

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION – THE SEVEN PILLARS OF SUCCESS



“What do you mean we need to engage in some internal communications? We email, we send memos! We have meetings! We even have a newsletter!!”

Internal communications has often been left in the “ad hoc” basket. Yes, all organisations send emails and memos. Meetings, formal and informal, are held. Line managers obviously communicate vertically and horizontally on a daily basis.

Study after study has confirmed that considered and deliberate internal communications form the foundation of organisational culture. It captures and communicates the DNA and atmospherics of an organisation to itself; its purpose and mission, its values and work processes.

Its benefits are profound. Clarity of purpose and mission. Alignment on values and work processes. Internal stakeholders therefore know the litmus test for decision making and for daily actions. Obviously, such alignment makes for a strategically cohesive and efficient organisation. There are other benefits including reductions in day to day miscommunication (and therefore conflict), increased morale, more appropriate recruitment and enhanced retention. All of these benefits can help make for a more handsome bottom line.

However the least understood benefit of effective internal communication is to external audiences in the form of enhanced branding. Given your brand is “what people say about you when you are not in the room”, it is logical that each touchpoint between the organisation and the consumer or external stakeholder actually constitutes what that brand is. You can attempt to influence that through *saying* what your brand is (through external integrated marketing communications) but this is only an augmentation in the process; it is your people as touchpoints that truly shape your brand. It is then a case of *res ipsa loquitur* that effective internal communication, and with it the aligning and tightening of values and behaviours in the organisation, makes for a more strategic, focussed and consistent brand experience to external audiences. Indeed for some years now HR and marketing have been in effect merging, as this has become better understood.

What then makes for an effective program? I would argue there are seven key principles behind effective communications as follows:

1. Look over the horizon. Think of internal communication as an investment in the essence of your brand.
2. Research your organisational values. Don't prescribe them randomly, or list what you want them to be, but follow the McKinsey 7S approach and actually identify *what they are*.
3. Define your objective, and your goals.
4. Use the full tool-kit in your execution. What do you have at your disposal? Personal meetings, roadshows, memos, letters, emails, noticeboards, publications, social media, intranet, internet, performance management, reward and recognition. There are probably more at your disposal than you currently think.
5. Consistency is critical.
6. Focus on the "symmetric" communication model.
7. The fish rots from the head. Therefore, the Board must be the starting point and standard bearer of and for effective internal communication.

Riley Mathewson possesses considerable expertise in this pivotal communications discipline. Email or call to learn more.

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