OVERVIEW

Communication is rapidly changing in messaging, frequency and the manner in which the message is transmitted in order to be effective. The proliferation of communications channels along with the changing dynamic of the workforce require organizations to be innovative in developing communications strategies that reach all employees in all locations.

Today, the lines are blurring between internal and external communications and as society becomes increasingly interactive with social media platforms and other sharing mediums, what was once considered internal communications will become external due to social sharing. Another primary factor to consider when developing communications strategies is the demographic make-up of the workforce. Multi-generational workforces will demand diverse communications strategies and tactics to effectively distribute vital information throughout the organization.

CONNECT

Current State:

According to the IPMA Workforce 20/20 survey, the most widely used form of employee communications is email. Seventy-one percent of respondents do not have a communications strategy that measures communication channel effectiveness for the organization.

Future State:

The workforce will continue to diversify demographically and will require an employee communications strategy that encompasses a multi-generational approach. Today, there are three distinct generations in the workplace and communications must be convenient, easy and natural for each group. Some are comfortable with email and telephone, while other will respond and rely on established and emerging digital technologies. There is no right or wrong approach to multi-generational marketing among employees. The key is to segment your workforce and utilize the communications channel that secures the highest response rate among them. For example:

- New to the Workforce – Social media, secure access from anywhere, mobile devices, push notifications, apps
- Young Professional – Social media, secure access from anywhere, mobile devices, in-
Not only is it critical to create a strategy for employee communications, it is equally as important to integrate an interdepartmental approach as well. Partner with departments and agencies across the organization to connect employees to the big picture. Create a two-way information pipeline that feeds information to the communications channels. Employees want to hear it from the organization first and by sharing a wide range of information, employees will be more empowered and engaged. They will feel more connected by having a broad understanding of how every department of an organization works and contributes to the overall success.

**Invest/Success**

Constantly monitor and measure the effectiveness of communications channels. By utilizing an email marketing platform (Constant Contact, Mail Chimp, etc.) analytics can be used to measure response rates, areas of greatest interest, click-through, etc. This provides the capability to adjust and tailor content to drive the response rates. In addition, email marketing can be used to target several audiences within the organization. Content that is of interest to particular groups can be customized by target audience. For example:

- Executive Leadership
- All Employees
- HR Managers
- First Line Supervisors

Through email marketing platforms, you can easily tailor and customize content that is of interest to specific groups which increases response rates because you are sending information that is relevant to what they do and they’ll want to hear about it.

Depending upon the size of your organization, consider utilizing pilot testing of communications technologies to ensure proof of concept prior to widespread investment. For example, if you are a large organization considering launch of digital signage, you may be faced with a high entry cost to launch. Consider a limited pilot program in a concentrated area of your organization and measure the success to justify the full launch investment.

**CONTENT**

**Current State:**

According to IPMA survey, only 25 percent of organizations have a dedicated internal employee communications staff. In addition, response to the IPMA survey indicate that 25 percent of those polled rely on top-down methods of communication.
**Future State:**

When it comes to effective employee communications, Content is King. Do not waste a dime invested in communications technology without giving careful consideration to what content is to be delivered, how it will be delivered and who is tasked with gathering, developing and deploying the information. Make sure it is:

- Fresh – Don’t let the same message repeat over and over without updating or refreshing.
- Relevant - Make sure the message is relevant to what’s important to your audience.
- Consistent - Don’t start/stop a communications effort. Rely on at least one constant communications channel that people will come to expect. Stick to it - don’t skip it.
- Fun – Find the most creative people in your organization to help with content. Make it interactive and fun including contests.
- Engaging – By utilizing social media channels more employees will engage.
- Real-Time – Consider channels that allow you to provide real-time updates. This is important for crisis communications.

The size and complexity of your organization will determine the level of resources needed to effectively and efficiently communicate with your workforce. Your staffing strategy should include a sufficient number of marketing and communications specialists to ensure your communications plan is implemented, measured and constantly adjusted to meet the needs of the organization.

**The Social-First Approach**

The lines will continue to blur between internal and external employee communications. Today, employees have a 70 percent greater social media footprint than employers. That means anything you are communicating may or may not get shared. Think of employees as a huge, robust army of brand ambassadors. They are the most efficient marketing and communications tool in the toolbox. Make it easy for employees to share internal communications content externally via their personal social networks.

- Content shared by employees receives eight times more engagement than content shared by brand channels ([Source: Social Media Today](#)).
- Brand messages reached 561 percent further when shared by employees vs. the same messages shared via official brand social channels ([Source: MSLGroup](#)).
- 98 percent of employees use at least one social media site for personal use, of which 50 percent are already posting about their organization ([Source: Weber Shandwick](#)).

Build messaging that is appropriate for social platforms yet ties to your objectives. You’ll want to engage staff members who are savvy users that can craft and deliver messages for sharing but also provide reach statistics to help gauge your response and interaction rates. It is important to assign a single point of contact to manage the social media platforms to ensure
consistency, freshness and relevance.

Who Hears What?
A communications plan should include a well thought out chain of events including dissemination of the message to certain audiences at specific time gates. Identify all the audiences within your organization and build a list management system to constantly update the lists for accuracy. Create the communication chain according to the most logical sequence.

For example, a major change in HR policy may be announced in the following sequence:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>MESSAGE</th>
<th>DATE/TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Leadership</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Introduction of policy. What is happening, why, benefits, who it impacts, when it takes effect.</td>
<td>Tuesday 1/3/17 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Managers</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Introduction of policy. What is happening, why, who it impacts, when it takes effect. Present guidelines, talking points, Q&amp;As and how the policy will be implemented. Include the communications plan and chain.</td>
<td>Tuesday 1/3/17 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Staff</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Introduction of policy. What is happening, why, who it impacts, when it takes effect. Include links to Q&amp;As and talking points. Include the communications plan and chain.</td>
<td>Wednesday 1/4/17 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Leadership</td>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Follow-up to presentation including answers to questions. Include links to Q&amp;A and other related documents. Request they cascade the information to their management team for dissemination.</td>
<td>Wednesday 1/4/17 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring Managers</td>
<td>Email, Segment Newsletter, Video</td>
<td>Introduction of policy. What is happening, why, who it impacts, when it takes effect. Present guidelines, talking points, Q&amp;As and how the policy will be implemented. Inform them of the communication chain. Encourage them to share in their staff meetings.</td>
<td>Thursday 1/5/17 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Employees</td>
<td>Email, Newsletters, Mailings, Signage, Social, Flyers, Posters, Table Tents, Intranet, Video, etc.</td>
<td>Introduction of policy, why it matters to them/benefits, who it impacts, when it take effect. Include employee Q&amp;A.</td>
<td>Friday 1/6/17 a.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Whenever necessary create segmented Q&As, such as a manager Q&A and employee Q&A.*

Always encourage executive leadership to cascade all information. Studies show that employees absorb, retain and act on information that is shared by their respective leader. They are likely to have a higher rate of personal buy-in and be receptive to the message when it is reinforced by their direct supervisor.

![Most Effective Message Senders](image)

Prosci Benchmarking Report 2011, Data from 650 global companies undergoing major change projects
CONSISTENT

Current State:

Respondents to the IPMA survey indicated that communication is inconsistent and many expressed concern over the level of difficulty in reaching employees without daily access to computers or mobile devices that are provided by the municipality.

Future State:

To extend the communications reach, consider developing diverse communications channels designed to meet the needs of a widely disbursed, multi-generational workforce. Consistent use of the following channels will ensure widespread distribution of information. Use the best combination for your organization:

- Email
- In-home Mailings
- Segmented Electronic Newsletters
- Print Newsletters
- Digital Signage
- Posters
- Bulletin Board Flyers
- Lunch and Break Room Table Tents
- Social Media Platforms
- Intranet
- In-Person Meetings (including consistent meetings with executive leadership, managers & supervisors)
- Video, video, video (everything from video addresses by leadership to short, humorous snippets)
- Social Sharing Apps
- QR Codes

Be consistent and constant in messaging. Create a look/feel for all communications that is consistent so that it is easily recognizable by employees. The more often people see it, the more likely they are to read and/or absorb it, and then expect it. Once the tactic that works best for any given segment is established it will then be adopted, and the demand for information will grow since you’ve built the expectation.

Investment in a multi-channel approach to communications is imperative...we want employees to hear, learn and share information that is provided by the organization rather than hearing about it on the local news. By investing in communications, you are controlling the message and ensuring what gets shared is in alignment with the strategic goal.

CONDUIT
Push and Pull
Seek and utilize ongoing feedback to constantly innovate. While distribution of messages throughout the organization is the push point, ensure that your communications staff is pulling information from the organization as well. While the person/people responsible for being the distribution point for information, everyone in the organization has a role.

Monitor and measure by utilizing metrics and adjust where necessary. Electronic platforms will provide analytics to measure utilization rates, while other more traditional forms or communications will require more subjective measurement such as focus groups and online surveys.

Build a conduit where employees can easily provide ideas and feedback on what, when, where, and how they are hearing and sharing information. When measuring your internal communication strategy, check out the feedback coming from your staff. Provide them with easy ways to share their views including intranet chat rooms, lunch and learns, pop-up surveys on the desktop, dedicated communications email address and phone number all through a central point of contact.

SUMMARY

Investment in communications requires the support of leadership. Tools, resources and commitment are required to ensure effective communications today and in the future. In a rapidly changing environment, the future of communications is the heart of Vision 20/20. With digital transformation at the forefront of the future of work, our ability to communicate will continue to be the driving force to organizational success. Leading companies are succeeding by building processes, systems and a culture of accountability that link communication to employee engagement and business results.