

Internal communications, employee engagement and change

Written by **small back room**

Why?

Internal communications is a critical success factor for effective organisational change and employee engagement.

Without effective internal communications, programmes of change are almost certain to fail to meet expectations. In fact, rather than creating positive change, the opposite can happen. Employee disengagement is estimated to cost the UK economy over £60 billion a year. This disengagement can be driven by poorly planned and managed communications as well as change programmes that power a counterweight of resistance.

This means the way CEOs approach, structure and drive internal communications will set the scene for the likelihood of effective change and employee engagement.

What?

This toolkit is designed for CEOs to help them consider the role, purpose and emphasis for internal communications in their organisations. It also aims to provide a practical framework for developing an internal communications strategy that will support organisational change and employee engagement. What it can't do is prescribe the 'ideal' structure for internal communications, as this will vary by organisation.

How?

The approach outlined in the toolkit is based on our practical experience of change, employee engagement and creative approaches to internal communications. The toolkit provides four key stages for developing a practical framework for effective internal communications:

- 1 **Looking in the Organisational Mirror** – understanding the organisational state of mind, including how executives and managers perceive the role and purpose of internal communications.
- 2 **Setting the Organisational Compass** – defining the drivers and aspirations and expectations for where you want to go; drawing on a platform of existing strengths.
- 3 **Creating the Journey for the State of Mind** – inspiring and engaging managers and employees on the journey to where you want to go, with internal communications acting as an effective motor for change and employee engagement.

- 4 **Developing creative initiatives and tools** – using creative internal communications to engage managers and inspire action from their teams.

Step One - Looking in the Organisational Mirror

Looking in the Organisational Mirror is about seeing the organisation from the point of view of different groups of employees to understand their state of mind. This makes it easier to define the role and purpose for internal communications in influencing how people will feel during a journey of change, or as a part of enhancing employee engagement.

Different groups of employees will almost certainly feel differently about the organisation and their relationship with it. These differences may vary due to many factors including role, team or 'level' within the organisation, work location, aspects of social identity, relationships with colleagues or individual managers and the organisation's heritage and culture, particularly if mergers or take-overs are a part of the history.

Some relevant questions to explore when looking in the Organisational Mirror include:

- How do different groups of employees perceive the organisation's current character and communications, and what is driving difference and similarity?
- How would employees like to describe the organisation's character and communications at a specific point in the future?
- What do the stories that employees tell about the organisation say about the positive things we do, and the not so positive?
- What are employees most proud of, and what would they most like to change?
- What is that makes people want to work here, and to stay working here?
- How successful have previous change and engagement initiatives been, and what has driven that success or been a challenge to achieving our goals?
- How effective and timely are our internal communications in communicating our purpose and strategy, organisational performance and the individual contributions employees make to achieving our aims and successes?

- Are internal communications geared to achieving our business aims and managing core messages?
- Do managers believe communicating is the essence of their job – and is that what they do?
- Does our brand truly represent our organisation and how we are experienced by employees and external audiences, and is the brand 'operationalised' through internal communications?

Step Two - Setting the Organisational compass

Setting the Organisational Compass takes the information that has been learned by looking in the Organisational Mirror, and using this to help define the drivers, aspirations and expectations for where you want to go. The important question to ask about your Organisational Compass is: Does it give a clear, unique, inspiring and ownable direction to action?

Every organisation will have its own Organisational Compass which is comprised of components such as its purpose, values and attributes. For employees and other internal audiences, it should give a clear idea of what the purpose of their work is and why it matters. The Organisational Compass should also contain emotive elements that give momentum to change and communications.

An Organisational Compass might include some or all of these components:

<u>Our drivers</u>	<u>Our aspirations</u>	<u>Our expectations</u>
Vision	What we aspire to achieve	Making a big idea real
Purpose	What we do and why it matters	Being inspired to action
Strategy contributing	The central driver of our work	Understanding and
Priorities/ competitive aims	Making the strategy a reality	Making us more
Values/ behaviours	How we work together and make decisions	A common way
Attributes and	Building on our strengths	Always improving

potential

Using an organisation's purpose or its values or attributes as way of creating change can be a positive approach to change and engagement. These elements can be used as a platform for change and engagement by building on existing strengths and emphasising a strong emotive driver.

For values to truly influence change they need to be 'operationalised'. By this we mean how values are brought alive in behaviours that support change and employee engagement. If an organisation's values are not a part of desired day-to-day behaviours that support change and employee engagement, it's probably time to find some new ones.

Step Three - Creating the Journey for the State of Mind

As we said in the previous Step, the Organisational Compass defines the drivers, aspirations and expectations for where you want to go. The next step is to inspire and engage managers and employees on the journey to where you want to go.

Something else we said at the beginning of this toolkit was that we see change as a journey. A journey for people and how they feel along the way: a Journey for the State of Mind.

To create a Journey for the State of Mind we believe it is important to break down the journey in to manageable steps which together take you from where you are to where you want to be. Each step of the journey will have actions and outcomes. And we believe that those outcomes are more likely to be achieved if a core consideration for each step is the state of mind of employees.

Influencing how people feel at every step of the journey is a critical role and purpose for internal communications. Internal communications strategy should be focused on understanding and influencing how people feel at each step and in turn; influencing their behaviour.

This strategy needs to be underpinned by messages that are controlled at each step to provide a clear focus on the priorities and actions for that step. The messages also need to be aligned with relevant components of the Organisational Compass.

Bringing together the learning from the previous two steps helps to populate the Journey for the State of Mind. A simple way of presenting the Journey for The State of Mind is shown on the opposite page.

This is a concise way of showing the 'action steps' that will take the organisation from where and how it is now, to where and how its to be in the future.

Successfully achieving this transition means focussing on how people will feel during this journey, with a starting point being the understanding from looking in the Organisational Mirror.

Internal communications will be a critical factor in influencing how people feel at each step on the journey. Relevant components of the Organisational Compass should be emphasised through communications at different steps in the journey to achieve a focus on priority actions and to engage employees throughout the journey.

The journey for the State of Mind

Change and employee engagement

<p>The change we want to achieve</p>	<p>How we are</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 2 3 4 5 6 	<p>A step on the change journey</p>	<p>A step on the change journey</p>	<p>A step on the change journey</p>	<p>How we want to be</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 2 3 4 5 6
<p>Employees will feel different as we work towards achieving our aspirations</p>	<p>How employees feel now</p>	<p>How we want employees to feel</p>	<p>How we want employees to feel</p>	<p>How we want employees to feel</p>	<p>How we want employees to feel</p>
<p>The values, attributes and behaviours we should prioritise in our internal communications to influence how employees feel</p>					
<p>Creative initiatives and toolkits for managers to build engagement and change at each journey step</p>					
<p>How we measure how people are feeling and the impact of our work</p>					

Step Four - Developing creative initiatives and tools

From our work with clients we have noticed patterns in the opportunities and issues they wish to address concerning employee engagement and change. Common requests are solutions to questions, which begin with – “How do I...”

- Help managers engage their teams and find new ways of doing things?
- Encourage people to learn about and contribute to our strategy?
- Help executives and managers with the way they communicate with their teams?
- Make positive change happen?
- Help teams share best practice?
- Make sure team meetings and briefings are really successful?

Our experience is that creative approaches to engagement can be the catalyst for helping managers to be more confident and consistent in the way they communicate across an organisation.

It is not unusual to find managers who want initiatives and tools to help them feel more confident in finding solutions to these questions. Creative responses to these questions can help break down potential barriers to engagement in ways that managers also find engaging. These responses can take away some of the 'load' of change from the shoulders of managers through wide participation, joint problem-solving, action and innovation.

Creative initiatives and tools can be the spark for managers and teams to build greater mutual understanding, to talk about organisational activities and priorities, and to generate new ways of doing things.

These creative interventions might be engaging toolkits that help managers to communicate strategy and what it means for the people in their team. Another frequent need is for practical guidance on carrying out large-scale events, team meetings and briefings, performance management and development, or finding interesting and engaging ways to communicate initiatives and policies.

Alternatively, creative tools and resources can be self-propelling initiatives that stimulate employees to share good practice, new ideas and knowledge. Please contact Michael Dunmore at Small Back Room if you would like to see examples of toolkits and initiatives that have been created for clients.

Regardless of the creative solutions that are put in place, they need to refer back to the organisation's brand, the Organisational Compass and the Journey for the State of Mind to ensure relevance, credibility and clarity.

Tips

These are things we believe you will want to keep in mind when considering the role, purpose and emphasis for effective internal communications in your organisation:

- Effective internal communications are a critical success factor for any change or employee engagement initiative. Everyone in your organisation needs to understand why this is so.
- The five core principles for when you are thinking about the state of mind of employees (and other internal audiences) and the management of change and engagement are:
 1. Use creativity to understand the state of mind.
 2. Understanding the 'state of mind' gives richer insights than simply understanding the 'state of play', which is provided by employee surveys.
 3. Share the organisational state of mind so people can see commonality and difference across the organisation.
 4. Use that understanding to engage people and provide momentum for change through recognising and reconciling differences.
 5. Influence the state of mind of managers and help them to engage and influence the state of mind of other employees.
- Leaders and managers are critical influencers on employee engagement and change, so engaging them in communications is the first step in employee engagement and change initiatives. Provide managers with the message structure, creative initiatives and tools and support they need to skilfully, consistently and competently engage and communicate with their people.
- Be sure initiatives and communications are grounded in an organisation's truths, to ensure they are relevant, ownable, realistic and inspire action.
- What employee engagement means will vary by organisation, so be sure there is a common view for what it means in your organisation and how you will measure it.
- Operationalise your brand through your communications, and use the Organisational Compass to help prioritise, control and manage messages, and to turn potential complexity into clarity and inspiration.

Small Back Room has developed methodologies to help with planning and implementation at each of the four Steps. Please contact Michael Dunmore at Small Back Room if you would like to know more about our approach and creative

ways to help engage managers to engage their teams or to provide feedback on this toolkit m.dunmore@smallbackroom.co.uk or 020 7902 7600.