

Internal Communications

Practice Guide



Every healthy relationship needs people to have regular, two way and respectful dialogue with each other. This is true of personal relationships and professional relationships. If organisations want to have healthy relationships with and between staff, there has to be regular information sharing and dialogue to ensure the workforce is informed and satisfied with their work. This is called internal communications.

Taking internal communications one step further, leadership experts tell us that staff do not just want to be informed, they want to be engaged. Staff who are engaged and have a role in decision making, problem solving and change, are more creative and positive. Research suggests that when there is staff engagement, the workforce feel more committed to the organisation. There is increased morale and motivation and increased productivity with less sickness and turnover. When staff are happy, informed and engaged, the result is effective team work and good customer service.



Organisations developing a communications strategy, or simply wanting to improve their internal communications, should start by undertaking an internal audit of what is working well and identify barriers which prevent good communication and engagement. Common barriers include an ineffective organisational structure, lack of trust between managers and staff, or lack of skills and training. If you can identify the barriers in your organisation, this information can accurately inform your communications strategy and you can begin planning solutions.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

Develop Skills and Competencies

Every person in the organisation should demonstrate good oral, listening and writing skills appropriate to their job role. Provide rigorous training and

development for all staff, from technical and soft skills to leadership development programmes. Leaders and managers should be able to role model excellent communication skills all the time.

Involve and Consult

Do lots of facilitation and discussion. Make it easy for people to provide feedback, ideas and comments. Promote the expression of ideas and encourage communication from everyone. Ensure that staff feel heard and able to share ideas and news. Involve people in decision making and help them to feel part of the organisation's progress and success.

Prioritise Engagement

Use strategies that create a community in the workplace. Hold focus groups and develop reward schemes which motivate staff to feel a belonging and connection to your organisation.

Quality Not Quantity

Do not overload people with communication which has little relevance to them. When there is too much information to sift through, people tend to disengage and avoid reading or listening to anything. Instead, ensure that what you communicate is interesting, relevant and informative.

Use Effective Communication Channels

Make sure that you know how people like to be communicated with. For example, it is pointless sending out emails if staff do not have access to the internet. Many people are visual, so a newsletter with short news stories and a few photos can be much more effective than memos or podcasts.

Prioritise Face to Face

There are many channels of communication to utilise these days, but the most popular and effective is always face to face. Staff get frustrated with meetings if they are long, boring and unproductive.

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However, if meetings are run well, respect people's time and engage staff and build relationships, face to face communication will always be the most powerful.

Tell Stories

Storytelling is a great approach, as staff enjoy hearing about other people and what they are doing or achieving. You can use stories to tell people the organisation's news and progress. You can also use stories to communicate the desired culture of the organisation.

Be Consistent and Honest

Be honest with people and avoid secrecy. Secrecy encourages gossip, fear and frustration. Staff will be cynical and apathetic if they do not feel the organisation is being open and sincere with them. If the organisation is going through a period of change, honesty is critically important. Relevant and truthful communication before, during and after change will ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and capabilities to embrace changes that affect them.

Be Timely

Staff find it very embarrassing to be the last to know about something that affects them. It causes resentment and poor relationships. So, if there is news or changes that are going to affect staff, keep them in the loop! Inform them before they hear it from someone else or see it in the news.

Build Relationships

Communicating is a two way process. People do not just want to be informed, they also want to feel there is an opportunity for dialogue. Managers should encourage staff to ask questions, because conversations and listening to feedback makes staff feel valued. Encourage staff to join discussion groups and networks, meet informally and get to know each other.

Have A Budget

Good communication does not require a lot of funding or resources. All it takes is some planning and the right resources and tools that your organisation and staff find most useful. If your staff enjoy reading newsletters, then ensure they are designed well and easy to read. If your strategy involves an intranet, then make sure it is kept up to date. Invest in communication strategies that will achieve your goals and objectives.

Measure Performance & Learn From Listening

You will never know if your strategies are successful unless you measure their effectiveness. Evaluation should be a continuous process and can be achieved through collecting feedback, surveys, focus groups or interviews. Hopefully, you should see some tangible results as people feel informed, consulted, accountable and engaged. Tracking the results of communications will help you to refine your messages and stories as the organisation grows and changes over time.

Approaches that give information include:

- Website
- Intranet
- Reports
- Newsletters



Approaches that share information include:

- Team meetings
- Staff surveys
- Suggestion boxes
- Supervision

Approaches that engage people include:

- Leadership development
- Consultation groups
- Focus groups
- Workshops