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(v)   Internal communication and training

MAXIMIZING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN AN ERA OF CHANGE

Submitted by Statistics Canada, Canada[1]

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.   As Gen Y enters the workforce and Gen X inherits leadership from the fast-departing boomers, organizations witness a shift in internal communication (IC): from top-down information transmission to collaborative thinking and convergence.

2.   This paper presents the strategies used to foster employee engagement in new directions adopted at Statistics Canada. After a brief overview of IC, a case-study approach is used to demonstrate how traditional communication methods can be adapted and leveraged to facilitate conversations at all levels, thus enabling the employee community to influence the agenda, and the organization to gain a collective understanding for how the future should unfold.

II.   INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN CONTEXT

3.   As a means to support the realization of an organization's strategy, IC is faced with a paradox: how can it meet the needs of multiple groups of stakeholders if the goal is to reinforce a core set of values? How can it steer diverse individuals towards embracing a single corporate identity? As surprising as it may seem, there is no contradiction in meeting the needs of the many by following directions from the few.

4.   This premise is reinforced by the two principal IC functions: first, to celebrate the community in an effort to increase cohesion between community members; second, to transmit information to reach a collective understanding of the explicit and implicit rules governing the organization.

5.   Organizations have witnessed again and again the important role played by IC to support their legacy, identity, and corporate culture. In modern organizations—also known as networked organizations—horizontal relations prevail. Such organizations are buzzing with communications: diversity and multiplicity of interactions; ongoing sector meetings; and, interdisciplinary communications.

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III.   NEW MEDIA, NEW EXPECTATIONS

6.   With the proliferation of new communication channels and platforms, as well as the emergence of citizen journalism and social networking over the past few years, employees entering the workforce expect to play an active role in organizational communications and decision-making.

7.   To engage this new workforce while tapping into the in-depth knowledge of mature workers, IC practitioners in organizations of all sizes have the opportunity to revisit the boundaries of their field. It is their role to bridge the gap between top-down messaging and collaborative thinking.

IV.   INTERNAL COMMUNICATION, PILLAR OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A. The theory

8.   Change is constant and inevitable. As Benjamin Franklin said, "When you're finished changing, you're finished." Hence change means evolution. In large organizations, IC plays a crucial role in change management.

9.   Multiple factors need to be taken into consideration when effecting change. Some factors will create more resistance than others (figure 1). While IC is unlikely to drastically change employees' personalities and corporate culture, a sound strategy could build on employee support and managers' behaviours to influence group dynamics, which in turn could help the corporate culture to evolve to a new level.
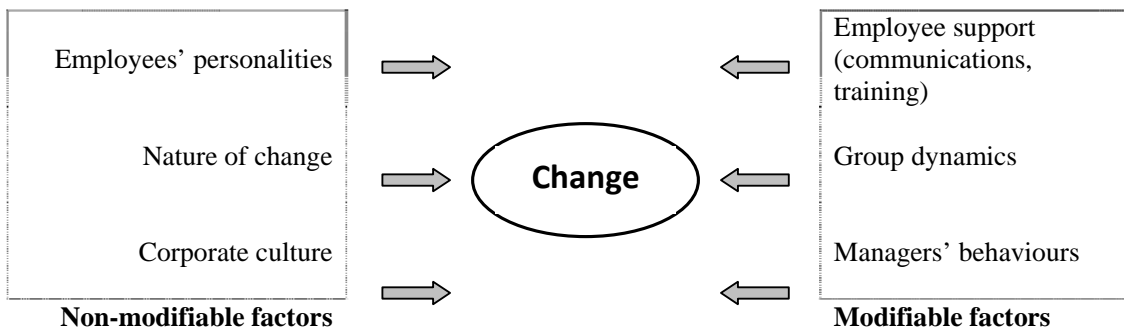

Figure 1. Factors that influence change
(Source: Décaudin and Igalens, p. 123)

10.   Major change will require more than information sharing and acknowledgement. It will aim to influence how employees perceive their work and how they act. The Kelman model[2] published in 1958 is still very pertinent when describing the process of changing attitudes:

- *Compliance* occurs when an individual accepts influence because he/she hopes to achieve a favourable reaction from a person or group.
- *Identification* occurs when an individual accepts influence because he/she wants to establish a self-defining relationship to another person or group.
- *Internalization* occurs when an individual accepts influence because the content of the behaviour is intrinsically rewarding. It is congruent with his/her value system.

11.   The model could be used to illustrate the ultimate goal of the communication strategy. In situations where major changes need to be communicated, IC practitioners would determine what result (or attitude change) is expected from communication initiatives.

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[2] KELMAN, H.C. Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1958), p. 53.

B. Back to basics: Meeting the needs of the audience

12.   When change occurs, employees want to know what it means for them. They want to know how change will affect their job. They want to know how they will fit into the new organization. At the beginning, few of these answers are known. Yet, the IC strategy has to be put in motion right away.

13.   As stated above, the new generation of employees expects to take part in defining how change will unfold. IC specialists[3] also postulate that active participation of employees in defining the modalities of change will foster adherence to change.

V.   FROM THEORY TO ACTUALIZATION

A. Internal communication supporting change management at Statistics Canada

14.   Over the past two years, traditional communication methods used at Statistics Canada were expanded to support change. With workforce renewal came new players at the senior management level along with an impetus to:

- Develop a long-term vision
- Reaffirm core values
- Refine the governance model
- Review the organizational structure
- Revisit overarching business architecture and processes.

15.   Employees were engaged by senior management early in the process. Communication specialists soon realized that IC practices already in place at Statistics Canada were built to foster change. Because of the scope of change this time around, attention was given by various internal stakeholders and managers to increase communications and consultations.

16.   The communication goal was to facilitate change through employee engagement. The aim—using Kelman's model—was to achieve *identification* in the short-term, and *internalization* over the long-term. Specific objectives were established as follows:

- Increase employee awareness about new directions
- Involve employees in setting the agenda
- Mobilize employees towards a common (corporate) goal.

B. Communication mechanisms, events and tools

17.   A number of communication mechanisms are in place to give personnel at all levels the opportunity to share ideas, provide feedback and propose solutions to meet new challenges. They include: weekly field debriefings with executives; regular divisional meetings; annual directors' meetings and directors general bilateral meetings with the Chief Statistician; and an annual strategic planning process and conference. Discussion from those meetings helped to shape the agenda, foster a common understanding in all fields about the new expectations, and draw a roadmap for the organization to move forward with its new agenda.

18.   Events have been organized to further engage employees in setting the agenda and mobilize them. They were extremely popular and well-attended:

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[3] DÉCAUDIN, J.M. and IGALENS, J. *La communication interne; Stratégies et techniques*. 2nd edition. Paris, Dunod, 2009, p. 131.

- *Employee Coffee Sessions* — The Chief Statistician met monthly with groups of employees to monitor their engagement and to provide junior staff with the opportunity to present suggestions and concerns directly to him. All issues raised during the meetings were presented to the senior management committee for consideration and action, as required.

- *Town Hall Meetings* — The Chief Statistician met annually with staff, by subject matter, to get their views on the data and analysis pertaining to their subject matter, identify data gaps and spot opportunities for change.

- *Long-term Vision Forum* — This one-time event was organized for all employees to hear the Chief Statistician explain Statistics Canada's new long-term vision. Ample time was allocated for employees to ask questions and provide feedback.

- *Annual Chief Statistician's Address* — The Chief Statistician's annual address to executives provides an in-depth review of accomplishments for the past year and an overview of challenges for the year ahead. The 2010 address was videocast to all employees for the first time.

- *Middle Managers' Conference and Senior Management Conference* — both events, held once a year, are venues to discuss emerging issues, set priorities, and develop action plans. The 2009 and 2010 conferences were instrumental in gathering feedback from all fields and making the change agenda progress.

19.   Finally, communication specialists leveraged the existing employee bulletins, networks and collaboration tools, and developed new tools to increase awareness among employees about new directions, and get them involved in the process:

- *Chief Statistician's Corner* — An Intranet module that is highly visible. Its objective is to help employees stay connected with the Chief Statistician by providing easy access to his papers and presentations; keeping them abreast of important decisions; and, giving them the possibility to meet or contact the Chief Statistician directly to share their ideas.

- *Corporate Business Architecture Site* — an Intranet module that provides employees with access to the latest plans, updates, announcements, and frequently asked questions. They are also invited to provide feedback, comments and questions directly to senior management.

C. Communication with external stakeholders

20.   Externally, Statistics Canada has communication mechanisms and networks in place to inform, mobilize and get input from external stakeholders. Its extensive stakeholder network includes the National Statistics Council, the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Consultative Council and Subject-matter Advisory Committees. These networks have been invaluable to seek feedback and gain support for the new directions taken by the organization.

D. Results

21.   The IC strategy has yielded positive results on many fronts. The new priorities established in 2008 have been defined in, and reflected by, the governance and management structures. The Long-term Vision for Statistics Canada has been distributed widely internally and externally, and core values of the organization have been reaffirmed.

22.   In the long-term review of the overall business architecture, all the mechanisms have been put in place to consult with staff at all levels and integrate feedback and suggestions along the way. At annual conferences and events, including the Strategic Planning Conference, the priorities, milestones, timelines and resources have been clearly identified to ensure that the new Corporate Business Architecture project advance as planned.

High levels of participation were registered in all consultations and events. Stakeholders' feedback has also been sought and communicated widely both horizontally and vertically.

23.   For years, Statistics Canada has sought employee feedback and assessed the success of its programs through employee surveys. The first internal survey was conducted in 1992, and was followed by similar surveys in 1995, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2005 and 2008. Since 1999, Statistics Canada has broadened its program to conduct Public Service wide employee surveys. Over time, results demonstrate strong employee engagement and high levels of job satisfaction at Statistics Canada. The next survey will be used again to measure and compare employee engagement, and continue to work towards achieving success in all areas.

VI.   CONCLUSION

24.   In organizations, change management needs to be supported by a sound IC strategy. In networked organizations, where horizontality prevails, communication channels are well established and can be leveraged to mobilize employees to work towards a common, corporate goal.

25.   In the past two years, IC practitioners at Statistics Canada realized that traditional communication mechanisms already in place at all levels of the organization were rich in their ability to support change. The challenge was to stay connected with networks, leverage their impact, and focus efforts on areas where further consultations were deemed appropriate to increase awareness and involvement. IC has been very effective. We still have ways to go to achieve the ultimate goal of mobilizing all staff, but we remain confident that as time goes by, and more and more employees become involved, the new directions will be fully integrated by all.

VII.   BIBLIOGRAPHY

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