service are real or potential "brand ambassadors," representatives of the brand who can leave strong impressions of the brand wherever they go and with whomever they speak. She continues: "Company employees are conveying something about a brand's identity every minute they communicate with outsiders and with each other in any way that relates to the brand in a casual conversation at a cocktail party,

through their body language in a selling situation, in their responsiveness on a service repair call ” (Upshaw 1995).

In *Leveraging the Corporate Brand* (1997), James Gregory writes that as important as advertising and public relations are to a successful corporate branding program, “unique among all elements of a corporate branding is the employee force. Employees are a target audience, a channel of communications, and part of the company message itself. Employees can make or break a corporate brand.” Gregory believes that employees must understand the branding program, appreciate its importance to the company’s success, and be fully committed to making it a part of their everyday lives and jobs. He continues that, “Despite the volume of internal communications available in companies today, so-called top down communications, bottom up messages, peer-to-peer communications, as well as new communication technology such as Intranets, employees are not a “ ‘captive audience.’ Employees must be convinced through solid reasoning, training, and incentives that the real payoff of corporate branding will be reflected ultimately in their paychecks” (Gregory 1997).

Upshaw’s philosophies on branding are not unique. Brant and Johnson (1997) outline a “practical, comprehensive approach to brand assessment that can help individuals involved in managing brands better understand the condition of their brands and gain important insights into how to best improve them.” Their process called BrandFitness begins by outlining the most important considerations for fully diagnosing a brand’s health and vitality. There are five steps to a complete BrandFitness assessment:

1. Determining company goals and objectives of the brand.
2. Identifying and understanding the internal corporate realities that impact the ability of the company to manage brands successfully.
3. Compilation, integration, and analysis of current customer knowledge and competitive information.
4. Diagnostics of both internal and external customer knowledge and marketplace information with corporate brand building objectives and goals in mind.

## 5. Recommendations for actions.

# 3

## Implementing the Program

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### In This Chapter:

- Tools and Vehicles
- Town Hall Meetings, Open Forums, Face-to-Face Communications
- Intranet
- Print and News-Stands
- Voicemail
- E-mail
- Video Conferencing, Television, Radio
- The Company Talk Show
- Posters/Badges
- New Employee Orientation and Education
- Campaigns

### Tools and Vehicles

Global organizations have a variety of tools and vehicles available and find that a mixed media approach leverages their communications strategy. The right blend of tools is critical to ensure that the message is communicated to every member of the intended audience. The best vehicles have the following characteristics:

- 1) Easy to use.

- 2) Adaptable. If the employee is not comfortable with the technology, it might not be the best way to communicate.
- 3) Mirror importance. Face-to-face meetings, video conferencing, e-mail, voicemail, printed announcements, etc., all have varying degrees of urgency.

Further, technology-driven communication departments are serving employee audiences in a more timely fashion. Stories go out on Intranets as soon as they are finished, with communications no longer bound by arbitrary

publication schedules that require articles and photos complete before any of them reaches the target audiences. Messages can also appear on employee's computer screens as they log in each morning, alerting them to major external news being released that day so it is heard from the company and not the news media. Employee communications research has repeatedly

In a speech given by Steve Aaronson, vice president international public relations AT&T Company, said the morning the AT&T and NCR merger was announced, employees of both companies viewed a joint broadcast informing them of the plan. According to Aaronson, "This may have been the first large scale merger in which the employees heard the news before the media did. The news went out via every internal channel possible. It marked the start of a comprehensive internal campaign to keep employees informed." (Gregory 1997)

shown that employees want to hear company news from the company first, and not from a newspaper, radio, television report, or now the Internet. Today's tools allow organizations to achieve this obligation.

In 1998 the Conference Board surveyed 500 of the largest manufacturers and 500 of the largest services companies included in *Fortune* on employee communications. More than 90 percent of the respondents have a periodical that goes to all company employees. Many firms have more than one publication. Almost half of the respondents indicate they have a magazine, but another 80 percent are evenly split between distributing a newspaper or a newsletter to their entire workforce. About half of the respondents mail the publication to the homes of employees.

Audio-visual materials, whether films, slide shows, or videotapes, are used for employee communications by virtually all of the surveyed firms. At least half of the companies use audio-visuals to lift employee morale and promote good will, supply information about company products, and promote quality-oriented, productive employee behavior. Supplying information about compensation and benefits is another important use of audio-visuals, especially in manufacturing firms and utilities.

Please note, however, that although listed below are many different tools and vehicles to communicate to internal audiences, survey results have long told the same story about how employees prefer to hear company information: from their managers. Furthermore, managers and executives always have known that important decisions are made through casual talk, rather than through formal presentations and organizational vehicles. For that matter, employees instinctively know that organizations have two distinct communications networks: the formal and the informal. And they know to rely on the informal part, the rumor mill, for example, when they are trying to find out what is really happening.

### **Town Hall Meetings, Open Forums, Face-to-Face Communications**

In the past decade there has been great emphasis on face-to-face internal communications programs. No other forum provides better opportunities for management, supervisors, and employees to share information, exchange ideas, and receive feedback than one-on-one sessions or small-group meetings.

Some highly centralized companies might use a senior manager to travel to key offices around the world to explain the organization goals and priorities, in effect an internal road show for employees with executives making presentations and answering questions. On the other hand, if the business is organized on a regional basis, the regional manager might be the right executive for communicating that overall strategic vision.

More and more, senior executives are using e-mail and telephone calls unfiltered by supervisors or administrative assistants, to receive

messages directly from their staff. This is open communication at its purest—perhaps even more candid than face-to-face because employees are more willing to raise sensitive issues on computers than when looking the boss in the eye.

At the Benjamin Group, a Silicon Valley public relations firm, Chief Executive Officer Sheri Benjamin hosts an annual employee meeting called the Summer Super Summit. “I bring the entire company together offsite for 2.5 days of team building, corporate strategy and vision setting, and to communicate corporate annual goals.”

In the companies surveyed, the CEOs and top managers are active in talking to employees. Whether on the closed circuit television systems,

radio talk shows, video meetings each quarter, or simply standing up in cafeterias or big meeting rooms hosting open forums, these leaders meet with employees either yearly or quarterly. These events from top management are different depending on the company size and dispersion of employees. At Sun Microsystems these meetings are called Town Hall Meetings, and at Intel they are called the Executive Open Forum Tour and are managed by the Employee Communications department, and include a stop at each site once a year.

#### **A Communication Challenge**

Seagate Corporation has an internal challenge and that is to stream audio and video over the Intranet. Access to Seagate’s Executive Management staff is limited as a result of meeting and travel schedules. Their goal is to expand Executive Management’s visibility to the global workforce via electronic means. Currently they have Information Technology working to build an infrastructure to support this, but Strategic Internal Communications is limited to the distribution of materials (presentations, videos, etc.) to site management. The quality of communications is dependent on site management’s ability and commitment to deliver the messages on behalf of Executive Management.

## Intranet

The Intranet has become the main vehicle to support the business and the driving tool for employee communication. It organizes the flow of information to employees and in the process saves the company a tremendous amount of time and money.

The top five advantages to the Intranet are speed, distribution access points, reduced paper communication, cost, and content and information flow control.

The Intranet is an exciting tool not only because of its global reach, but also because it can be measured. Some of the ways companies are measuring communications on their Intranets are:

- Page views and hit counts
- Impressions and exposures
- Third-party monitoring services
- Surveys
- Use of “cookies” to track visitor retention

A corporate Intranet provides an inexpensive, convenient means of providing instant information to employees. Materials can easily be

Digital Equipment relies on its company Intranet to share real time information with employees worldwide. According to DEC's corporate Web master, the Intranet is a “just in time” medium that enables DEC to get information to its employees before it hits the streets—a policy they appreciate. DEC's Intranet provides employees with a wide variety of sites from which they can keep up to date with the company and its activities and communicate with employees from around the world. (Grates 1999)

updated and distributed. Employees also can use their Intranet to enter data online, eliminating the need for paper or subsequent data entry. It is also highly useful during times of major change, connecting management to employees and employees to information.

At the Swedish insurance company Skandia ForsakringsAV, Katrina Mohlin, senior vice president of Corporate Communications, says the Intranet has become the main way they communicate with Skandia employees worldwide. “We rely heavily on the Intranet, the

site being updated up to three or four times a day. We are focusing on improving the interactivity, making it easier for staff to communicate directly with top management.” Mohlin continues, “Recently we started teaming up with external reporters and journalists to ensure professionalism and this has increased the popularity of the Intranet. We also conduct polls on the Intranet with open real time results visible for everyone. The effect is that people feel more involved and they also feel they are listened to. And finally, we also have an open forum that is highlighted each day. This puts daily pressure on the people in management and other parts of the company being highlighted to constantly improve.”

And finally, the Intranet has no geography or time zone considerations. It is a 24 x 7 medium, making it truly a global tool.

Some of the challenges that employee communication departments need to be aware of in using the Intranet are ensuring communication’s equity is reached organizationally: determining the best method for measuring the Intranet’s return on investment, forging the relationships with the information technology departments for support, and making sure the content is readable.

## **Print and News-Stands**

Print is not dead, and for internal communications it remains a powerful force, even in light of all the technological advances. It is portable, allowing people to carry and read it at their convenience. It is permanent, giving employees the advantage of saving it to read again. The advantages of print can be especially important for large firms with staffs spread over many borders, across time zones, and beyond oceans. In fact, internal magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and broadcast fax bulletins posted in cafeterias and on the manufacturing floor play an important role in reinforcing messages and values communicated by supervisors and management. Print pieces are ideal media to convey corporate-wide news, helpful for articulating the corporate persona, and for building a broad base of understanding of the organization’s goals, challenges, and critical business priorities.

## **Voicemail**

Company voicemail messaging systems also can be employed to broadcast important information to employees about startup dates for campaigns or other information. See the campaign section below on how Hewlett-Packard's Chief Executive Officer Carly Fiorina has been using this tool to invent the new HP.

Fred Smith, Chief Executive Officer FedEX, takes calls once a month from employees from around the world. Not only is it an opportunity for him to see the business through his employees' eyes, its also provides time for Smith to educate employees about FedEX. Smith finds the results well worth the effort in that most employees, no matter what level, call with intelligent questions that show they are thinking about the future of the business. (Grates 1999)

## **E-mail**

The popularity of electronic mail has dramatically impacted both personal and business communications. Respondents from all parts of organizations cite e-mail as the most frequently used medium for employee communications. Another use for e-mail is to link information to the Web. Most e-mail programs have the capability of inserting a URL into the text so e-mail becomes more of a vehicle to get employees somewhere else---like the company's Intranet. E-mail is most frequently used for important quick messages. It also is used to relocate or navigate employees to the larger, more colorful information that is found on the corporate Intranet.

## Video Conferencing, Television, Radio

Global video conferencing is available almost everywhere in the world, or at commercial locations if the company does not have on-site capability. The largest companies in the United States have elaborate television studios and satellite capabilities. Such sophisticated systems staffed by professionals are the best mechanisms for communicating

with employees through visual channels. For example, Kmart Corporation built its studio to “meet” regularly with managers all over the country. Each Friday, senior managers, often

The Caribbean and Latin American (CALA) division of Nortel has figured out a way to keep employees unified. Once a month using Nortel’s video and data networking technologies, CALA produces and airs live its Virtual Leadership Academy. The show gets beamed to CALA offices in 47 different countries (40 of which receive only audio) in the Caribbean and Latin America. Using one-way video and two-way audio, the Leadership Academy educates widely dispersed employees about strategically critical issues. (Bussot 1999)

including the Chairperson of the Board, discuss the most critical issues of the week with store managers all across the country. Phone lines are open to keep the communication going in both directions, and store managers feel much more a part of the corporation as a whole rather than separate entities.

Kmart also uses the studio to create a monthly video magazine that is a bit more slick and similar in style to *Entertainment Tonight*. Teams of “reporters” go out into the field with video cameras to cover company events for the program, making it very relevant and quite interesting to everyone in the company. The show is then broadcasted to all the stores; Store managers tape the program for viewing by all the store employees who are interested in seeing what is happening at other stores throughout the country (Argenti 1998).

Most surveyed companies have this capability. Sun Microsystems uses WSUN radio to communicate to employees. National Semiconductor has a closed circuit television network called National TV or NTV. It can be silent and used for slide shows, or the CEO can

go live on it for corporate messaging, or it can play videotapes. It also is used for the quarterly business update meetings for all employees. According to Linda Boring, communication specialist at National Semiconductor, "NTV is global so we can talk with our employees all over the world."

## **The Company Talk Show**

Some companies have broadened the use of the video conferencing and video shows to create a new idea of a company talk show, and this is creating breakdowns in the one-way, top down, rigid formulaic corporate monologues. This new, more interactive, less formal mode of talking and listening is incorporating what organizations are now learning about communicating. Formal memos and structured meetings are not the end-all of internal communication; instead informal contact and just talking seem to be how employees get information.

According to Bill Isaacs, founder of a consulting firm called Dialogos, "Humans create, reinforce, and disseminate knowledge through conversations. Companies that perform better in the marketplace are the ones that do a better job of conducting these conversations." The company talk show is a great way to blend the formal and information communications as it talks about the right things to the right people in the right way. Just as famous talk show hosts like Oprah Winfrey, Larry King, or David Letterman know instinctively how to draw out their guests, encourage a flow of ideas, and keep the conversation focused, interesting, and fresh, so do companies that use the talk show. Companies that are using this medium own the conversations and keep them flowing among the employees.

So how are companies using this concept? First, they have a great talk show host. Someone with a strong personality who has a vision for the show and can set the tone; someone who understands that good conversation must be facilitated; and someone who asks the right

questions, makes guests comfortable, and continually reestablishes links with the audiences.

Every good talk show also has a great set—a stylish, fun, and highly functional environment that is familiar both to the guests and the audience, and that encourages casual, spontaneous interaction. Finally, every good talk show has an effective, recognizable format. This format includes a set of guidelines that allows guests and

audience members alike to know what to expect. What kinds of guests will appear and where they will sit in relation to the host? Who will get to talk, and when will members of the audience participate? Taken together these elements create an inviting, evocative, and familiar space that puts guests at ease while priming the audience for something new - a new talent, a new joke, a new idea – all in an atmosphere that blends entertainment with education.

At Hewlett-Packard Laboratories each week, Chandrakant Patel, the leader of the lab, hosts “chalk talks,” informational lectures given by engineers or product managers on what their technology is accomplishing or doing. Results of these talks provide the researchers immediate feedback on their work. They are able to mingle after each talk, having dozens of spontaneous conversations. New relationships form and some of those relationships have yielded product development. Patel says, “There is a hunger for a messier, richer, more ad hoc form of interaction; for a diversity of perspectives and for a chance to bring them to bear on people’s research” (*Fast Company* October 1999)

What is new about this is the argument that informal conversation should assume a more formal status, that it should be promoted as a key component of an organization’s business model, and that companies should actively assume the role of talk show host.

## Posters/Badges

Posters and employee badges also are useful internal communication tools. Posters stating missions, values, and corporate objectives are hung in strategic locations like conference or break rooms, or cafeterias. Visible to all employees and visitors, these are

daily reminders of how to run meetings, of company objectives, and of the values used to get there.

There is an additional opportunity to reach employees by incorporating their work badge into the program. Many companies use employee badges for security purposes. Internal communications departments can create smaller versions of the corporate mission and values for employees to wear on their badges, along with their picture identification.

Seagate provides wallet cards featuring its mission and objectives. Some of the international manufacturing locations have created posters and plaques. Strategic Internal Communications managed the project. More relevant perhaps, Strategic Internal Communications is presently working on a “Seagate Culture” video—a documentary featuring Seagate employees discussing their experiences in the workplace. Those experiences will reflect the culture and the values that Seagate is striving to spread throughout the organization.

## **New Employee Orientation and Education**

New Employee Orientation is a way for companies or organizations to initiate new employees into the corporate culture. These classes are from two hours to all day and include the processes and procedures for existing in the new environment. These classes are used to fill out necessary paperwork like medical forms and W2 information, but some corporations are using this time for showing videos of the organization’s culture. Some companies train their managers to teach, which is a great opportunity for new employees. Employees can chat with senior managers and managers can discuss culture, work, and life with new employees, offering tips on how to succeed in the new environment.

Most companies are including education in their ongoing efforts to have employees understand and work within the corporate cultures. These classes can include how to hold meetings, how to communicate with managers, best bets for working at the company, and understanding compensation, stock options, or benefits. Department

heads most often teach these classes, or employees are trained to teach these specific classes. The size of the company determines how detailed and large the training departments are.

## Campaigns

Sometimes corporate strategic change involves a larger effort than a story on the Intranet or a speech by the Chief Executive Officer. There are times when a campaign approach to employee communications is the only way to accomplish a task. Many times, communicators are in the best possible position of knowing their company's culture in order to be able to influence organizational change. Part of this is the need to drive change while understanding the past and not letting it get in the way of managing the future. This, then, becomes part of a campaign approach: collateral development and unified messaging. Many times companies need this type of communication effort.

For example, consider the role of communications in the turnaround of Continental Airlines.

President and CEO Gordon Bethune and his communications staff used their understanding of the company's culture to fuel momentum and, ultimately, growth, when he took over the ailing airline. By proclaiming a simple, yet meaningful, message for all target constituencies, "Continental flies on time," Bethune was able to re-

Seagate Corporation has created a unique program for internal product launches. Focused around the different phases of a product's development cycle, they target the development site with competitive information, and focus on the product's development, timelines, deadlines, key customers who will take the product, market share, and projected revenue information, etc. Using lobby displays, online news updates, and e-mail quizzes about the product, employee winners get Seagate gear featuring the logo of the product. They also receive global and site newsletter coverage, music written about the product and the development team, executive staff visits, free pizza events for hitting milestones, game shows in the cafeteria with prizes, large celebrations if the product launches on time, and recognition for the core teams.

energize employees and customers with a focus on the future that helped to propel Continental back into the black. As part of his internal communications campaign, Bethune walked the picket lines to talk to pilots, set up an 800 number for employee complaints, instituted a profit-sharing plan, started paying bonuses based on the airline's on-time record, and visited 15 cities to personally deliver his message to employees. Bethune effectively made a personal and corporate commitment to putting the customer first in every way. He looked to every Continental employee, from baggage handlers to flight crews to reservation takers, to build the momentum to make it happen (Grates 1999).

Another company in the throes of change is Hewlett-Packard. New Chief Executive Officer Carlton "Carly" Fiorina, as *Forbes Magazine* said, "Staging the greatest new show in corporate America." Fiorina is creating an onslaught of messaging to reposition Hewlett-Packard's (HP) brand and image internally and externally. "Fiorina has deliberately tied the makeover at HP to her own nature and personality." Not a bad strategy in this era of corporate personalities. Like Andrew Grove of Intel Corporation and Jeffrey Bezos of Amazon.com., Fiorina has to embody the change inside the organization and she knows a brand thrives only if it pervades all media. Besides talking to thousands of staff, she has found plenty more ways to get out her message.

First, she is visiting every HP site, from Germany to Korea, doing her "Travels with Carly" lecture, a 20-minute talk with 30 minutes of questions. She also plans to visit the HP Labs every month. HP's in-house magazine *Measure* has been pulled off the chopping block and is publishing 83,000 copies each quarter. Fiorina publishes a letter in each issue. She is also using voicemails for the masses. Six voicemails have gone out since July 1999 and are used to unveil the new brand and structure and talk about the "new HP." Seven mass e-mails have been sent. Fiorina has asked for messages from employees and gets thousands a month. She even hired an HP retiree to sift through all of them for her, and she reads each one (on her private \$30 million jet).

There also is a multimedia “Carly Show,” which offers streaming video, selected quotes, and a brief biography for employees who visit the internal Intranet site. And finally, one of her external efforts of appearing on various breakfast television shows and on Japanese, British, and French television are rebroadcast on the HP Intranet.

# 4

## Being Global

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### In This Chapter:

- **Challenges**
- **Structuring the Global Organization**
- **Final Thoughts**

In today's global business environment, broad-based communication must win the attention and cooperation of employees all over the world. Advances in technology have fundamentally altered both the nature of production, causing a shift in focus from products to services, and the very nature of the communication process. Furthermore, demographic shifts have complicated the ease of communication. It cannot be assumed that messages and methods --- no matter how well crafted---will convey the sender's message and meaning to diverse audiences. Workforce mobility and a shortage of talent have put even greater stress on communication processes. All of these factors generally have weakened communications programming, and this weakness has contributed to reduced clarity of organizational vision and less than rigorous strategic planning.

To meet these challenges, communicators and senior managers must work to establish proactive, well-defined communications strategies that engage and align employees with the organization's global business goals. A closer tie between business and communication strategies will help the workforce understand and support the direction of the organization. All of this can be a bit

overwhelming to the employee communicator operating in the world arena. And while certain communications principles remain constant, their practical application must now be tempered to fit a complex, ever-changing set of conditions. It is no longer enough to craft the message. The global employee communicator must be sensitive to linguistic, cultural, behavioral, and psychological factors that influence how the message will be perceived in different parts of the world.

## **Challenges**

### **Diversity and Culture**

Tom Geddie in his report on “Moving Communication Across Cultures” (1999) says, “It’s no surprise that the biggest global communication issue organizations face in this big round world today is understanding and engaging diversity.” Geddie interviewed 32 members of the International Association of Business Communicators in 15 different countries. More than half of the respondents cited diverse audiences (whether within a single country’s border or across borders) and cultures as the single biggest communication issue organizations face. Cited next was understanding and properly using technology; next was mergers involving people in different countries, then helping employees understand corporate global issues; and finally, communicating the big picture.

One answer to the question of how to better deal with diversity comes back to having a better understanding of the employees’ culture. It is not easy trying to understand the cultural attitudes and behaviors of people from other countries. Culture is defined as an integrated system of “learned behavior—that is, the ideas, customs, skills, and arts of a people or group” (Leaper 1997). Barriers to effective global communications can range from national attitudes, habits, access to information, differences in expectations and motives, to imprecision of language. Other cultural variables beyond language and behavior include how individuals manage themselves in a business or a social context—manners—how interaction happens, and

management of time, authority, or power. More than mere stereotypes or even generalizations, these indicators offer the communications department a glimpse of how an employee in another country might respond to a particular program or corporate message. For example:

Something as mundane as space and how it's perceived can provide unexpected insights into national traits. Executives in France like an office in the middle of a floor. Those in Japan prefer working at desks in rooms surrounded by their staffs. Germans like secluded, private offices to show power and status. Americans like to compartmentalize space, much as they do time, and office size and location reflect importance. (Leaper 1997)

In order to have messages be successful and understood, corporate communicators must incorporate or be aware of all these factors when creating global messages and communication systems.

## **Language and Translation**

Most communications professionals agree that another problem for communicating globally is language:

More often than will ever be known, international communication efforts produce messages that confuse, amuse, astound, insult and anger. If this isn't bad enough, people of other countries complicate the situation by being unwilling to admit they don't understand a message. And even when comprehension occurs it's often superficial. (Leaper 1997)

To complicate language even further is the concept of where employees are located. Leaper, in his article "Global Business Communications, Adopting a World View," discusses an interesting fact regarding the globe: "There is no central point on the surface of a globe. So a person standing in Manila or Buenos Aires is justified in feeling centrally positioned, with the rest of the world stretching away in all directions." Everyone feels they are in the center. This becomes a key point to remember when determining how to communicate and when to translate.

According to research, knowing when to translate a document has no hard fast rules. And interestingly, aside from company news,

mission/values, and limited benefit communications, not all internal communications are intended for a worldwide audience. At many corporations, translation is done when the topic or message is a legal or mandatory issue. When is it legally required that employees worldwide understand this message? Or, put another way, what is the liability if the message is not understood? Alternatively, how important is it to “sell” this program internally? In addition, are employees not using this program or tool due to lack of understanding? Most of the time the specific country site or campus will make the decision whether or not to translate a certain document or program’s information for their audience.

In the Geddie article, communicators from other countries offer advice on translating. Some of that advice includes a person in the United States saying, “Keep language simple and check for understanding. Just because someone is nodding their head, it doesn’t mean they captured what you have told them. And when business has interpretations done it is a great idea to include a second interpreter (unconnected to the first) to interpret back to English—as a check before release of the materials.” A communicator from the Netherlands gives the following advice regarding translation: “Research, research, research! What works in the Netherlands may not necessarily work in Ghana or the USA. Translating the message you want to convey is far more than putting the words into another language.” And finally, an internal communicator from England said, “The secret is not in the translation. It is in what I call trans-communication. This is creating or finding local champions (not translators) who can put the global messages into total local context whilst retaining the message” (Geddie 1999).

Aside from the advice of Geddie’s interviewees, there are some general rules regarding language that are important to remember in communicating with people in other countries. For example, it is a bad idea to use slang of any type. American and Canadian English use slang, colloquialisms, sports allusions, abbreviations, acronyms, and other jargon that often goes unnoticed and unacknowledged. Those persons for whom English is a second language tend to speak a more classic, textbook variety and simply can’t keep up with the latest

buzzwords and popular expressions. As a general rule it is best to avoid expressions such as “fly-by-night operations,” “trial balloon,” “beating a dead horse,” “close, but no cigar,” etc. Attempts to translate these into another language can lead to statements ranging from unintelligible to ridiculous.

Sports metaphors are also not recommended. For example, who “dropped the ball” or expressions like “couldn’t get to first base,” “par for the course,” “whole new ball game,” “low blow,” etc., normally don’t translate well, even if these help to make the situation more defined from a metaphoric perspective.

It is also mandatory to avoid any off-color stories, sexual innuendo, and coarse language. This is true for most communication, but when communicating to a global employee audience, the potential for giving offense is great and less predictable.

Even internal corporate terminology and acronyms might not be appropriate for all global employee audiences. Communicators should not assume that internal products are universal and accessible. It is best to avoid phrases referencing one’s own country like “It’s available at all local campuses.” Also, spell out dates and acronyms. And finally, there are the general writing tips of not using long, complicated sentences, words with too many syllables, and trying to break down complex ideas into simpler thoughts.

## **Structuring the Global Organization**

Steve Pearson of EDS Corporation says, “Being global means that you need to be able to share information, resources, and capabilities at a moment’s notice with other offices around the world. That’s the key to being global and not merely being international.” What distinguishes the successful global communicators from those who are simply struggling to figure it out? Basically the answer to this question is that global communicators employ the best mix of global communications people. Global communicators have knowledge of worldwide issues, knowledge of other cultures and languages other than English, local understanding and the ability to respond quickly to opportunities and

crises anywhere, and the capability to communicate instantly with important audiences around the world.

Staffing becomes a critical factor in global communications organizations with a balance between long-term employees with broad experience and those with specific country expertise, cultural knowledge, and language skills. Communicators must be linked to management in each country and to the corporate offices. Using on-site staffers, whether a local or long-time expatriate, is vital. Interestingly enough, in a recent study by the Public Affairs Group, it was noted only 13 percent of the surveyed Human Resource staffers see global communications as a top issue. Clearly, when internal programs are not being understood or coordinated globally, it is stemming from the perceived lack of awareness in the internal communication organizations regarding the importance of this strategic effort.

Global education has never been more important, and the communications staff also needs to drive this process. The best companies make global learning part of orientation when hiring staff for a country. This includes language and cultural training as well as business training. So, hiring locally whenever possible is very important. Employees who speak the local language and live the local culture are much better at translating the company's culture and mission/values than non-native speaking employees. Workers are more inclined to raise issues and be candid with managers from their own country, and nuances will not be lost in translation—both of which are keys to nurturing an open communications climate. Having local staff helps determine whether or not the local employee publications, videos, and so on should be in the local language. They automatically will be because the business is being done in the local language.

Thinking and acting globally involves sharing best practices, identifying successful programs that can be adapted across national boundaries, eliminating duplication of effort, and capitalizing on economies of scale. Global organizations may require broader communications that foster teamwork and break down artificial walls both geographically and organizationally.

And finally, as mentioned earlier, the employee communications function is transferring out of Human Resources and operating units into corporate communications departments. There is recognition of the strategic nature of communication and the need for integrated messages. With the growing centralization of the communications function, the strategic role of the communicator has increased as management at all levels has come to appreciate the importance of winning the hearts and minds of employees. This shift underscores the need to ensure consistent messages, detailed planning, and effective use of media to best utilize the organization's resources. High-performing organizations implement their communication plans through professionals who play a strategic role.

## **Final Thoughts**

Norman Leaper, in the conclusion to his study on "Global Business Communication," said, "The first requisite to doing business internationally is to change our normal mind-set—to get over the "foreignness" of people in other countries." This is key when working in communications for a global company, whether the charter is employee or external communications. As he said, "We must try to visualize the point of view of the person we're communicating with—and then craft messages that are clear, concise, and understandable."

Doing business in a global economy and managing change makes effective communication a critical success factor. Market volatility and the need for fast business planning in the face of competitive forces can and often does create rifts between the goals of the organization and the processes that touch employees. It is essential that organizations create comprehensive, integrated communication programs. Employee communications departments must be built around a paradigm of communication that includes individual, group, and mass communications. This, then, will lead to greater employee understanding and cooperation. Structuring a global employee communications department with the appropriate people and providing them the necessary technology and support tools will enable the company to communicate messages globally, easily, and effectively.

The success of employee communications programs comes from a clear and unwavering focus on the need to communicate business objectives and the role employees play in achieving these objectives. In organizations with successful communications programs, senior management clearly has taken the time to articulate and support communication philosophies and strategies that flow from the organization's values.

# 5

## Measuring the Program

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### In This Chapter:

- **Is There a Problem?**
- **Information Evaluation**
- **Formal Measurement**
- **Using Research**
- **Incorporating the Feedback**

Measurement is key to assessing communication effectiveness and needs to be part of any global internal communications effort. Programs must be measured both for their local impact and for how well they contribute toward meeting corporate strategic goals. Whatever communication measurement tool is being used, it should show how programs help the global bottom line.

Measuring success is not easy, especially in light of the historical lack of interest by communicators in measurement and evaluation. Communications people have traditionally focused on goal-oriented activities like generating materials and disseminating them, with little evaluation or feedback beyond number of stories run or total column inches of coverage.

A company needs to understand how the communication activities it engages in create value for the organization. The only way to establish that value is to prove that the communications process can

achieve greater productivity and a more positive image for the company's internal actions.

## Is There a Problem?

The classic tools for diagnoses of communications problems in organizations are:

- The attitude survey
- The communication survey
- The communication audit

An employee attitude survey measures a wide range of subjects including climate, security, job satisfaction, opportunity communication, management, compensation, and benefits.

A communication survey measures communication philosophy and topics important to

employees: whether they feel sufficiently informed, what their preferred source of information is, how high publication readership is, credibility and usefulness ratings, managers' communication skills, and awareness by employees of company's mission/vision/values.

One of the major issues in communication surveys or employee attitude surveys is what to do with the data.

These surveys, which sometimes are evaluated against national norms, provide both direct and normative information to management.

For example, a software development company may learn that only 43 percent of its managers feel that they get enough information from management to do their job adequately. While this number may

The surveyed companies all do some form of measurement. These are either internal qualitative surveys or focus groups, or mini-surveys after events. These surveys measure the employees' satisfaction with how they are receiving information, if the information is pertinent, helpful, and whether additional changes or information would be valuable for them to have. 3Com Corporation surveys each internal communications vehicle once a year to rate its effectiveness. Sun Microsystems and Sony Electronics use focus groups at each facility to determine what employees are reading, what tools are most effective, and how employee communications is working at their location.

appear to be a cause for concern, when compared with other software development companies from across the country, the number is average and therefore not of special concern.

However, the real issue is how to measure employee movement toward achievement of corporate goals, which is more in alignment with the needs of management.

A communication audit looks at both formal and informal communications channels, upward and downward flow of information, lateral communication, and employee preferences for communication. Audits model how the communication process is working in the organization, based on the stated goals, resources committed, and perceptions of the employees. An audit can determine:

- Management credibility
- Employee attitudes and company knowledge
- Effectiveness of feedback programs
- Impact of corporate media
- Effectiveness of supervisory communications

Techniques used in communication audits include:

- Focus groups – small groups of people representing various demographic cuts of employee groups. Focus groups provide qualitative information, which means not only their opinions, but also the context for those opinions.
- Management climate assessment – generally a series of interviews with top management and key unit managers to determine the culture and values of the organization in relation to communications. Also, it is used to identify the effects of individual personalities and define the content of jobs and roles.
- Content evaluation of published material – looks at the subject matter of memos, policies, forms, newsletters, and the "paper" a corporation runs on to determine what is important based on what is written down and kept.
- Surveys – provide a means to let everyone in the organization get involved in the audit process. Surveys allow people to participate anonymously. Data is more quantitative than qualitative.

- Network analysis – looks at the interaction between people in an organization to determine or map such things as communication nodes or bottlenecks. The theory is that the more people who interact, the more successful the organization is.

## **Informal Evaluation**

Not all evaluation needs to be formal or directed at the entire employee population. There are a number of ways a manager can evaluate the organization's communication activities informally:

- Walkarounds – How do people address each other? What are the clues to status or job (dress, parking, eating areas)? What's on the bulletin boards? Does the suggestion box look used? Is there a suggestion box? Are there any motivators on the walls (signs, posters, etc.)? Do people seem busy and happy with their work?
- Lunch-room surveys – Informal discussions at the lunch table, the vending machine, in the restroom. What are people talking about? What are they worried about? What's the grapevine saying?
- Interviews/focus groups – What are employees' concerns when you get them together? How do people react when you bring up certain topics?
- Reading and viewing communications materials – Is the newsletter coming out on time? What kind of stories is it telling (bowling scores or production reports)?
- Stories people tell – Is there some pattern to what people are saying? Do the stories talk about successes or failures?
- Feedback channels – What is in the suggestion box? What's the big issue on the 800 line? What is the sales and field force reporting? What's online feedback showing?

## **Formal Measurement**

Many times in communications work, the goal is stated in terms of the effort and not the results. "Our goal is to get employees to enroll in

the stock option program” or “tell employees about a new product.” The problem with these goals is that there is nothing measurable. So, the first concern is measuring the impact of our communications efforts. The more specific the better. For example, “The 401(k) program will have a 10 percent increase in the third quarter.” This is more measurable than a more general statement like, “We will make an effort to increase 401(k) participation.” In communications, the classic goals talk in terms of outputs, not impacts. The problem can be seen in the classic communication measurements:

Seagate measures internal programs primarily by e-mail survey. Communication audits are conducted to determine how employees obtain information, readership/viewership levels, and content preferences. The audit is done at the beginning of every fiscal year and acts as a baseline for performance goals. Quizzes (with a prize incentive) are used to gauge the effectiveness of a program in raising awareness of particular issues. If there is a call to action in a communications program, the action or change in behavior is measured.

- Readership surveys – measuring the fact that employees were attracted to an article, not whether the article influenced their actions.
- Content analysis – measuring whether communications materials match the outcome expectations spelled out in the objectives.
- Readability index – is the material understandable for your targeted audience?
- Tracking – evaluating print or video clips by recording placement, distribution, column inches, and other measures such as equivalent cost of buying similar space. These only tell you where the information is going, not whether it is having an impact.
- Audience – research that distinguishes between the audience that you can potentially reach, versus the audience you actually reached, versus your targeted audience.

These techniques work very well in helping adjust an ongoing program.

In measuring the impact of communication, effectiveness is generally evaluated based on goal-oriented activities: delivering a

message via the media to employees. This approach is characteristic of communications activities and information programs. Communicators evaluate success by "counting the house." How many people signed up? How many articles did it take to accomplish the goal? Beyond this there is no evaluation.

Another approach involves using some type of feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the internal publicity or information. The research measures attitudes before and after the communication or campaign.

## Using Research

Research on internal communications should start with the assumption that linking communications efforts to the goals of the organization is the foremost concern for internal communicators. The key questions behind those concerns are: How does communication create value for an organization and how can this value be measured? The need for this approach comes from today's organizational realities that companies exist for the creation of value, and value is determined by economic performance in the marketplace. By increasing the amount of goal-oriented action by its employees, an organization will improve its economic performance.

MTW Consulting Corporation has a 12-member group called the Culture and Communications Team that meets by a conference call once a month to help the company make decisions about culture and communications. CEO Richard Mueller and President Ed Ossie are active members. Says Ossie, "Why do I get involved? Because if we get the culture right, then that drives the whole company" (*Fast Company* Dec. 1999). One recent project was a company-wide survey of "guiding principles." The team was charged with identifying a dozen principles, along with a list of questions, for evaluating how well MTW was living up to them. The survey asked employees to rank 12 principles--trust, integrity, customer satisfaction, and so on--by importance, and then to rate the company's adherence to each one. Employees ranked "learning organization" as one of the top three but indicated that MTW was failing to live up to its goal by a wide margin.

The results were posted on the Intranet, frank criticism and all. MTW doesn't claim to be perfect, but it does try to give employees a hand in addressing imperfections. According to CEO Mueller, "People recognize that this is an evolving endeavor and they appreciate being part of the process" (*Fast Company* Dec. 1999).

The creation of value comes from the effective allocation of resources—including people. In allocating human resources, effective formal and informal communication motivates people to take goal-oriented actions that will produce value. For example, some characteristics of this approach are that the communication:

- Promotes understanding and commitment
- Seeks feedback and participation
- Provides motivation
- Creates a basis for action
- Monitors progress toward accomplishment of organizational goals

The role of communication then is to move employees toward goal-oriented action, not just compliance or passive acceptance of the information.

Another goal is to be able to measure some behavioral change or, at a minimum, movement on the scale shown below:

- Aware – have general awareness of the issues
- Inform – up to date on issues involved
- Understand – have full knowledge of the issues and implications
- Accept – mentally accept the validity of the issues
- Intent – have decided to take action, but have not yet
- Goal-oriented action – take specific action requested

This approach, using standard research techniques, provides data that enables management to:

- Establish a benchmark of existing conditions.
- Identify the information needs of various stakeholder groups in relation to the goals of the organization.
- Identify effective channels and media.
- Align communication policies and practices to the goals of the organization.

## **Quantitative vs. Qualitative Research**

As communicators take their first steps toward research, they have tended to favor qualitative over quantitative. The most popular qualitative techniques are interviews and focus groups. Focus groups of 6-12 people can be organized and conducted relatively quickly over a one to three hour period—you can identify an audience, test a message, and confirm the direction you are going. In addition, focus groups are relatively inexpensive. A company seeking to embark on a new benefit program might bring in employees for focus groups to test out the reaction to the proposed program.

Another qualitative technique, the in-depth interview, provides an open-ended interview in which the interviewee is given a subject and then encouraged to expand on it in his or her own terms. This kind of research is valuable early on in the process to evaluate the kind of climate or environment in which the research will be conducted.

The key quantitative research tool is the survey. Questionnaires generally are more expensive to develop, test, and administer. They range from the more elaborate face-to-face interview to a short telephone interview. There are the questionnaires passed out at the office or plant for the employee to fill out or e-mailed or mailed questionnaires that can be done at home. Professional researchers (usually outside contractors) should conduct the design and administration of questionnaires and employees should be assured of confidentiality.

## **Incorporating the Feedback**

One of the real problems with measurement and research is that sometimes it tells you what you don't want to hear. For example, management is hopelessly out of touch with its employees or the benefits program is not effective, or perhaps the worst is employees do not know where to find information.

Those people who stand to lose the most are going to be looking to discredit the research. So, it's important to set up a process for getting past this problem:

- Provide feedback that makes sense.
- Get commitment to take action before doing the research.
- Relate actions to research--tell people that their input helped measure how actions worked; find out if what you did worked.

The level of reaction to research can range from implementation to rejection, with the worst outcome probably being a decision "to do nothing."

Most companies are using their research and gathered data to change or make their internal communications better and more effective. They gather the feedback, then modify activities based on that feedback, which usually includes passing it up and down the management chain to get desired action plans.

The best use of communications research is to help in choosing among possible alternatives during design of communications, and then making changes in the organization that respond to feedback. The movement toward evaluation can only help people in the communications field. It's a maturing step, one that has become necessary because of a general recognition of the increasing importance of improving human resource performance and competing successfully in the new world marketplace.

IBM has a company-wide program called "Speak Up," and Intel Corporation has a similar program called "Write to Know." These employee-generated question-and-answer-programs at IBM and Intel are not unique; many companies have this type of feedback channel. At IBM since the program's inception, its administrator has fielded more than 250,000 employee queries. Usually the turn-around time is about ten working days. After the manager assigned to investigate an employee query has supplied a written response, it is reviewed by the program administrator and then mailed to employees by e-mail. Sometimes, depending on the issue or concern, the employee is called. (Townley 1998)

# 6

## Getting Started

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### In This Chapter:

- Now What?
- A Guide to Communications Planning

### Now What?

There was a cartoon in the *Wall Street Journal* that showed a group of managers sitting around a conference table. The chairperson said, “Okay everyone, it is the consensus of this meeting that we say nothing, do nothing, and hope it all blows over before our next meeting.” One of the problems with this approach is that when communicators say nothing, and there is external publicity about it, employees “hear,” “We can’t trust you with this information” or “If we don’t tell employees they might not find out.” But as Tom Friedman, reporter for the *New York Times*, says, “Sometimes the news is in the noise and sometimes the news is in the silence.”

So, how do you get a program going? The most important step is having top management’s commitment that communication is a critical, strategic function. The second most important step is to look at internal and external communications as an integrated function. And finally, make sure that all communication functions are staffed with professional communicators, knowledgeable about their specialty whether it is internal or external communications, or investor relations. Then, with that commitment a committee of senior managers needs to

be gathered to begin the process. Outlined below is a seven-step process for establishing an employee communications department:

1. Establish a working policy for internal communications. This involves creating a mission statement. The goal of communications usually is to move employees from simple awareness about their company to goal-oriented actions that result in actions that accomplish the objectives of the organization.
2. Identify functions and staff these functions with professional communicators.
3. Recruit a steering committee to determine needs and uses. This group will assist the department with larger, varied vision. Making sure employee audiences like manufacturing (little access to computers and Intranets) to office dwellers to field sales personnel (not in a regular office on a site) are considered when developing the program.
4. Develop short-and long-range communications plans: what needs to happen immediately versus what type of processes, procedures, and, department structures are needed for the long term.
5. Develop and use feedback to measure effectiveness.
6. Budget to solve organizational problems.
7. Evaluate and revise the program, process, and department structure.

## **A Guide to Communications Planning**

There is a tool any organization that needs to communicate should use. Called the communication plan, it is critical to the long-and short-term success of any communication. The most important piece of information about a communication plan is that it is date-driven. Communicators must work backwards from the date that the communication needs to be seen by the biggest audience. For example, if a new bonus plan is being implemented, communicators need to tell audiences in the proper order. Who needs to know first in order to have a successful implementation? Then who needs to know to further support the program. Finally, telling the employees last. So, if

the implementation date is March 1, the communication plan might start back in January, making sure key stakeholders and others involved are very aware of this new program and have put into place the various tools and processes to support it.

<b>INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING GUIDE</b>	
<b>Communication Goals</b>	Brief summary of what is occurring, why and how, timing, and project scope.” This serves as a convenience for the reader and should be no longer than what is needed to gain a quick grasp of the plan’s major thrust. Usually about one paragraph.
<b>Key Messages</b>	Summary points articulating the action or event, reason, impact, timing, and any calls to action. These are the key take-away messages for your audience.
<b>Communication Date</b>	When the communication will happen.
<b>Vehicles or Tactics (How we will communicate)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intranet</li> <li>• Newsletter (online, hardcopy)</li> <li>• Special bulletin to employees (online, hardcopy)</li> <li>• Management communication channel</li> <li>• Executive Update meetings</li> <li>• Q&amp;As</li> <li>• Radio or television show</li> <li>• Collateral (brochures, videos, posters)</li> <li>• Training/education</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Manager face-to-face communication</li> </ul>
<b>Audience (Who needs to know)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employees (U.S./Global)</li> <li>• Managers and/or Executive Staff</li> <li>• Other Internal (HR, Finance, IT)</li> <li>• External (families, industry, retirees, candidates, media, acquisitions)</li> </ul>
<b>Message</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the specific communication trying to accomplish?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do employees have to do anything or is this just for their information?</li> </ul>
<b>Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the plan for that specific communication? (Who will write it; who owns getting it to the editor?)</li> </ul>
<b>Status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is it done or pushed out or not done?</li> </ul>
<b>Measurement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anticipated results?</li> <li>Embed measurement criteria into plan.</li> <li>What does success look like?</li> </ul>

**Sample Communication Plan, (Rev. 0, Date)**

**Communication Goals:**

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- 
- 

**Key Messages:**

- 
- 
- 

**Team:**

<b>Comm Date</b>	<b>Vehicle</b>	<b>Audience</b>	<b>Message</b>	<b>Plans</b>	<b>Status</b>

# 7

## Future Thoughts

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### In This Chapter:

- Conclusion
- Bill Jensen Talks Simplicity

### Conclusion

The business environment of the future is daunting. Workplace experts envision a knowledge-based, culturally diverse workforce with varying skill sets and little allegiance to one organization. Employees are likely to be more geographically dispersed, thanks to more attractive telecommuting arrangements and technologies. And there is also the “unknown” impact of Generations X and Y. These teens and twenty-somethings have very different values and expectations about their jobs and the companies they work for. As an HR executive said at one technology organization, “Unless we prepare ourselves and our organizations, there’s bound to be a tremendous clash between them and their baby-boomer managers.”

Futurists also contend that the continued proliferation of sophisticated telecommunications technology, company intranets, the Internet, and 24-hour all-news stations will make it even less feasible to control the flow of information to and from companies. As a result, communicators will need to become more vigilant in this area, working closely with managers to ensure that what their

organization stands for externally is consistent with what they say and what employees believe internally.

Communicators of the future need to recognize that there is a new employer-employee compact: Empowerment has replaced paternalism, there are no guarantees, and the work you do is based on shared responsibility. Acknowledging the future means training staff to track trends and patterns around the world so communicators can be in a better position to predict change. It means making yourself and your staff aware of all forms of communications from bulletin boards on the Internet to children's books to new magazines. It means pushing yourself and your colleagues to reassess existing opportunities, products, or services. It means that communicators need to act like entrepreneurs with the ability to be flexible and think hypothetically. And above all, it means asking questions, not just of yourself, but of your staff, your management, and everyone you work with.

Another reality is the constant state of change. Whether it is news of a merger or acquisition, employee layoff, labor dispute, or organization change, it is important to remember that how you communicate change is as critical as the news being delivered. Below is a six-step strategy developed by Gary Grates, CEO of Boxenbaum Grates, Inc., a public relations consultant firm:

1. Involve your audiences in the process and understand their motives, biases, and beliefs. Listen.
2. Create and communicate a case for change based on market realities--today and tomorrow. Listen.
3. Identify and communicate market forces that the organization faces doing business. Listen.
4. Formulate and communicate a responsive business direction. Listen.
5. Outline the consequences of success and failure. Listen.
6. Tell and retell. Listen.

An additional key consideration for all communicators is mastering a new skills set. Tom Peters said, "Only those who constantly retool themselves stand a chance of staying employed

in the years ahead.” Take a moment to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your staff or yourself. Does your team need to acquire any specialized skills such as management, facilitating, strategic planning, computer, or new technologies? Do you or members of your staff need background in new disciplines such as psychology, organizational development, and/or writing?

### **Bill Jensen Talks Simplicity**

Bill Jensen of the Jensen Group is an expert in simplifying the work environment. In his book *Simplicity, The New Competitive Advantage in a World of More, Better, Faster*, he tells readers,

All companies—and the people inside them—are already inundated with too much information, too many tasks, too many decisions with too little time to get it all done. Even in top performing and most admired organizations, work is becoming way too complex. If we’re going to compete, lead, and work smarter, we’ll need easy-to-use ideas and tools that help us cut through the clutter, that allow us to focus on what’s important and not waste our time on the rest. We need the power of simplicity.

Jensen’s book is about changing the rules so people have the power to do less of what does not matter and more of what does. To Jensen this means communicators have to start changing two habits that create work complexity and confusion. One is to use time differently by changing how we organize and share what we know. In other words, how do we create meaning and make sense of things? Secondly, we need to work backwards from what people need to work smarter. He says that all companies—and the people inside of them—are already inundated with too much information, too many tasks, too many decisions with too little time to get it all done. If we are going to compete, lead, and work smarter, we’ll need easy to use ideas and tools that help cut through the clutter. That will allow us to focus on what is important and not waste our time on the rest. This, according to Jensen, is the “power of simplicity.”

This final section is an interview with Bill Jensen.

**Q:** Bill, one of your major "Simplicity" theories is to "use time differently by changing how we organize and share what we know." For the internal communicator, how do we do that?

**A:** There are four major perceptions among communicators that absolutely must change:

- 1) Most communicators define their success by the KISS model-- Keep It Simple Stupid. They try to boil everything down to the shortest, dumbest, most easily remembered sound bite or message. The power of simplicity is helping people explore an idea in a way that they can create their own clarity. For example, visit any well-designed CD-ROM or interactive museum where they take complex ideas and organize them in such a way that people are excited to go deeper and deeper into the subject. My book talks in detail about "getting ready to use people's time and attention." Simplistic messages themes and sound bites do not start with an understanding of how you are using that person's time and attention. Their goal is just to be louder, shorter, or more consistent than all the noise out there. Any information that is truly simple begins by asking, "I am about to use 15 seconds [or minutes or hours or days] of this person's time. How and why will that person see that I have used that time effectively?" KISS focuses on how little the end-user has to think. Simplicity is about how effective am I at using that person's time--from his/her perspective, not mine.
- 2) The second change that must happen is communicators need to understand WHO determines value. Communicators continue to be "pimps" (*focused on senior management messages, focused on what the organization needs to the exclusion of what the individual needs or focused on what senior management wants to the exclusion of what the workforce needs*) for senior management. It is extremely rare that anything senior executives have to say helps an individual or employee make a PERSONAL (vs. corporate) decision. The main value exchange that is going on in communication is "Did I get what I needed to make a new or

different personal decision?” And/or, “Do I have enough understanding to make a personal decision?” The only arbiter of value in communicator's services is the end-user, the individual. Senior execs may provide the funding, and managers may provide the directives, but the workforce determines value. Most communicators just do not get this.

- 3) There is a complete section in my book devoted to communication value and its relationship to actions/behaviors, themes, messages, and context (which are nice and helpful). But at the end of the day, the only thing that matters is did somebody do something differently because of this communication?
- 4) Confusing adding value with number of deliverables. All communications departments confuse the number of projects, vehicles, or messages they deliver with adding value. Hardly any communications department is organized around, measured on, or focused on what exactly it takes to help people make decisions to change their behaviors. In a world filled with infinite choices and even more information (“to infinity and beeyonnnnd”), the communications department that is truly adding value will be shooting for zero deliverables. (For more, see next question.)

**Q:** How can we structure our departments to “work backwards from what people need to know to work smarter?”

**A:** Duh. How many departments are designed based on what people need to make decisions? They are designed the way they are funded—as discussed above...to “pimp” corporate messages. Before I go on, do companies have a Department of Air and Water? While no company could survive without those things, they are only discussed when there's a problem. And what makes these things work is some department in charge of the infrastructure of the company. Now applying that...organizations need to totally get rid of Communications Departments. They should go away. Like water and air, communication is absolutely essential to day-to-day survival, but it

should be part of the infrastructure that makes the company go. It should be under a function titled something like Organizational Effectiveness, which tracks the synergistic sum of all the parts, e.g. how are our Human Resources policies impacting how we communicate, which affects our retention rate, which is affected by our Information Technology infrastructure, and how we pay people, etc.

**Q:** How can employee communicators know how to deliver information to make employees' lives more simple?

**A:** Walk a million miles in the employee's shoes. Real understanding of where they are coming from. Not just taking their pulse from the safe distance of things like "communication audits." ... Start being a passionate, in-your-face advocate for what people need to work smarter, more simply. The average communicator already knows more than he/she thinks about doing this kind of work. What is missing is the backbone. (See last question.)

Also, it is important to remember that the oldest of the Net Generation is joining the job market. Right behind them are their 80 million peers. This population includes kids who are now playing with digital toys at the age of three. They represent the largest surge in the U.S. workforce since 72 million boomers hit the market. They have been called the generation that must be reckoned with. Net Geners, incorrectly labeled indifferent, more correctly called independent, have new ideas about what it should feel like to work for you. They want to know they can trust what you are building. And they will force their definition of trust into the employment contract. They will want to work smarter, more easily, and they will seek simplicity by questioning what you build. The Net was built in their lifetime and not a single senior executive approved or supervised it. They will look for an equal partnership in building what it takes for them to work smarter. That will drive how content e.g.: information architecture (framework for organizing ideas), information design (the relationship between ideas and the way they are expressed), and worktool design (information to make decisions) is created and sustained.

**Q:** What types of tools do we use in the simple company? Are they the same: the Intranets, executive meetings, online newsletters, magazines, internal TV, and radio, etc? Or are they an entirely new set of tools we haven't created yet?

**A:** Any firm wishing to get simple must realize that learning and work can no longer be separated. Strategy rollout, learning, and the information we use every day needs to be designed as one integrated whole. Richard Saul Wurman calls this “technotainment” —tools and technology that merge work information, entertainment, and learning opportunities. We need a lot less communicator's tools and a lot more worktools.

Technology has created ways for us to build visual tools to be discovered into information...people can create their own pathways for information. Here is a question that represents this idea, “How many new hires could tell you what your corporate strategy is just by using your worktools?” We have that capability today. We have the ability to design information in such a way that people could figure out strategies and meaning and complex ideas just by using their day-to-day worktools. What is missing is the strategy to create learning and sharing WHILE USING the worktools. What is missing is thinking tools. Things that help communicators design thinking and learning into e-spaces and dialogues. That takes guts. That takes vision. That takes passion. That takes leadership.

**Q:** In year 2020 what is your vision for how corporations communicate internally to employees? What does that look like?

**A:**

- Zero communication departments – Instead there is a single department focused on the efficiency of knowledge work.
- Primary goal – to reduce the amount of information needed by people to make decisions.
- Primary strategy – to work backwards from the needs of the knowledge worker. Primary measures - time, fulfillment, navigation.

- **RESULTS:** Respect/need levels shoot way up - communicators are seen as the primary synergists of lots of other people's work.

**Q:** How can we prepare for that vision? What types of skills will communicators need?

**A:** Guts, passion and personal vision. Really! Most communicators already have most of the skills and tools they need to be working on 2020-type communications today. But, unfortunately, most lack the three key ingredients that any leader (of anything) needs today.

- 1) **Guts.** There is such a lack of backbone among communicators, it is pathetic. Overall, most are whiners, not risk-takers. Despite the content they communicate about taking risks, almost all communicators are risk-averse. Hardly any go out looking for and embracing risks.
- 2) **Passion.** How many communicators are truly passionate about what they do? --The kind of passion that rallies people, that sways leaders, that changes the course of events--damn few. How many communicators would go toe-to-toe with a senior exec based on personal convictions and passion? Even less.
- 3) **Personal vision.** How many communicators have thought long and hard about why they do what they do and how it could truly impact the world? How many have a well-articulated personal vision that guides every action they take? (The unfortunate answer goes hand-in-hand with Passion.)

**Q:** Any final thoughts?

**A:** Read the book! But anything else? I have three final thoughts: kahunas, passion, and personal vision. Have those and everything else will fall into place.

# Resources

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## About the Author

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For the past five years, Melanie has worked for Intel Corporation. Currently, she is the Marketing Manager for Human Resources where she manages and delivers internal messages and communications to Intel's 75,000 employees worldwide. She also manages the Executive Office Project Group to deliver worldwide announcements, events, Open Forums, and various corporate celebrations.

Before Intel Corporation, Melanie worked in the publishing business as the marketing manager for Seattle-based Outdoor Empire Publishing. In this role, she wrote and marketed educational materials for State and Federal agencies. She also spent about ten years in the magazine publishing business with *Upside Magazine*, the Fivash Publishing Group (publishers of *Nine Magazine* and *Washington CEO Magazine*), and American Lifestyle Communications (publishers of *The Verdict*, *Bakersfield Lifestyle Magazine*, and *Bakersfield Business Quarterly*).

Melanie lives in San Jose California, in the heart of the Silicon Valley. She is native Californian and spends much time with her family in the San Joaquin Valley of California where her parents do their best to keep cattle ranging in the West alive and well.