Measuring Internal Communication

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"The greatest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished."
George Bernard Shaw

An annual employee survey is a useful communications measurement tool, but is it really enough?
Many things change over the course of a year. It is also important to understand the impact of specific initiatives and related internal communications throughout the year.

Demonstrating the value of effective internal communication. Communications measurement helps organizations to quantify the value of effective internal communication (which is typically significant but often overlooked). It also helps internal communicators justify and gain adequate resource.

When should we measure communications?

Annual in depth surveys. Engagement and satisfaction surveys are typically carried out annually and can carry additional questions to provide some insights into the effectiveness of internal communications.

Prior to a specific communications campaign. In order to best understand the impact of internal communications, it is necessary to measure (awareness, attitudes, knowledge etc) before a campaign.

After a significant communication or campaign. It is important to measure the effectiveness and impact of significant communications programs and initiatives. This allows you to tailor internal communications to make sure they are effective and delivering quantifiable business value.

At intervals to track attitudes. Regular measurement helps communicators to gauge the ever shifting feelings and attitudes within an organization and to tailor messages to make sure they are appropriate to their audiences.

Pulse checks and temperature checks. Measurement during and after specific events provide an insight into the issues and challenges an organization faces and to gather feedback on specific issues.

At intervals to benchmark and track against KPI's. Measuring regularly against benchmarks and tracking trends over time provide an early warning of issues that may go undetected until they have escalated further.

Types of measurement

Determining which aspects of internal communication to measure will depend on the organization's specific business and communication objectives. A few examples of useful communications measurements include:

Baseline communication measurement. Prior to communication, measure; existing knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of employees, as well as determining the existing information available, how easy it is to find, the current communications channels available and to identify other factors influencing attitudes and behaviors.

Functional communication measurement. Following a communication or campaign, functional aspects of communication should be measured. Comparisons to the baselines measurements are useful. Additional measures can include; the number and types of messages sent, timing of messages, message cut-through / reach, channel effectiveness and appeal, audience satisfaction with content (types, volume etc).

What to measure – measuring impact

Measuring the impact of communication is a critical step and measures can include:

Audience perception measurements including factors such as: % and types of messages received and communications remembered. Were messages seen as relevant, consistent and credible? Were the messages understood? How well do employees feel they are being supported? Do employees understand exactly what needs to happen as a result of the communication(s)?

Change in behavior. The objective of most internal communication is to change the attitudes and behaviors of employees. Therefore, it is valuable to identify and measure factors such as: What changed? Was there more or less of a behavior? What is now different?

Impact on business goals / outcomes. Communication measurement should enable Internal Communicators to quantify the impact of communications on business objectives. For example:

- The number of employees who signed up for share scheme (following its promotion)
- The shift in attitudes regarding customer service and the projected impact of increased customer retention
- The number of usable suggestions submitted via an employee suggestion initiative (and the financial value of those suggestions)

Isolating the impact of internal communication. Communication does not happen in a vacuum and it can sometimes be difficult to isolate the impact of communication versus other factors (incentive schemes, new product launches, factors external to the organization and so on). Possible solutions include:

- Communications control groups (isolating a group, such as a single remote location, and not communicating them about a specific initiative or goal, then looking at how their actions differ from groups you have communicated with).
- Assessing the change in behavior with regard to a business goal which was communicated well, versus a business goal with little or no communication.
- Estimate the % influence of communications versus other influencing factors.

Calculating the financial value of communication. Calculations of the financial value of communication will, at best, be estimates. However, it is still an important part of communication measurement as it starts a conversation with senior managers as well and can demonstrate the enormous value of effective internal communication.

Consider the impact of an effective internal crisis communication response. A comparison can be made against a situation (internally or within a similar organization) which wasn't handled as well, and quantifiable value attributed to factors such as:

- Volume of customers retained.
- Retention of good staff that might otherwise have left.

An Impact Calculator can be used to calculate the financial impact of internal communication.

How the SnapComms tools can help measure communication

SnapComms provide a range of tools and reporting options to make internal communications measurement easier.

Aside from in depth online or paper based surveys, the SnapComms desktop survey and quiz tools can provide additional measurement and benchmarking capability for internal communications measurement throughout the year. Key features related to communications measurement include:

Bypass email. The survey / quiz is delivered onto the desktop of targeted employees (and not buried in email).

Recurrence and escalation to increase participation. A notification pops up on the targeted employee's screen and has flexible recurrence options based on the individual's response. So for important surveys / quizzes, the administrator(s) can set them up to recur indefinitely at regular intervals until completed. For less important surveys/quizzes, recurrence can be limited to an appropriate number of pop up reminders.

Targeting (managers, teams, individuals). The SnapComms channels and tools can be targeted to specified employees or employee groups based on existing network structures and /or groups based on needs or demographics.

Stakeholder analysis. The SnapComms registration alert tool can collect information from employees regarding their demographics and information preferences. Targeting groups can then be set up based on this information. This functionality allows demographic surveying, for example, to collect responses from employees with families versus those without.

Pre-testing and pilots. Targeting features with the tools make it possible to pilot and pre-test communications within a specified group of employees. Assessing the impact of communications by making comparisons to a control group is made easy by the SnapComms content management console and its associated reports.

Sampling. Easy targeting of the SnapComms desktop survey and quiz tools allow you to sample the employee base so that employees don't get survey fatigue. This makes measuring communication at regular intervals more acceptable. Hence you are able to measure and track benchmarks and KPIs.

Confidential responses for maximum candor (and effective communications measurement). The SnapComms desktop survey tool has a confidentiality option which can be valuable in times of change and uncertainty.

Quick and easy to respond. Due to the overt nature of the SnapComms desktop survey and quiz tools, they work well for short, surveys with multi-choice questions (although other answer options are available too). Recurrence settings teach staff that it is easier to open a desktop survey and answer a few quick questions than it is to keep deferring it until later.

Opportunities to provide additional insight. Optional free form questions can be added to the SnapComms desktop survey to allow employees to provide additional insights and ideas if they have them.

Opt in functionality. The SnapComms survey tool can also be used as a 'silent survey' (with no desktop notification) that employees can opt into via a hyperlink (perhaps embedded in a message or on the intranet). For less critical but important issues it gives employees a voice and keeps lines of communication open.

Incentives. A prize incentive can encourage staff to participate in a quiz or survey. The SnapComms desktop survey tool allows you to embed images into the survey or quiz (e.g. of the prize) and reporting options allow you to awarded prizes based on response times, scores or random selection. (NB Incentives may cause a bias to the survey sample, so be sure to factor this aspect in to any analysis of the results).

Reporting. The SnapComms content manager provides full reporting (message visibility, recurrence statistics, cut-through, hyperlinks clicked, survey and quiz results as well as more comprehensive reporting for the internal social media channels). Reports can also be exported to Excel for further analysis.

**Example questions for internal communications measurement** using the SnapComms desktop survey tool.

Qualitative communication measurement

In addition to quantitative measures of communications effectiveness, qualitative communication measurement should also be undertaken. Qualitative techniques can include:

Free form answers in surveys. The SnapComms desktop survey tool provide options for free form answers which can either be included in overt desktop surveys or as part of a open ended opt-in 'silent survey' which is activated by employees when required and helps to keep lines of communication open.

Focus groups. One of the challenges associated with focus groups is to encourage participation, and to manage attendance and required resources (people, venues, catering etc). The SnapComms RSVP desktop alert tool can be helpful here. The tool allows you to send invites via a desktop alert to targeted employees with multiple attendance options. Once an employee has decided to attend and selected their preferred timing and location options, the appointment can be added into their Outlook calendar. Reporting options in the content management system show exactly who is attending which session, as well as the answers to any additional questions that have been included (dietary preferences, transport requirements etc).

Discussion forums. Although face-to-face interviews and focus groups are often the best option for qualitative communication measurement, internal social media can be a useful addition or substitute. SnapComms provide easy-to-use, out-of-the box internal social media channels that require little configuration or technical support. Set up employee discussion forums to investigate specific issues. Monitor comments made in discussion forums to gather qualitative measures of how employees are thinking feeling and behaving.
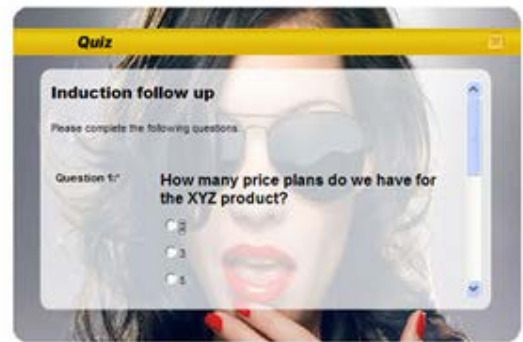
Avoiding survey bias

Avoiding non-response or self-select bias. When surveys rely on employees to opt in or 'self select', you may mostly hear from the squeaky wheels or people with an agenda motivating them to participate. The SnapComms desktop survey tool provides recurrence, random sampling and escalation options to help ensure that representative internal communications measurement data is collected from across the organization.

Control groups. The SnapComms suite of internal communications tools are targetable to specified employee or employee groups. This allows control groups for communications campaigns to be set up. The content management console allows you to identify survey responses from control groups and hence to compare and assess the impact of internal communications campaigns.

Multiple select questions. For some types of questions, e.g. "Where did you hear about XXX from?" or "What factors influenced your decision" providing single answer options can skew results. In these cases the SnapComms desktop survey tool provides multi-select answer options.

Comparisons. Visibility reporting available via the SnapComms content manager consol allow you to measure the impact of communications on people who saw a particular communications against those who didn't.

The impact of time on recall. Recall rates will drop over time, hence if communication campaigns are to be compared with one another, communications measurement needs to be carried out at the same time period after each campaign. The SnapComms content management console allows you to view campaigns and communications by 'go live' dates which make it easier to ensure that communications measurement is carried out at a consistent time after each campaign.

Providing context for a quiz or survey. A customizable introduction can be provided for each desktop survey or quiz allowing context to be given. For example, a product knowledge quiz without context may cause employees to worry about the purpose of the quiz and possibly work harder to ensure they provide the correct answers. However the same quiz with an explanation "*the purpose of this quiz is to see how well the communications team are doing, therefore please be as honest as possible"* is more likely to provide an accurate measure of communication effectiveness.
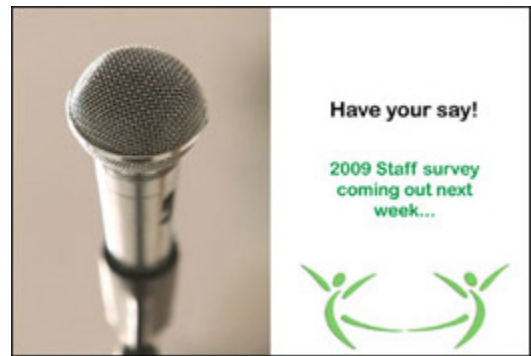
Encouraging survey participation

Promoting the survey to encourage participation. The higher survey participation rates are, the more statistically accurate and relevant the results will be. The SnapComms internal communications channels include tools such as; desktop alerts, scrolling desktop feeds, screensaver messaging and user which can all be used to raise the profile of surveys and encourage participation.

Communicating survey findings and actions being taken. When employees believe that the outputs from staff surveys will be constructively used, they are more likely to participate. Therefore, ensure that survey results and the resulting actions being taken are well communicated to staff. Messages, newsfeeds and articles in the staff magazines are great ways get messages across without their becoming buried in email in-boxes.

Related Resources

- Measuring the effectiveness of managers as communicators
- Articles on communication measurement by Angela Sinickas (www.sinicom.com)
- Visit our White Papers page for additional resources: