

Research Brief Series

THE PRACTICE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION A LOOK INSIDE ORGANIZATIONS | Part 2

Global Research Report

The Next Level

The Business Value of Good Internal Communication

November 2019



IC
Kollectif

The report, The Next Level, by IC Kollektif, examines the value and practice of internal communication (IC) from many angles around one central theme: the business value of good internal communication. This publication is part of a series on topics and issues addressed in the 164-page global report. Following are interviews conducted mid-2018 with nine communication professionals from eight industries - Consumer Goods, Food & Beverage, Financial Services, Information, Technology & Services, Insurance, Law Practice, Mechanical or Industrial Engineering, Oil & Energy - to find out what the practice of internal communication look like in their own organization. The full report is available at ickollektif.com/report.

INSIDE ORGANIZATIONS

THE REALITY ON THE GROUND

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

What are the main challenges and opportunities facing your team at your company?

INTERSECTION OF INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Blurred lines between internal and external communication are here to stay. How does your organization deal with this reality in its approach to internal communication? Can you share how your organization ensures internal and external communications are aligned together and also specify if both functions are integrated or not?

EFFECTIVE IC: MINDSETS, BEHAVIOURS & PRACTICES

What are some of the key mindsets, behaviours, and practices helping your organization to be effective at internal communication?

VALUE OF IC

Which proven strategies do you and your team use to help business leaders understand the value of internal communication?

IMPACT OF IC

How do you demonstrate the impact of internal communication on organizational goals to business leaders?

Rick Phillips

Communicating in an accelerated environment

As a Fortune 100 company with 33,000 employees, Nationwide is a complex organization that is constantly changing. Until 2014, the company consisted of 15 separate brands in various businesses in the insurance and financial services industries. In 2014, we merged those into one brand (Nationwide), and although steadily improving, the company still has moments where it occasionally thinks or acts in silos. That sometimes causes internal communications confusion. In addition, our primary businesses are in very competitive industries. Not only are we dealing with intense competition, but expense pressures are causing the team to prioritize who we serve, how we serve them, and force ongoing prioritization. When combined with other distribution and technological challenges, we end up juggling many significant issues and communications needs all in an accelerated environment. My communications team needs to be agile to successfully support the enterprise.

The agency model

We are aligned as one corporate communications group at Nationwide and embrace internal/external communications as integrated entities. I've never had a leader express interest in just one solution. They want to make sure that internal and external communications are tightly aligned on any given issue. I structure my team like an agency. Our internal and external teams have "beats" and serve specific business and staff areas. That way, in an issues management scenario, I have internal and external communicators that can deliver aligned results in both areas in minimal time.

We also recognize that there is no such thing as an "internal only" message, and on occasion, we've had internal messaging in hands of reporters in minutes. That doesn't mean that we don't prioritize audiences. We always share messaging with internal audiences first, unless there is simply no alternative, in which



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case we will aim for simultaneous timing. But, by and large, our employees remain the top priority for messaging.

Connecting the dots

I've always believed that there are key skill sets and behaviors necessary to be a good communicator.

First, writing is key. My belief is that if you can't write and present yourself in a certain way, you can't think. It's a harsh statement, but in my experience, it's always been accurate. Organizing your thoughts in a logical and intuitive manner is foundational for being a good communicator.

“Honesty is a critical component for a good communicator. The ability to deliver difficult counsel, even while others are in “yes” mode, is a critical skillset, which helps build credibility and trust. Without trust, we offer very limited value to our leaders and the business.”

Second, in many business areas, indeed in many businesses themselves, entire organizations see only what they’re working on or what their team is doing without connecting it to a higher framework. In an organization the size of ours, communicators must show employees how all parts of the business connect. So being “dot connectors” is a critical skill. This also means that communicators must understand the world around them and how that connects to our business. I’ve also found that curiosity is a critical attribute for a communicator. The ability to look at things and issues in different ways than others allows us to sometimes see opportunities that others might miss.

Finally, honesty is a critical component for a good communicator. The ability to deliver difficult counsel, even while others are in “yes” mode, is a critical skillset which helps build credibility and trust. Without trust, we offer very limited value to our leaders and the business.

Demonstrating results

We use a variety of methods to keep our leaders up-to-speed on the value of strategic communications. Like many organizations, we have a quarterly scorecard that tracks a host of key metrics important to the business and important to show our value. While a number of these show trends such as readership, click-throughs, and the like, we strive to show how our associates are understanding key messaging and applying it to their daily work.

One of our advantages is that our company has a long history of supporting internal communications. In fact, while my team supports many of the corporate and strategic communications elements of the business, local communicators, individuals we call embedded communicators, are sprinkled around the enterprise and collectively larger in size than my team. As a result, we’ve created a Communicators Community, where we gather multiple times a year for training, sharing strategic information, and we have a conference where we learn from external speakers and each other once a year.

Tracking outcomes and outputs

Wherever possible, we attempt to track outcomes, not just activity. Some activity is worth tracking and we do our share of it in communications scorecards. Where we’re able to track and show behavioral change is where communicators truly earn their salary. Do strategic words and phrases start working their way into common language and presentation decks? Do we see discussion on internal chat boards by individuals who are motivated to discuss these issues? Can we trace employee engagement score increases, and increased open rates and click-throughs of key messages on some of our internal tools? These are a few ways we attempt to help leaders understand our impact.

Leslie Quinton

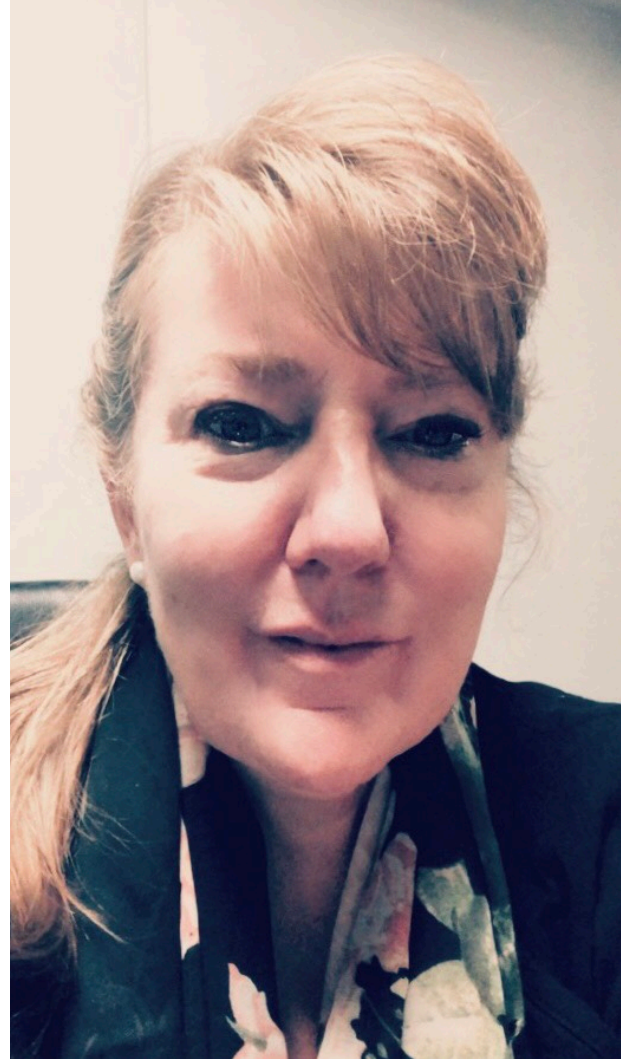
Going global with balance and consistency

One of the opportunities I see in our organization is to transform the communications function into a truly international one with the right models and processes that this scope requires to build our brand internally and externally. From my experience in other organizations, this challenge seems to be a universal one. How do we create the right balance of structure and autonomy throughout a global company with an appropriate number of guidelines to create consistency but also flexibility to account for cultural differences? Whether it is internal or external stakeholders, companies like ours need to be ever more responsive and adept at keeping in touch with all those we need to reach, even if getting the buy-in for the right tools, processes and technologies sometimes take longer and more persuasion than we would like.

Audience segmentation is still in vogue

I have heard some people state that internal and external communications are now essentially the same thing. While often true, this is not entirely the case and there are almost always reasons to target your communications differently according to the audience. The old belief is still valid. You need to communicate to your publics not only in the tone and language that will be most appreciated by them but also through the means that will have the most impact on influencing the kind of behaviour you want to impact. Thus the argument for different approaches to internal and external communications.

The single biggest game changer in narrowing the divide between external and internal communications is obviously social media. Your employees can read about what is happening to the company in real time and can reinterpret the message faster than and far beyond the official communications channels, depending on the issue. This makes rapidity of response from the external team, who need to alert and keep the internal team



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in the loop, more important than ever. The two teams work in tandem with one another. While they are separate, they are tightly connected and frequently work on projects that integrate members of both teams seamlessly.

It's all about the relationships we build

The internal communications function is largely one of relationships. If it is seen as an opportunity to further the strategic goals of the organization through well-planned and thoughtful initiatives, it becomes the gateway to influencing behaviour as change management at the highest level. Successful internal communication professionals must be seen as facilitators, strategic leaders, and creative partners, not simply fact-checkers and proofreaders. I have

seen a number of internal communications teams go through a syndrome where they are considered simply as a means to an end, channels used to share information but without the authority to actually add value to the content being produced. The last-minute nature of a lot of internal communication makes it difficult to add this strategic element to certain announcements but if the relationships are good with the internal clients, more and more IC teams can leverage their knowledge and best practices to serve the company's ultimate goals.

We're all in this together

Internal communications is one of the roles that is sometimes underestimated in organizations, especially where it is seen strictly as a channel or tool as opposed to a strategic partner. By demonstrating the impact on employee engagement and strengthened culture on the bottom line, it is easier to convince business leaders of the ROI in investing in strong employee communications. Organizations that have let their internal communications programs become completely reactive have lost sight of the positive impact that can happen to productivity and on retention and attraction statistics when you have a well-organized, thought-out internal communications plan. The single most important key stakeholder internally is Human Resources. Without the buy-in of the human resources team and complete coordination of the two groups to achieve the respective objectives, neither team can succeed. Good internal communications can be the canary in the coal mine, an early warning system that allows the communications team to take the pulse of the organization and react accordingly, which can also have an impact on external stakeholders. Communicators can't be shy about sharing their successes and highlighting instances when strong IC strategies ended up contributing to CSR programs, risk management plans or other critical success related to the bottom line.

How to show them your stuff

There are three ways to show the influence and impact of internal communication on the realization of corporate objectives. The first and least intuitive is to show what happens when IC is not involved. This is counter to much of our thinking as problem-solvers but I have sometimes recommended to my team in previous situations as a last resort that rather than

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impose ourselves, let something fail to demonstrate the value of the internal communication presence. This is a bit radical and not the preferred method to show the usefulness of the function, but it is sometimes a powerful last recourse.

The most common way of linking IC outcomes to organizational strategies is to correlate the objectives of the IC plan directly to those of the organization and talk about it. Good internal communications programs ultimately have exactly the same objectives and pillars as the overall global corporate strategy for the business, but unless the links are explicitly made to the management team, that may or may not be perceived and appreciated.

The third way to share the impact of IC on corporate objectives and the one that tends to be the most effective in my experience (rightly or not) is the case study and statistical approach. Don't forget that communications tends to exist in areas that are more experiential and qualitative than most business leaders are comfortable with. If you can share third-party data and analysis that shows ROI and quantitative impact on business, it is sometimes the best tool for convincing management of the need and utility for robust, well-equipped internal communications teams, which is another reason for IC to keep excellent KPIs and internal results tracking to justify their programs and tactics.

Luis Ramos

Change is constant

The biggest challenge for any internal communications team is dealing with the many fluctuations within the larger organization, such as corrections in strategy, adjustments in tactics, changes in management, modifications in the markets, and so forth. That said, this challenge is a constant and predictable one. Trying to hit a moving target is just part of the job!

And, of course, the larger the organization, the more complex that challenge becomes. The external communication professionals more often work with clear KPIs and tangible targets, such as the need to launch a new product at a certain time and assess the impact of that launch. Meanwhile, the people in internal communications need to gather, analyze, and balance the needs and desires of a much larger and more diverse group of stakeholders on a daily basis.

The internal communications team also has the opportunity to support change management and business transformation within the company at a far more profound level. In a world where permanent transformation is everything, being able to support that kind of process from within the corporation can be highly rewarding for the internal communications practitioner as his/her contribution can really make the difference between achieving overall success and suffering failure.

Internal communications is in a privileged position to connect all the dots, help various functions and departments bridge the sense of loss created by any change, and see the logic, necessity, and an advantage for those affected by something new.

Aligning internal and external communication

There is no longer a clear separation between internal and external communications in terms of content. Think about it. Most of us share what



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happens in our personal and professional lives on social media. Messages circulate through the social channels and mix with traditional and digital mass media. Employees consume that mixture, which contributes significantly to how they feel about their work.

No company can ignore this! It is utterly imperative that the company's internal communication content complements and perfectly aligns with what the company is publishing externally. In our organization, internal and external communications belong to the same department. That makes content sharing much easier, alignment more precise, and communications a lot more effective.

On a related note, I'm a strong believer that the news channel shapes and defines how the content or message is received and understood by the recipient. For example, if a person is known for being aggressive, any non-aggressive words that come from that person will still be understood as sounding aggressive to the listener. I'm not defending that: it's just the way people receive and process a message.

The same thing happens with publications. Their specific connotation influences the tone of the message they carry, at least to the inner ear of the reader. For instance, when an employee reads a news item in the external media, he/she will tend to give it more credibility and importance than the same information published on an internal company news channel, which is understood to be a biased opinion.

Strategic partners

The most important factor in our success is the good connection that our IC practitioners maintain with the company leaders, especially those charged with driving change in the organization. The more involved the internal communications expert is with the business process, the better he/she can identify the messages that need to be communicated and find opportunities for doing so more effectively.

Business leaders need to think of their communications people as partners, even as sparring partners! That is, not to simply think of them as people you contact at the last minute to produce an internal memo, but as people who can help you develop your idea for easy understanding and widespread acceptance from the start.

Leaders who ignore the importance of internal communications are often shocked when they realize that no one else in the organization seems to understand that marvelous, game-changing, multi-layered transformation plan they worked on for weeks in the isolated privacy of their office. Unfortunately, that's still far too common an occurrence!

To be effective, true visionary leadership needs to turn the vision into a story that everyone involved can easily understand. Understanding is the first step in acceptance. Without acceptance, the vision dies. That means trusting the communications expertise.

Putting the house in order

Internal communication as a support function has a provocative strength. We have the ability – the duty even – to generate and attract attention. This makes us a powerful partner because we can dramatically increase the visibility of projects and people through our internal networks and channels. This is particularly so when there is a robustly integrated global communications network that can be fully exploited.

Business leaders need to be regularly reminded of this! One of the ways we do that is making sure that our own house is in order. We develop and constantly update our own well-ordered and detailed strategy for how we deal with and balance diverse, sometimes conflicting demands of the internal stakeholders.

Only with a clearly communicated strategy in line with the company's goals and initiatives will internal communication receive the recognition it so richly deserves.

An objective approach

Everyone probably agrees that internal communication is somewhat limited in how much direct and measurable business relevance it can create and develop. Our mission is to make employees better informed, more involved, and more inspired by the company and its goals.

We describe and explain strategic topics in an appealing form via different communication channels and through our globally-operating communication team. The goal is to better integrate employees into the company's overarching narrative and help them feel like the major characters they really are, heroes even, in the larger story of great people creating great solutions with great success.

The fundamental advantage of these measures is that they are designed to be visible, simple to present and easy to comprehend. However, measuring their effect can be a bit tricky and finding proof that a uniform, centrally-generated message has accomplished what it intended to do is still all too often a subjective matter. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to use modern communication tools and analytics to track and measure messaging success making it objectively concrete.

Lucia Muthová

Senior managers must be strategically involved in dialogue with employees

Our company is facing many changes and we are in the process of transformation. Internal communication is now even more important. We need to explain the reasons for all changes to our employees, inform them about our strategy, their role in the whole process, and find enough time for mutual dialogue. Informed and motivated colleagues are drivers of change and crucial for the success of the transformation.

I see internal communication opportunities in finding mutual understandings between different groups of employees. Our role as communication professionals is to offer them a basis for constructive dialogue, listen to their opinions and needs, and enable them to speak openly. At the same time, we encourage the CEO and top management to be more strategically involved in open and permanent dialogue with employees. Our task is to continuously create a platform for one-to-one discussions.

Employees are the best ambassadors

Internal and external communication in our company have always worked hand-in-hand and they are handled by the same department, ensuring full integration of both functions. Everything that is presented externally whether media releases, advertising campaigns, or new products and services are presented within the company first. The best ambassadors of your company are employees, themselves.

Of course, a lot of other internal information is presented via internal communication channels. Integrated communication means not only integrated



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internal and external communication but also integration with other company functions such as human resources or market management. We regularly circulate information between our departments by meeting regularly and circulating minutes. Internal communication in our company coordinates the release of information so we are informed about all the news in advance.

Multiple channels and co-operation are keys to success

Generally, communication is a quickly developing area. People are busy, so effective communication is targeted, short and concise, managed, and prepared to reach different target groups. We constantly work

on changes in communication tools and styles. Currently, we use the internal TV channel, e-newsletter, e-mails, and posters. Our managers meet colleagues regularly at town hall meetings and informal events and regular feedback is provided in an anonymous engagement survey. Face-to-face and Q&A meetings are a very strategic and an effective way of communicating in the changing working environment.

Co-operation among departments is a key to effective internal communication strategy. A consistent and coordinated approach to changes is a must. It is extremely important for our company to have a positive mindset so that ongoing changes are implemented efficiently and the company can keep up with the rapidly changing environment.

Does the data show change?

Without a doubt, facts and figures are critical so measuring communication impact is important. Figures offer clear evidence of how internal communication strategies and activities work and deliver valuable feedback that management understands.

Sometimes it is not easy to put numbers together at the end as we focus more on project execution than results. I think most of IC professionals would agree, but we want to know the impact of specific activities on employee behaviour, management, and the business. It is nice to receive positive comments, but only the exact data can show us the real impact of our projects.

In an era of digital tools, it is easier to measure communication activities by the number of likes, comments, discussions, shares, viewers, readers, and social media analytics. It is crucial to ask the right questions BEFORE the project starts: What do we want to achieve, do we want to somehow change employee behaviour? In the end, we should be able to answer the questions: Have we changed behaviour or not? Is there an impact on the company and its business goals?

Good communication supports business results

An effective business leader considers IC as a part of his or her everyday job. Relationships are healthy

only if mutual communication works. It does not matter whether the relationship is between husband and wife, parents and children, between business partners, students, and teachers or, managers and employees, if you do not communicate, listen and react, your partner feels ignored and that his or her opinions and feelings are not valued. All conflicts spring from misunderstandings and a lack of information.

Our business goal is to improve understanding of the strategy, reduce the fear of the future, and increase confidence in management and business through intense two-way communication. We regularly ask our employees whether they feel well informed, understand the company strategy, and are motivated to drive changes. Motivated and well-informed employees are more engaged; one of the main goals of every successful company.

According to survey results, the understanding of the strategy, confidence in management and the degree of open, two-way communication has improved in our company. For example, we started hosting regular town hall meetings a few years ago to support personal communication with employees at the headquarters of the company and in regional offices. In support of open communications, we used the smartphone app to ask questions. People can choose whether to enter their names or just post an anonymous question. After each event, we measure direct feedback, employee satisfaction with responses, and understanding of the information. Direct feedback is analyzed and discussed with management.

Part of our communication job is to share business goals with our sales agents to support them in their job and help them practice professional and effective communication with customers. We are in the role of facilitators between management and salespeople. We need to ensure a sufficient communication flow where mutual expectations are met. Through this process, sales agents understand their importance to the company strategy and the business impact. Management understands our strategic role in this process.

Paul Osgood

Managing weapons-grade communication

Like most internal communications teams, we are the strategists, consultants, and initiators of digital disruption. This is an exciting and exhilarating time, and it is without a doubt our greatest challenge and opportunity. Long gone are the long-term institutional investment propositions designed to create monolithic platforms that will see us through the next decade or so. The rise and fall of enterprise-wide social networks provide a great example of shorter-term investments delivering tangible, if ephemeral, leaps forward in collaboration and engagement. So, creating the virtual water cooler or coffee machine remains an elusive prize, no matter how much the vendors of enterprise social networks tell us otherwise.

We compete for the attention of our lawyers and business services teams as they expect to consume and engage with weapons-grade communications from a variety of digital platforms and channels. If we get the balance right between cost, fit for purpose, coolness, and accessibility, we become the 'cool parent' of communications – admired, respected and, most of all used. Get this delicate balance wrong and we simply create irrelevance for all our communication. Most internal communications practitioners should remain fearful of getting this all wrong. That is a positive tension that should imbue our daily lives.

Growing digital roses

At Clifford Chance, all the internal communications, external communications, digital, and brand team members meet every Monday morning to share their agendas. Critically, this extends to shared reporting



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lines, shared business partnering and shared communications strategy and planning. Without lockstep working and working relationships, we lose our focus and the true understanding of our communications strategy. When this works well, the approach is completely seamless. Our recent management of gender pay gap reporting was innovative and is impacting recruitment, retention and our external positioning. This has only been achieved through seamless and intense working relationships where skills have been pooled and ideas shared. For a mature and somewhat cynical communications professional, this was a really impressive and inspiring way to work.

In many respects, the integration and alignment of internal and external communications is a natural result of universal access to news. All stakeholders access and evaluate news in real time. This means

that the marketer who is promoting their product or service is utilising the very same channels that are being used by many stakeholders to collaborate, socialise and transact on their own or their organisation's behalf. It's a heady mix which truly blurs the lines between employment, procurement, recruitment, and even shopping. In one regard we are returning to the late 19th century ideals of George Cadbury when he created Bourneville where "No man ought to be condemned to live in a place where a rose cannot grow." Our digital infrastructure is extensive. We live, work and socialise online and our digital roses grow around us. Sustaining a singular internal communications approach that ignores the very environment in which all our employees thrive is naïve and leads to communications irrelevance.

From order taker to consultant

At Clifford Chance, we use a simple internal communications consulting model to develop communications strategies and solutions for all of the operating areas of the firm. We bring a consulting mindset to our stakeholders that sometimes surprises those who expect the team to be the traditional internal communications order takers. Time after time, we are able to demonstrate the added value of asking what our stakeholders are seeking to achieve with their communications. Simple 'Know – Feel – Do' analyses, for example, begin to open up opportunities for true engagement across the firm.

Stakeholders throughout the organisation need to understand the key strategies of the firm sufficiently to translate their knowledge into meaningful client engagement. As internal communicators, we have a responsibility to nurture behaviours that help reduce the time delay before internal stakeholders feel confident enough to share their knowledge with clients. Identifying how we use communications to help speed up this cycle delivers demonstrable benefits and new client opportunities.

Data unlocks dialogue

I am a huge believer in using data to deliver a deep understanding of the value of our work. Data analysis not only allows objective judgments to be made but more critically, it is data that usually unlocks the dialogue about communications in an organisation. It

gives credibility to internal communications team members, many of whom may not have maturity and experience to offer a valued opinion based simply on what they know or have seen.

But we shouldn't fall into the trap of believing that data is a panacea. To badly paraphrase Dan Ariely, "Data is like teenage sex: everyone talks about it, nobody really knows how to do it, everyone thinks everyone else is doing it, so everyone claims they are doing it." Excellent internal communications data needs a great deal of energy, persistence, and patience. It's a classic voyage of discovery for the internal communications professional and, in my opinion, a journey that not enough practitioners seem willing to make.

Is the market rising or falling?

The perception of internal communications' impact is often inextricably linked to the state of the market or the position of an organisation in that market. In a rising market, business leaders look for signals of alignment with organizational goals. Do our employees get them? Agree with them? How loud can they shout them to all stakeholders? In a falling market, the position is quite different. Business leaders are more focused on mood and sentiment about organisational goals. Are they fit for purpose? Will employees deliver on these? How will employees deliver on organisational goals and do they have the tools to achieve this?

These differences in business leaders' requirements have to be properly understood by internal communicators if they are to demonstrate an impact on organisational goals by organisational communications.

Gary G. Hernandez

The battle between head and heart

One of the hardest things we do in communications is balance employee advocacy and the company position. In our hearts, communicators want to take care of employees. In our heads, we want to attend to the needs of the business. When these two factors line up, everyone is happy. When they don't, and they often don't, we have tension, and because we are in the middle, the tension comes to bear on us.

Lay-offs are a classic example. Internal communicators typically know about layoffs, reorgs, and divestments long before employees do. We spend long months planning how to share the news and how the business will operate through the change. There is nothing like listening to a colleague talk about their future when you know they will be gone in two months. If you tell them, mass panic ensues and you end up fanning the fire you are trying to put out. If you keep your mouth shut, then a little bit of you dies inside. It's a tough position to be in and internal communicators live it every day.

The opportunity is in helping the company get to a healthy state and helping the employees get through it with minimal trauma. In short, communicators need to find the magic formula of delivering the needs of the business in a way that upholds the dignity of employees. Communicators are the alchemists of the business world, always trying to make gold out of lead.

Another challenge we face is in helping our management, the business, or whomever we are communicating on behalf of, anticipate the consequences of their messaging. I often see clients balk when stakeholders take exception to a decision that they communicate. It is our job not only to help management communicate that decision but to anticipate the reaction stakeholders have to it and not flinch.



Gary G. Hernandez is the Head of HR Communications at a company in the Middle East. He is responsible for managing internal communications for employee relations and human resources in alignment with the company strategy.

In today's world, we can finally stop talking about what we will do if something leaks and get on to making decisions and delivering messages that we won't be ashamed of when they do leak. I hear a lot of communicators and business people express concerns about airing dirty laundry. The solution is to keep your laundry clean.

I also think that people expect things to operate within a company the same way they operate outside the company. This is the challenge. What do employees experience outside of work? Choice, flexibility, and instant access to information, whether it is correct or not. Not all companies can provide these to employees in a reliable way. There are real constraints that aren't going away overnight. Things like legal issues and cyber-security threats limit how and what we communicate inside a company. I do believe employees understand the difference between the external world and the internal company world, but their tolerance for this difference is diminishing. I don't have the solution. It will be interesting to watch it play out.

Finally, I would say that the internal/external dichotomy can be balanced by using honest and authentic communications. Honesty has to do with messaging and authenticity has to do with voice. We can provide honest and authentic communications without divulging confidential information and coming across as disingenuous.

Get to the point

Attend to the needs of the business. As business communicators, our purpose is to keep the business healthy. Understand what your business needs and deliver it.

Employee engagement for engagement's sake is wasted time. We should always have an answer to 'engage with what?' As business communicators, we should be striving to engage employees with the strategy, the company objectives, and the plan to deliver them.

Keep it simple. No one has time to read page long messages. Tell them what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, and how to do it and then move on.

Plan in the background, deliver on time, exceed expectations

Nothing communicates louder than performance. Put together strategic communication plans that are fit-for-purpose and that help deliver real business outcomes. Deliver on time with the minimal amount

of disruption. Do your planning in the background and do it quickly. Communicators tend to spend 80 percent of their time on planning and then walk away feeling like they completed the job. Don't get me wrong, planning is hard work and it takes time, but the business only cares about that last 20 percent, the execution of the plan. Do your planning in the background and then deliver on time, at or below budget, at a quality level that exceeds expectations.

When I asked a fellow communicator this same question, she said she strives to connect her leaders with employees so that they could experience for themselves the value of real communications. This might happen at town halls, in informal conversations, and even in the dreaded end-of-year message. If you want your leadership to understand the value of communications, help them to communicate effectively and feel that value firsthand.

Results: Three things to keep in mind

First, understand the difference between outputs and outcomes. They both exist. They are both good in their time and place. Do not confuse one for the other and always strive for outcomes.

Second, embrace the fact that correlation is not cause and effect. We need to understand that there are rarely going to be times when our communication activities have a direct and isolated impact on business outcomes. And that is okay. What we can say, with hand on heart, is that if there is a 70 percent chance of a business outcome being realized, good communications can increase it to 90 percent. The math isn't exact and that's the point. Can communications absolutely and solely increase a company's bottom line by xyz%? Probably not, but it can increase the probability of that goal being reached.

Third, share your successes. If you achieve a great outcome, don't keep it to yourself. The planning may have happened in the back office, but you don't have to keep the results there. Tell your leadership. Tell your stakeholders.

Kerrie McVicker

Keeping up with the quick pace of change

First and foremost is the need to change, adapt and evolve at pace! This is both a challenge and an opportunity that isn't unique to our team or company. The way people listen, learn and communicate, both as consumers and as employees, is constantly changing. To remain relevant and add value, internal communications needs to do the same. This is an opportunity in that constant iteration encourages creativity, resourcefulness and agile thinking, and a challenge in that you cannot waste time without being left behind.

Nestlé Oceania has a highly diverse and complex workforce. Our people and operations are dispersed across different geographies and business areas with variable access to technology. A thorough understanding of employee demographics helps to navigate the complexity of targeted employee communications.

As part of a global organisation, there is always so much to share and talk about. Internal communication provides a lens to ensure communications are localised for our employees and that organisational information and feedback flow.

Moving in the same direction as external communication

Internal and external communications are often communicating similar messages or stories, albeit to different stakeholders, through different channels and with different filters applied for relevancy.

Our teams maintain good visibility of what the other is working on and plan for regular opportunities to connect with each other, align and share organisational information. Together, our teams combine to create a broad view of issues affecting the organisation. There is a lot of value to be gained from working very closely together.



Kerrie McVicker is the Internal Communications and Employee Insights Manager at Nestlé Oceania. She is based in Australia. Her key responsibilities include leading the internal communications strategy and managing its implementation across Nestlé Oceania in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands. This role supports leadership, employee and change communications. Nestlé Oceania has 5900 employees in 6 countries. Globally, Nestlé employs around 328,000 people and has factories or operations in almost every country in the world.

At an organisational level, our internal and external communications teams in Oceania sit within different functions. This, however, is not reflective of how we interact with each other.

There is a high degree of trust between our teams that is built on respect. Our relationship is highly collaborative. We support and learn from each other, brainstorm with each other and freely share our insights and knowledge.

The coaching and advisor mindset

Internal communication is an enabler for organisations and it plays an important role in facilitating strategic connections and conversations.

To create effective internal communication, we build and maintain strong networks and trusted relationships across all levels of our company, both within our market and with our global colleagues. A well-established and structured approach covers key topics across a range of touchpoints and helps us embed internal communication in processes or projects at an early stage. As strategic partners for leadership and change communications, we create employee-centric communications that draw out the 'why' and 'what's in it for me' factors. Using this coaching mindset within the business, we empower employees to engage in organisational conversations internally on our online collaboration platform and externally on LinkedIn. Finally, we provide channels and opportunities for employees to give feedback.

Working with leaders to create clarity

Our employee landscape is complex. Multiple generations work at the same time in any number of environments including offices, factories, distribution centres, in the field, retail and virtually across six countries and no single communications channel connects with everyone. Employee insights are the value internal communications brings to navigating this landscape. These insights inform us how best to cascade information through the business and provide a focus for turning content into compelling messages so that employees can hear what they need to hear.

Communicating a consistent message to employees across our market connects them to our company's purpose, values, and organisational goals. The more our people understand what we stand for and where we're going, the better they understand how they contribute and make a difference in their day-to-day work.

Internal communication plays a key role in building trust, awareness, and engagement with employees. We support leaders in knowing their people, enabling conversations and creating connections. As a strategic partner to the business, leaders look to internal communication to share expertise on

employees and the employee experience for decision-making and managing change.

Finally, internal communications adds value to leaders and employees by acting as a 'translator' and a conduit between the levels of an organisation. Helping business leaders quickly understand what is important to other functions or employee groups, and what their different perspectives and unique pain points might be, helps them shape their communications so it lands the way they need it to the first time.

How we demonstrate the impact of IC on organizational

Employee insights are fundamental to effective communications. There is a lot of information available including communication measures, an abundance of HR data and organisational feedback such as engagement surveys, communication surveys, diversity and inclusion initiatives, focus groups, feedback loops, organisational networks, and employee interviews. By drawing this all together, internal communication plays a valuable role in turning information into employee insights that the business can use for three things: information, inspiration or decision-making.

Strategically, insight sits behind the counsel you give to the business in the moment. They are what you draw on when coaching the business day-to-day, and what informs the stories you tell that become part of the fabric of our organisational culture. Practically, insights are an input for developing effective communications plans and content. Impact on organisational goals can be realised by ensuring at the outset a shared understanding with the business of what success looks like. With clarity over the end state, aligned communication objectives combined with employee insights deliver impactful communication plans with clear measures tied to outcomes.

Sobha Varghese

Technology, measurement, and strategy

The world of business runs on communications and with effective internal communications, the organization can function like a well-oiled machine. In terms of challenges, reaching everyone despite the immense strides we have made in communications technology remains a gap area. Workplaces are changing with virtual workers and distributed workforces being the norm rather than the exception. Coupled with the need to reach employees faster or at least at the same time as the external 'social' world, IC pros have a daunting task at hand.

To reach everyone at an increasingly faster pace, IC pros have to use creative formats, compelling content, advanced tools, newer technologies and collaborative platforms, meaning that it can be the same whirlwind world of social inside the company. For example, in TCS, our 400,000+ employees can collaborate and connect with each other from anywhere in the world via our internal social media portal 'Knome' and our messaging platform 'FrescoTalk'. We've seen how our social platform allows anyone anywhere to address a question to the leadership, cutting across hierarchies and bringing about higher transparency. We also employ traditional IC media such as intranets, corporate magazines, a video channel, townhall sessions, and meetings to connect with our employees.

Another key challenge is measurement or assessing the impact IC brings to the organization. Proving value is essential to have management buy-in and leadership support. Collecting feedback from employees and consistently fine-tuning the IC strategy to suit audiences is needed in diverse organizations like ours. While measurement and fine-tuning are critical, it is not always simple or straightforward to do this in real life.



Sobha Varghese is the Head, Internal Communications, Continental Europe at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). Based in Belgium, her key responsibilities include designing and developing the internal communications strategy, planning, and budgets. She is the owner of IC content and channels, editor of the quarterly magazine, and directs information flow within Europe, maintaining links with corporate headquarters, enabling leadership communication, establishing IC campaigns, communities and connections. Tata Consultancy Services has more than 400,000 employees and operates in 46 countries.

In the midst of all this, having a clear internal communications strategy is advantageous for an organization. Internal communications can unify messages from all corners of the company to present the vision and direction the company takes, enhancing the organizational narrative. It can foster collaboration and instill a feeling of community or a sense of belonging. IC is truly an enabler in promoting engagement within companies, strengthening bonds and creating networks towards the development of an inspiring workplace.

Internal and external communication work together

In this age of speed and social, news travels fast. This has led to an almost complete breakdown in the barrier between internal and external communications. What a company shares on its external communication channels is quickly internalized in its employees' coffee corner and WhatsApp communications, and communications made internally often immediately make it to social media. The golden rule is that you should not share anything internally that you wouldn't be comfortable revealing outside. The reverse is true as well. Beyond the mechanics of where the IC teams are placed, which can boil down to budgets and resources rather than skills and strategy, there is an inherent need for both internal and external teams to connect, collaborate and work together towards common objectives.

We are at an age when a press release or a newspaper article just doesn't cut it. Organizations need to create customized and compelling pieces of content for different media and audiences to get the right messages across at the right time. Both internal and external communications teams need to work together in tandem towards this. There are tremendous synergies to be had from working together in this manner and understanding that both disciplines are equally important.

While treating new developments in our organization, we prefer to take the content and tailor it to different audiences. For example, in IC, we like to use a friendly, focused and more engaging tone and personalize the message for our IC media and platforms. It can be a shorter, sharable format for our internal social platform, a visual, longer story for our magazines or to-the-point messages for our email alerts. On our social platform, we especially like to have our employees make comments, share their views and start a conversation. Wherever possible, we also link to external sources which we have enabled so that our employees get a complete perspective about a development.

“Beyond the mechanics of where the IC teams are placed, which can boil down to budgets and resources rather than skills and strategy, there is an inherent need for both internal and external teams to connect, collaborate and work together towards common objectives.”

While both internal and external communications tell the company's story, IC pros say it to the people who know the organization best and feel the reality of the workplace every single day.

Creating a sense of belonging and community

Our employees have a high affinity for sharing, which when combined with a generous spirit of collaboration, are key mindsets propelling internal communications. A senior leader I spoke to recently put it across as “people coming together to help each other” with a great “sense of belonging and community”. He mentioned this “fluidity” to be the “core DNA” of the organization. People coming in from outside are amazed by this. TCS has the framework of a large organization, but with all the possibilities of entrepreneurship within. Our employees can leverage the company as a platform, take charge, and participate in our many business and community initiatives.

To illustrate, in our recent employee campaign called [#TCSsuperstars](#), we identified and highlighted the stories of employees who were achievers in different walks of life. We had several inspiring stories lined up on our internal social platform at the start of this campaign. Our employees liked and shared these stories while also immediately connecting with the selected superstars, congratulating them and asking for insights from their experience. This has been one of our key internal communications initiatives, connecting and celebrating our people.

IC drives engagement and builds corporate reputation

Internal communication is a unique discipline that cuts across departments such as marketing, human resources, and business units and brings them together. Having a strong IC strategy means that you can remove silos, provide the right context for raw information, and translate it into useful knowledge for employees.

The IC function has to deliver results and demonstrate value to gain leadership support. For example, we break down our stories into easily digestible and relevant pieces for the internal audience. As a result, we have informed and equipped employees, who come through as the true face of the company in many situations. Through IC campaigns and programs, we facilitate conversations, foster connections and create a feeling of community. Engaged employees not only support business and sustainability initiatives, they also spread the word and stand up for the brand.

In terms of internal perception of the department, I would like to point to the results of our annual employee survey 'Pulse' that takes stock of engagement and satisfaction to internal services. As per this survey, our communications department stands tall with high scores for employee satisfaction. Through all this, our leadership can see the great value IC brings to the table in terms of engagement and enhancing the corporate reputation.

How we demonstrate the impact of IC on organizational goals

Effective internal communications is a major factor behind a driven, motivated and passionate workforce. When you see that employees support the organization's goals, rally behind its initiatives and come together in times of need, it is indelible proof of the high impact of IC. When you see employees rise above differences and converge as a community to drive the organization forward, I believe you have seen the power of IC at work.

We are a skills and people-driven business and our ability to create revenue, gain new clients and keep customers satisfied are all linked to how engaged our employees are. IC is an important enabler for all the key business metrics of our business. For example, our brand was rated the fastest growing IT services brand in 2018 by Brand Finance, currently valued at USD 10.4 billion. From among many variables weighed to arrive at this valuation, our employee and employer brand related factors were a crucial component.

Rachana Panda

Digital platforms, communication style, and support from the top

There are opportunities galore. GE is forever evolving as an organization and as communicators every transformation is an opportunity, particularly for internal communicators.

Digital media has set new standards: two ways and real time. Internal communication needs to flow in two directions. Employee feedback and input are essential to build engagement and enable organizations to continually improve the relevance and value of their messages. The good news is, with interactive digital signage software, visual communication, media players, interactive surveys, and comment and review features, organizations can turn passive readers of interactive paper memos into active communication participants.

Digital platforms enable companies to communicate in real time, customize messages to fit the needs of various geographic office locations, reach remote employees, display up-to-the-second performance metrics and emergency information. We are great believers in new formats and platforms.

What is the right style? Formal, boardroom-style communication is familiar and comfortable for many large organizations, but it might not be the most effective way to reach and influence employees. Speaking from experience, adopting an informal style, one that melts hierarchical corporate barriers, can be perceived as threatening, but because of social media and a strong preference for informal style among younger generations, this may be the way to go.

Support from top management is a must. For any internal communication program to work, leadership must actively and vocally support it, day in and day out. Organizations with an ivory tower culture struggle with this challenge more than those where



Rachana Panda is the Chief Communications Officer for GE in South Asia, and she is based in India. She has a leadership role in communications and is responsible for the strategic direction and governance of the function in the organization. Her responsibilities include media relations, CEO/CXO level engagements, industry forums, marketing communications, digital media, brand building, and crisis communications. GE employs 20,000 people in the region. Globally, the company has 300,000 employees and operates in 170 countries.

leaders jump into the trenches and gain firsthand awareness of how important communication is to get results.

One thing that hasn't changed is the need to embark on internal communication with a clear and sustainable strategy, and then measure the results to assess impact and value. The strategic challenge is to implement a plan that is not too broad, narrow or ambitious. A smart approach is to create a strategy that phases in communication activities over time, starting with simple and straightforward applications before moving on to the more complex.

Internal is now the new external. It's interesting to see how a decade ago most of us never considered internal communications as a full-time role, but today every progressive company understands the role of a strong internal and culture communicator. There is a single word that sums up what a person sees when they look deep inside our businesses. They see our culture. At one time, our internal culture was just that, internal. Now, there's no such thing as internal culture. The culture of an organization is out there, larger than life and totally visible. It is a crucial part of the brand.

An organization's culture never really stands still. Like a growing child, it morphs and evolves in sync with what is happening inside the company. A company's brand is primarily the story of its cultural journey from birth through evolution, transformation, beliefs, and most importantly stakeholder perception. The most critical stakeholders are employees, more so in the digital era, where everyone is a reporter or a storyteller. How we empower and leverage our employees will decide the outcome. There is no perfect way but it is worth trying a few new ideas.

I believe internal and external communication should play like a symphony in total harmony. The use of digital media for internal audiences is becoming more and more seamless. For most conglomerates like GE, we know that we must constantly deal with information overload through multiple channels. At GE, Eddie, an agile internal news sharing platform named after Edison, the founder of GE, is a platform that was recently developed to develop and share content easier and simpler. Eddie is a cool, smart innovator and he facilitates every employee to become a storyteller externally as well.

Expert alignment and full participation

Communication is about creating an alignment between the big picture goals, plans, and strategies from the top of the organization and the employee on the front line. We need special skills to drive a thought through strategy. These are experts who are domain specialists adept at recognizing behavioral shifts and information consumption while assessing the wisdom of using multiple channels. They can ask relevant questions of leaders, simplify and translate the strategy for employees. Most importantly, domain experts can measure and analyze data. We insist on domain expertise.

At GE, we believe internal communication is ultimately the responsibility of the CEO and business leaders. Leaders must realize the importance of their relationships with their employees, and it is imperative that the initiative comes from the top. The CEO must make the time to connect directly with people, listen and value the inputs provided by experts, be open to feedback and demand more engagement. I have had the opportunity to work with leaders at GE, who understand this well, and push for innovative ways to connect with employees be it millennials, commercial teams, diverse talent, or manufacturing talent. Each audience is very different in terms of messaging and platforms. GE has developed some very interesting real-time content on this over time such as the doodle series, our newest Molly ad, and "My mom works at GE".

Practices to increase the perceived value of internal communication

Demonstrating that internal communicators have a strong grasp on the company strategy and understanding of the audience is needed to help business leaders understand the value of internal communication. Most internal communicators end up spending their time in tactics and employee engagement activities. While these are important, the real value of a communicator is to drive the company culture and deliver the strategy adding to the business outcomes. Here are some key practices which in my view are key to business leaders valuing internal communicators:

- Develop solid business acumen. A firm grounding in the organization's business is vital to building the strategic muscle.
- Work with a business plan in mind. This will help you align your work with business priorities as also assess and demonstrate impact.
- Make sure you engage with the key stakeholders to understand their business priorities. These are key insights that will help you create successful communication strategies.
- Use varied communication interventions and formats. While the usual town halls, intranet, newsletters or broadcast mailers are the trusted channels, yet there are immense opportunities to think creatively.
- Add and mix different channels, moving away from corporate speak, customizing narratives so that they are relatable to the new generation that is entering the workforce.

Creating a stronger culture

Internal communications is deeply related to building culture. It can build team collaboration by recognising team members, cascade strategy, build pride and collaboration, and support culture and growth. The measurement could be through opinion surveys, focused storytelling and engagement, reach and interaction metrics. Ultimately it is a change in culture or building a stronger culture that shows that internal communications is working.

About the report - The Next Level is the first publication of its kind bringing together C-suite leaders, in-house communication professionals/executives, and academics across all continents. Based on primary and secondary research, the report takes the conversation about internal communication to the strategic management level. Via solid insights, advice, frameworks and resources, *The Next Level* covers critical topics and issues dealing with today's challenges and future needs to truly help practitioners better position themselves as trusted counsellors and advisors and communicate on the same strategic level with senior management. Find out more and download the full global report at: ickollectif.com/report.

About the Research Brief series - 'Research Brief' is a publication series based on the findings of the global research report The Next Level. Each edition of the series is available at ickollectif.com/next-level-research-brief.

About IC Kollektiv - IC Kollektiv is an award-winning global organization dedicated to the strategic management of internal communication as a business function. The independent non-profit is based in Montreal and shares knowledge, insights and research from around the world on the practice of IC with people in more than 163 countries. For more information on IC Kollektiv, please see our website ickollectif.com.

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The global report is supported by **IABC**, the **Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management** and by **The Conference Board**.

We acknowledge the financial support of SocialChorus for the Research Brief series.

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