

The importance of internal communication



Communication is often defined as an exchange of information. Exchange involves at least one sender and one receiver so true communication thus infers a two way process; a dialogue, not a monologue. Information can involve text, voice, pictures and in fact any data which the human body can pick up through its five senses including emotion.

Internal communications can be defined as the direct two way communications between employers and their staff. Effective internal communication – which can be said to be “downward, upward and horizontal”, is a vital means of addressing organisational concerns.

Effective internal communication has been shown to help improve employee engagement through; increased job satisfaction, safety and decreased absenteeism, grievances and staff turnover. Such improvements are linked to improved productivity and overall profitability.

Effective internal communications is all about enabling us to do our jobs to the best of our ability and ensuring that all of us are working together towards the same organisational goals.

This can mean anything from encouraging you to talk to and exchange ideas with people from other departments to explaining the direction that we are heading in as set out by the University’s decision-making bodies. We use a series of communications channels and tools to keep you informed and give us the chance to listen to your opinions. (prof. A. P Krishnan)

Why is internal communication so important?

Because clear, concise, and consistent communications educate employees, enabling them to appreciate the value of their organisations vision, programs

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or projects and is a significant element in engaging the employees keeping them focused, productive and committed.

The contribution that clear and effective channels of communication can make to an organisation is substantial, not least in enlisting employees' support for business objectives, aligning everyone's activities and providing some motivation to raise performance levels. Where appropriate mechanisms are in place, employees are also more likely to engage with the organisational values and objectives offering feedback and coming forward with ideas.

Internal communication is more than the art and technique of effectively imparting thoughts, information, and ideas to large numbers of people. It has become the single, most important element that enables an organisation to share their vision and galvanise their work force to action that moves the organisation forward.(Lyn Smith,)

Impact of Communication in organisational change

Poor communication during a time of organizational change can turn a difficult situation into a crisis. In spite of this age of high technology, few organizations have channels of communication that are adequate to the demands of change. People say, " But you never told me!" and you begin to realise how ineffective thousands of emails, memos, websites can be...

Maybe a team meeting or a two-minute face-to-face conversation would have been better... This sort of training will let you learn when one style is better than another...

Develop a written communication plan to ensure that all of the following occur within your change management process.

Communicate consistently, frequently, and through multiple channels, including speaking, writing, video, training, focus groups, bulletin boards, Intranets, and more about the change.

Communicate all that is known about the changes, as quickly as the information is available. (Make clear that your bias is toward instant communication, so some of the details may change at a later date. Tell people that your other choice is to hold all communication until you are positive about the decisions. This is disastrous in effective change management.

Provide significant amounts of time for people to ask questions, request clarification, and provide input. If you have been part of a scenario in which a leader presented changes, on overhead transparencies, to a large group, and then fled, you know what bad news this is for change integration.(Pamela Mounter)

Clearly communicate the vision, the mission, and the objectives of the change management effort. Help people to understand how these changes will affect them personally. (If you don't help with this process, people will make up their own stories, usually more negative than the truth.)

Recognize that true communication is a “ conversation.” It is two-way and real discussion must result. It cannot be just a presentation.

The change leaders or sponsors need to spend time conversing one-on-one or in small groups with the people who are expected to make the changes.

Communicate the reasons for the changes in such a way that people understand the context, the purpose, and the need. Practitioners have called this: “ building a memorable, conceptual framework,” and “ creating a theoretical framework to underpin the change.”

Provide answers to questions only if you know the answer. Leaders destroy their credibility when they provide incorrect information or appear to stumble or back-peddle, when providing an answer. It is much better to say you don't know, and that you will try to find out. Tony Greener

Leaders need to listen. Avoid defensiveness, excuse-making, and answers that are given too quickly. Act with thoughtfulness.

Overcoming barriers in communication

When you send a message, you intend to communicate meaning, but the message itself doesn't contain meaning. The meaning exists in your mind and in the mind of your receiver. To understand one another, you and your receiver must share similar meanings for words, gestures, tone of voice, and other symbols.

1. Differences in perception

The world constantly bombards us with information: sights, sounds, scents, and so on. Our minds organize this stream of sensation into a mental map that represents our perception or reality. In no case is the perception of a certain person the same as the world itself, and no two maps are identical.

As you view the world, your mind absorbs your experiences in a unique and

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personal way. Because your perceptions are unique, the ideas you want to express differ from other people's. Even when two people have experienced the same event, their mental images of that event will not be identical. As senders, we choose the details that seem important and focus our attention on the most relevant and general, a process known as selective perception. As receivers, we try to fit new details into our existing pattern. If a detail doesn't quite fit, we are inclined to distort the information rather than rearrange the pattern. (Peter J. Holzer)

2. Incorrect filtering

Filtering is screening out before a message is passed on to someone else. In business, the filters between you and your receiver are many; secretaries, assistants, receptionists, answering machines, etc. Those same gatekeepers may also 'translate' your receiver's ideas and responses before passing them on to you. To overcome filtering barriers, try to establish more than one communication channel, eliminate as many intermediaries as possible, and decrease distortion by condensing message information to the bare essentials.

3. Language problems

When you choose the words for your message, you signal that you are a member of a particular culture or subculture and that you know the code. The nature of your code imposes its own barriers on your message. Barriers also exist because words can be interpreted in more than one way. Language is an arbitrary code that depends on shared definitions, but there's a limit to how completely any of us share the same meaning for a given word. To overcome language barriers, use the most specific and accurate

words possible. Always try to use words your audience will understand.

Increase the accuracy of your messages by using language that describes rather than evaluates and by presenting observable facts, events, and circumstances.

4. Poor listening

Perhaps the most common barrier to reception is simply a lack of attention on the receiver's part. We all let our minds wander now and then, regardless of how hard we try to concentrate. People are essentially likely to drift off when they are forced to listen to information that is difficult to understand or that has little direct bearing on their own lives. Too few of us simply do not listen well! To overcome barriers, paraphrase what you have understood, try to view the situation through the eyes of other speakers and resist jumping to conclusions. Clarify meaning by asking non-threatening questions, and listen without interrupting.

5. Differing emotional states

Every message contains both a content meaning, which deals with the subject of the message, and a relationship meaning, which suggests the nature of the interaction between sender and receiver. Communication can break down when the receiver reacts negatively to either of these meanings. You may have to deal with people when they are upset or when you are. An upset person tends to ignore or distort what the other person is saying and is often unable to present feelings and ideas effectively. This is not to say that you should avoid all communication when you are emotionally involved, but you should be alert to the greater potential for misunderstanding that accompanies aroused emotions. To overcome emotional barriers, be aware

of the feelings that arise in your self and in others as you communicate, and attempt to control them. Most important, be alert to the greater potential for misunderstanding that accompanies emotional messages.

6. Differing backgrounds

Differences in background can be one of the hardest communication barriers to overcome. Age, education, gender, social status, economic position, cultural background, temperament, health, beauty, popularity, religion, political belief, even a passing mood can all separate one person from another and make understanding difficult. To overcome the barriers associated with differing backgrounds, avoid projecting your own background or culture onto others. Clarify your own and understand the background of others, spheres of knowledge, personalities and perceptions and don't assume that certain behaviors mean the same thing to everyone. (Dana Bonbrisco Dodzik)

Recommendations for managers for improving communication

Research indicates that managers spend somewhere between 50% – 80% of their total time communicating in one way or the other. This isn't surprising, since communication is so critical to everything that goes on in an organization. Without effective communication there can be little or no performance management, innovation, understanding of clients, coordination of effort, AND, without effective communication it is difficult to manage the expectations of those who are in a position to make decisions about your fate. (Eileen Scholes)

It can also be said that many managers do not communicate well, and do not set an organizational climate where communication within the organization

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is managed effectively. This isn't surprising, since a manager who communicates ineffectively and does not encourage effective organizational communication is unlikely to hear about it. Poor communication is self-sustaining, because it eliminates an important "feedback loop". Staff are loathe to "communicate" their concerns about communication because they do not perceive the manager as receptive. Both staff and management play out a little dance.

In short, you may be fostering poor communication, and never know it. You may see the symptoms, but unless you are looking carefully, you may not identify your own involvement in the problem. What can you do about it?

Effective organizational communication, regardless of form, requires three things.

First, all players must have the appropriate skills and understanding to communicate well. Communication is not a simple process, and many people simply do not have the required depth of understanding of communication issues. (Marisa Desoiza)

Second, effective organizational communication requires a climate or culture that supports effective communication. More specifically, this climate involves trust, openness, reinforcement of good communication practices, and shared responsibility for making communication effective.

Third, effective communication requires attention. It doesn't just happen, but develops as a result of an intentional effort on the part of management and

staff. Too often, communication, whether it is good or bad, is taken for granted.

We can define your role in improving communication with respect to each of these. First, if you want to improve communication, you will need to ensure that you and staff have the skills and knowledge necessary to communicate effectively. This may mean formal training is in order, or it may mean that you coach staff and provide feedback so that they can improve.

Second, you play a critical role in fostering and nurturing a climate that is characterized by open communication. Without this climate, all the skills in the world will be wasted.

Finally, you must bring communication to the forefront of organization attention. If you make the effort to improve communication, your staff will recognize that it is important. If you ignore it, so will staff.

Conclusion

It is very clear that internal communication is an integral part of management of an organisation. The effectiveness of management depends upon the efficient internal communication system. The communication operates as the nerve system of group activity.

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