Case study: developing an internal communications and engagement strategy

Writing an internal communications and engagement strategy that works isn't easy, but essential if you're going to focus on achieving your organisation's business objectives.

IC Space has recommended an approach to developing your strategy.
We hope it will give you plenty of ideas about how you can use it in your own organisation. But we wanted to go one step further and show you a real-life strategy that had been written using this approach.

Not every organisation is comfortable sharing strategies and information which highlight some of the internal challenges they face, for obvious reasons.

This case study shows how one organisation has started to build its internal communications strategy to focus on delivering the businesses strategic objectives. We have removed some information so the organisation can remain anonymous, but it will provide you with a really good template to refer to when developing your own strategy.

We hope it's helpful.

The IC team

PAPER FOR THE CORPORATE MANGEMENT TEAM

Title: Employee communications and engagement strategy
Issue/ Purpose: To propose an employee communications and engagement strategy for CMT to consider and agree.
Summary: The Civil Service staff survey in 2011 identified low staff satisfaction levels with engagement and leadership across the organisation. This strategy uses the organisation's strategic objectives in the corporate plan and the communications and people strategies as drivers to influence and identify improvements. It recommends five high-level objectives for CMT to consider and agree. This strategy is a sub-strategy of the main corporate communications strategy.
Resource implications: None. The strategy will be delivered within existing resources.
Timings: This strategy will be delivered over the next two years.
Action required by CMT: CMT is asked to consider this strategy and agree the five high-level objectives set out in section 4 of this strategy.
Links: Corporate plan 2013-18 Communications strategy 2012-15 People strategy 2012-13
Author(s): Communications and HR managers
FOI/publication issues: None
CMT Sponsor(s): Directors of Communications and HR.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The organisation faces a period of considerable change over the next few years as it moves to become a larger, merged family of businesses with a wider remit across two major sites from April 2013.

1.2   It is essential that staff in both organisations are fully engaged in and understand the purpose of the new organisation, the challenges and opportunities it brings, and the role they will play in it.

1.3   The organisation agreed a corporate communications strategy in April 2012 setting out how we will improve communications and engagement with our stakeholders up until 2015.

1.4   The corporate communications strategy recognised there is more work to do on internal communications to ensure staff feel better informed and engaged. This strategy is a sub-strategy of the main corporate communications strategy and sets out five high-level objectives for improving employee communications and engagement, to be delivered by 2015.

1.5   The current focus of this strategy is to improve communication and engagement within the organisation. However, as the merger work progresses, we will start to understand more about the challenges and opportunities this brings and the strategy will be updated regularly to take account of these.

1.6   The internal communications and engagement strategy is presented in three sections:

- **Where we are now** – reviewing how well employees feel communicated and engaged with

- **Where we want to be** – showing how our actions will support key drivers, such as our vision, corporate plan, employee engagement and the corporate communications and people strategies

- **Where we want to be** – proposing five high-level objectives.

1.7   CMT is asked to consider and comment on this strategy and agree the five high-level objectives set out in paragraph 4.

2.0   WHERE WE ARE NOW

2.1   The organisation currently has 1,000 staff of which 250 have line management responsibility. The size of the organisation will increase to approximately 1300 staff following the merger in April 2013.

2.2   The new organisation has nearly 300 staff but to date we have not been able to ascertain a detailed breakdown of these staff and the number of managers. It is recognised that as the merger work progresses this information will become available and it will be factored into the strategy through regular reviews and up dates and brought back to CMT for approval.

2.3   The new organisation is not part of the annual Civil Service staff survey so there is not any comparable information about staff attitudes or satisfaction that can inform this strategy at present. Some recent focus group work around communication and engagement with managers has recently been carried out and this did include staff from the new organisation. It is recognised that as we progress more work needs to be undertaken to establish the views of staff from the new organisation ahead of them being involved in the 2013 Civil Service staff survey.

2.4   The Civil Service people survey in 2011 provides us with the most up to date information about staff views in the organisation, which are summarised in this section. The survey had a high response rate of 78% so we can be certain the findings are accurate. CMT is aware that the organisation's staff and managers are as not as well engaged or informed as they need to be to respond to the significant challenges we face in the future.

Leadership

2.5   As CMT has previously noted, the findings from the 2011 Civil Service people survey show we need to make significant improvements in some of the key leadership indicators. For example:

- 56% of employees said the organisation keeps them informed
- 33% said they had the opportunity to contribute views before decisions that affect them are made
- 34% said change was well managed
- 44% thought CMT had a clear vision for the future.

2.5.1   Appendix A (removed) shows a more detailed summary of the 2011 Civil Service people survey, including breakdowns by each division.

2.5.2   While these findings compare reasonably well against the Civil Service as a whole, the organisation is a relatively small organisation, currently based mainly on a single site, so higher levels of staff engagement and satisfaction would be expected than is shown in these results.

Manager performance

2.6   The Civil Service people survey shows that overall managers are slightly better engaged than staff, as would be expected. However, other important manager indicator measures are generally much lower than would be expected for a similar organisation. For example, only:

- One-third of managers feel change is well managed
- Two-thirds feel informed and
- 41% feel they have the opportunity to contribute their views.

2.6.1 Further analysis of the 2011 Civil Service people survey findings highlights that improvement is needed in line management performance. For example:

- The overall rating for line managers across a range of indicators showed we were 80 out of 97 when compared to the Civil Service as a whole
- Only 56% said their manager motivates them to be more effective in their job, which is 7% below the Civil Service average
- Only 56% said their line manager helps them understand how they contribute to our objectives, which is 3% below the Civil Service average
- Line management engagement is 60%, which is only marginally higher than staff engagement at 58%.

Employee engagement

2.6.2 The 2011 Civil Service people survey showed that the overall engagement index for the organisation is 58%, while this is two percentage points above the Civil Service average it is not as high as would be expected for a similar organisation. A review of how staff answered the key engagement questions in the survey shows mixed and sometimes contradictory results. For example:

2.6.3 Staff do not feel sufficiently engaged with the organisation and its senior leadership:
- 49% would recommend the organisation as a place to work
- 40% say the organisation inspires them to do the best in their job
- 37% say the organisation motivates them to achieve its objectives.

2.6.4 But there is a sense of staff connection with the organisation's objectives:
- 92% say they understand the organisation's purpose
- 89% see how their work contributes to the organisation's objectives.

2.6.5 The message is mixed when it comes to staff rating their line manager:
- 56% say their manager motivates them to be more effective
- 58% say they get regular feedback
- 71% say their manager is open to new ideas
- 70% get recognition when they have done a good job

- 52% do not feel involved in the decisions that affect them at work.

2.6.6 But staff are interested and motivated in their work:
- 86% are interested in their work
- 73% say they get a sense of accomplishment.

2.6.7 More detailed information about how staff answered these engagement questions in the survey can be seen in appendix B (Removed).

2.6.8 The survey showed that in general there are not any large differences in staff views around grade, gender or ethnic background but there are some around disability.

Internal communications channels

2.7 A survey in 2011, responded to by 313 staff (30%), showed that the intranet is where most staff get their information [92%], followed next by team briefing [70%], email [57%], grapevine 47% and the chief executive's update 37%. Further details of this survey can be seen in appendix C (Removed).

Intranet

2.7.1 Despite its limitations, the corporate intranet remains popular with staff and has generally served the organisation well. For example, the internal communications survey in 2011 showed that 92% of staff value and rely on the intranet for their daily information needs, which is 10% higher than in 2009. Staff use the intranet for a wide range of purposes, be it for business or to simply interact with each other. The most used pages in the past six months are the staff directory, what's new, HR, restaurant menu and the discussion forum.

2.7.2 Feedback from the intranet survey, conducted in June 2012, provided a wide range of views about how the site could be improved. The key suggestions were: a more efficient search engine, better design and navigation and more consistency across divisional pages. There is a separate report to CMT detailing how we will upgrade our intranet site.

Team briefing

2.7.3 Currently team briefing is the key face-to-face channel used to cascade corporate information and messages to staff via managers. Recent staff focus groups have shown there are mixed views about the effectiveness of this, where the following comments were made:

- Topics considered are not always relevant to all parts of the organisation
- Sometimes information offered is old news
- Some managers considered ill equipped to understand topics and conduct engaging conversations with staff; they merely read the discussion guide
- Some managers don't prepare in advance of their briefing sessions
- Team briefing doesn't happen in all parts of the organisation

- Difficult for staff who work off-site to attend team briefing sessions
- Busy staff think team briefing can be a waste of their precious time
- Feedback is not always handled properly and acted upon.

Action currently being taken

2.8   CMT is aware of many of the challenges outlined in this strategy and action plans have been put in place to address some of the issues, specifically focusing on supporting the leadership and managing change theme. Actions include:

- Having divisions analyse their results and develop local actions
- Hosting focus groups to help us better understand how staff think we could improve our leadership and management of change
- Developing a central, online change management resource
- Better supporting line managers as the agents of change.

3.0   WHERE WE WANT TO BE

3.1   There are six key drivers that will influence our employee communications and engagement strategy:

1. Our vision and values
2. Corporate plan and annual business plan
3. Leadership
4. Employee engagement
5. People strategy
6. Corporate communications strategy.

1. Our vision and values

3.2   Effective communication and engagement is recognised as being a major contributor to the achievement of our vision and values. It plays a direct role in supporting employees deliver the organisation's strategic business objectives.

3.2.1   We are finalising our new vision and values to reflect our widening role, following the merger. Once finalised, we will craft this into a clear strategic narrative that sets out the vision for the future in a meaningful way that is clear to both managers and staff.

2. Corporate plan and annual business plan

3.3   Our new corporate plan will set out our high-level long term goals until 2018. As part of the delivery of this strategy we will focus on how internal communications can support the delivery of the plan and specific objectives in the business plan through tactical campaigns and initiatives.

3. Leadership

3.4   It is widely recognised that senior managers hold the key to effective communication and engagement with staff, with the leadership of an

organisation accounting for two-thirds of the impact on employees' attitudes and behaviour. In comparison, formal channels – like the intranet and newsletters – only provide supporting messages and account for less than 10 percent of the impact on employee behaviour.

3.4.1   The major challenge for CMT and senior managers is to visibly demonstrate to staff and managers that they have listened and taken action as a result of the people survey and other feedback – closing the engagement loop. The new vision and corporate plan offer an exceptional opportunity for senior and line managers to communicate and engage with staff and shift some of the perceptions currently held.

3.4.2   Managers are the most trusted source of information for staff and play an important role in motivating them. The organisation has a number of significant organisational challenges to manage over the next 12-18 months such as:

- Communicating and engaging staff and managers with our new vision and corporate plan
- Ensuring staff and managers are engaged and informed about the merger
- A new chief executive
- Implementing the findings in the X review
- A changing environment and tough financial challenges.

3.4.3   Managers must play a critical role in leading and helping staff understand these changes and engaging with them to create:

- A single organisation with a clear, shared focus and direction
- Ownership and engagement with the new vision and corporate plan, rather than disparate activity
- A consistency of approach across all divisions so all staff get the same messages and opportunities to engage.

3.4.4   There is a separate report to CMT detailing how we will improve leadership and staff performance through effective manager communication and engagement.

4. Employee engagement

3.5   The Civil Service people survey shows clearly that understanding and measuring employee engagement is critical to motivating staff to do their best for the organisation. Engagement is not just about job satisfaction; it's about the two-way relationship between staff and the organisation. Getting it right will have a positive impact on organisational performance and encourage innovative thinking and a commitment to delivery; leading to higher levels of customer and stakeholder service.

The influential Macleod review demonstrated that organisation's with higher levels of engagement were more effective across a range of

business areas. The review identified four enablers for engagement which we will use as drivers for our own strategy:

Strategic narrative – This is visible, empowering leadership which provides a strong strategic narrative about the organisation, where it's come from and where it's going.

Engaging managers – This is not managers who are engaged, although we want those too, it's managers who are engaging, who focus on their people and give them scope. Managers who treat their people as individuals and adults, and who coach and stretch them.

Employee voice – This is where there is employee voice throughout the organisation, for reinforcing and challenging views; between functions and externally. This is where employees are seen as central to the solution and the success of your organisation.

Organisational integrity – This is where the vision and values on the wall are reflected in your day-to-day behaviours. What your leaders say must align with what they do. Any gaps are quickly spotted, leading to employee cynicism and disaffection.

3.5.1 The Civil Service people survey showed that employee engagement in our organisation is shaped by a range of experiences at work but typically there are three main drivers:

- **Leadership and managing change** – how employees understand and are engaged with our vision, what opportunities they have to contribute views, how well change is explained and how well they are kept informed.
- **Their work** – how motivated they are, their sense of personal achievement and how well they understand why decisions that affect them are made
- **Their line manager** – how well managers deliver feedback, praise and involve employees in business planning.

3.5.2 This strategy will put in place tactical campaigns and initiatives to support and develop these concepts in order to drive up employee engagement across the organisation.

3.5.3 Appendix B (Removed) shows how staff answered the questions around the three main employee engagement drivers in the Civil Service people survey 2011. It is critical that we closely track these and ensure they continue to inform our employee communications and engagement strategy in the future.

3.5.4 Not all these drivers can be influenced by internal communications alone so it is critical that communications works closely with HR to ensure our work is coordinated and supports the people strategy.

5. People strategy

3.6 The people strategy is an important driver as one of its key objectives is to introduce a management capability programme and support staff engagement and motivation.

3.6.1 The new management and leadership programme was introduced earlier in 2012 to raise the profile of leadership and improve capability within the organisation. The programme has been designed to ensure that what we offer is flexible enough to meet our changing requirements and the challenges our leaders may face in the future. It could be used further to set out expectations around communicating and engaging with staff effectively. The induction programme for new managers is a good example of setting out the big picture issues facing the organisation and what is expected of managers.

3.6.2 The core issue in relation to management and leadership development is not that there is not support available, but that it is not being taken up by those that need it.

Investors in People

3.6.3 Management and leadership is also one of the main strands within the Investors in People framework. HR has been leading the cross-organisation IiP support group to do further work to help the organistion prepare for the next IiP assessment which will take place in November 2012. Specific actions related to leadership in the 2012 IiP continuous improvement plan are:

- Continue to encourage a culture of openness and trust which includes but is not limited to directors being more visible and regular team and all staff meetings;
- All managers to lead staff in line with the corporate behaviours, for example: recognising when people have done a good job and supporting people in their personal development.
- Managers to involve staff in decision-making appropriate to their role through discussion at regular 1:1s and team meetings.

6. Corporate communications strategy

3.7 The corporate communications strategy acknowledges the important role managers and staff will play in delivering the orgnisation's new vision and business objectives by: *communicating the right information, content and messages, to the right audiences, at the right time, through the right channels, to achieve the right action.* Employees are key ambassadors in shaping and influencing the external agenda in their day-to-day interactions with our various stakeholders.

Channels

3.8 While channels in themselves do not change behaviour, having effective channels which deliver information in the way staff want to receive it is essential. While most of our current employee communications channels work well, there is clear evidence that

refreshing or changing some of them would help us improve employee communication further. There is a separate report to CMT detailing how we will upgrade our intranet site.

4.0 HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE

Principles

4.1 In order to deliver this strategy effectively we will be guided by the following principles:

- Provide targeted and timely communications to our employees - ensuring they hear about big news items from us and not the grapevine or the media
- Provide important messages face-to-face via line managers or via senior leaders at all-staff meetings
- Always communicate in plain English
- Always look for opportunities to create dialogue and engagement with employees and managers.

Influencing the drivers for change

4.2 The previous section identified six drivers for improving employee communication and engagement which form the basis for influencing this strategy and its objectives.

Aim

4.3 The overall aim of this internal communications strategy is to: *Make sure employees know what's going on and are engaged in the organisation and where it's heading*

Objectives

4.4 To achieve this aim the following five high-level objectives are proposed:

1. Help employees see the connection between their job and the organisation's new aims and vision

2. Contribute to employees feeling better informed by helping them understand why changes are happening, including the merger

3. Improve employee engagement by creating a climate of listening and feedback, up, down and across the organisation

4. Improve levels of trust between leaders, managers and staff

5. Help managers communicate better with their teams, stakeholders and customers

4.5 The table below shows, at a high level, how each of these objectives is linked to the drivers set out in section 3 (Where we want to be).

Measuring success

4.6   We currently working with the 2011 survey findings and we will update CMT with the 2012 findings when know in about three months' time. We will evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy using the annual Civil Service people survey findings and other surveys or focus groups as necessary. The key indicators from the people survey, and future targets for 2013, are linked to the five objectives in the table below.

4.7   CMT is recommended to agree the five high-level objectives, broad tactics for achieving the objectives, and the success indicators for 2013. Following this, more detailed work will be done to develop the tactics to deliver the objectives.

Report ends

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Summary to show how drivers are linked to objectives, tactics and success measures

Driver	Comms objective	Broad tactics	Measuring success	
			Current 2011	**Target 2013***
Our vision and values The corporate plan and annual business plan Leadership Employee engagement	1. Help employees see the connection between their job and the organisation's new aims and vision	Campaign around new vision and values, corporate plan to run from Dec 2012 onwards. Develop middle managers' skills through management development programme module from Jan 2013 onwards New CEO comms and engagement plan from autumn 2013	36% said organisation motivates me to achieve its objectives 71% said they had information to do their jobs. CS avg 67%	40-44% 75-79%
The corporate plan and annual business plan Leadership Employee engagement	2. Contribute to employees feeling better informed by helping them understand why changes are happening, including the merger	Campaign to explain organisational restructuring from April 2013 Implementation of managers' communication and engagement strategy -	56% said the organisation keeps them informed. CS avg 55% 34% said change was well managed. CS avg 27%	62-66% 40-44%

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Driver	Comms objective	Broad tactics	Measuring success	
			Current 2011	**Target 2013***
		conferences, better mgt information		
Leadership Employee engagement People strategy Corporate communications strategy	3. Improve employee engagement by creating a climate of listening and feedback, up and down the organisation	Introduce employee network from April 2013 Introduce ideas / efficiency scheme summer 2013 Revamp recognition scheme summer 2013 New CEO comms and engagement plan from autumn 2013	58% = Engagement index 56% said manager helped how they could contribute. CS avg 59% 33% said they opportunities to contribute views. CS avg 36%	60-64% 40-44% 37-41%
Leadership Employee engagement	4. Improve levels of trust between leaders, managers and staff	Implementation of managers' communication and engagement strategy - conferences, better mgt information	44% thought CMT had a clear vision for the future. CS avg 39% 44% had confidence in CMT decisions. CS avg	50-54% 50-54%

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Driver	Comms objective	Broad tactics	Measuring success	
			Current 2011	**Target 2013***
		Improve senior management visibility through informal opportunities and personalised comms New CEO comms and engagement plan from autumn 2013	36% 43% thought directors were visible. CS avg 45% 47% thought organisation is managed well	50-54%
Leadership Employee engagement People strategy	5. Help managers communicate better with their teams, stakeholders and customers	Develop middle managers' skills through management development programme module	40% said the organisation inspires me to do the best in my job. 57% of staff who said their manager motivates them to be more effective in their job	44-48% 61-65%

* Adjust when Civil Service people survey 2012 results are known if required