

So You Want To Conduct An Internal Communication Audit?

Do your employees have the information they need to do their job? What's the best way to reach your employees? Are your employees aware of your organisation's strategy and how their work contributes to its success? Is there consistency and reinforcement of key corporate messages? An internal communication audit can help you answer these questions and more.

If you have never conducted a communication audit or it's been a while, it might be time to have a first-hand look at whether your internal communication is making a difference.

What is an internal communication audit?

An internal communication audit evaluates the

effectiveness of your internal communication. When you have a clear picture of the impact that communication has on your audiences, you can determine whether it's serving the needs of the organisation or requires adjustment.

How can an internal communication audit help?

An audit is valuable input to your strategic communication planning process and can help you identify where you might be missing the mark including any information gaps, messages that aren't clear, and channels that aren't delivering the way that you intended or reaching your audiences. It can also help you establish a benchmark to measure effectiveness and allocate your resources wisely.

Better yet, it provides data that informs the overall strategic direction of the organisation, demonstrating to senior executives that you understand the business and can contribute to its success.



EFFECTIVE IC RESEARCH IN 5 STEPS



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Determine what you will evaluate

First things first, you need to determine exactly what it is you want to evaluate through your audit.

Do you have an existing internal communication strategy? If yes you could select the elements that are most critical to its success or the areas where you are making the biggest investments.

Examples of what you could evaluate include:

- > Channel effectiveness – evaluate the effectiveness of existing internal communication channels and determine employee habits and preferences.
- > Employee awareness – are your employees retaining the essential pieces of information you want them to remember and act on?
- > Leadership communication – leaders rarely have a common definition of the purpose and value of internal communication, or shared expectations of what it should be delivering. And there's almost always a gap between how effective they perceive their own leadership communication skills to be and what employees (particularly frontline employees) think.

Select your audience

Make sure you get a diverse set of views from across the organisation, including employees from all business areas, functions, roles, locations and levels. Don't forget to get the necessary permissions to conduct the research if necessary. This is particularly important for employees working in a rostered environment, in the field or for organisations with a heavily unionised workforce.

Communicate the 'why'

Before you begin it's important that you communicate up front why you are asking people to share their views and what you plan to do with their feedback.

For example:

"You have been randomly selected to participate in research about the quality and effectiveness of our communication practices, channels and messages. We'd like to hear your views on what's working well and where we can improve. Your feedback will assist us to deliver timely and meaningful communication that supports business priorities and key projects. It will also help to clarify the crucial role managers play in communicating with you and identify the support they need to do this well."

Determine how you will collect your employees' and stakeholders' insights

There are many ways to collect information from your employees and your stakeholders

(those who have a stake in making internal communication happen) including:

- > **Reviewing existing internal communication practices and processes** – to uncover any gaps or themes that could inform your research approach. This could include existing communication strategies and plans, communication channels, audiences and key message delivery, supporting systems and service provision. You could also look at existing research such as your organisation's engagement survey results for any results directly influenced by communication and the way in functions within the organisation.

- > **Collecting quantitative data** – through a survey to measure employee satisfaction and perceptions around the effectiveness of internal communication. I use Survey Monkey but there are hundreds of different online survey software and questionnaire tools available on the market today. Try to keep your survey concise; it should take no more than about 10-15 minutes to complete. Take some time to get your demographics right as well, as your choices will affect the story you tell later. For example, you may want to compare results by work area, tenure, location, generation or gender.

Depending on what you're evaluating in your survey, you could ask your employees:

- > How they currently receive communication about the organisation.
- > Their preferred ways of receiving communication about topics such as strategic priorities and direction; pay and benefits; business unit goals, work processes and decisions, financial results, safety, change etc.
- > Their perceptions about the effectiveness of the different ways they receive communication (i.e. is communication timely, clear, relevant, consistent

- > To recall key elements of the organisation's strategy.
 - > The quality of communication they receive from their direct manager and other leaders within the organisation
 - > Their level of interest in new ways of communicating.
- > **Collecting qualitative data** – through a series of one-on-one interviews and focus groups to dig a little deeper and uncover more detail about the needs, expectations and perceptions of the effectiveness of internal communication across different employee groups, work areas and locations. Focus groups and interviews are particularly useful for exploring people's attitudes and feelings and for drawing out issues and reactions to specific themes and aspects of your internal communication strategy and approach. To ensure open and honest discussion in your focus groups aim for no more than about 10-12 participants and whatever you do, never mix employees with managers and leaders.

employees that their anonymous responses will be combined with the responses of a cross-section of employees to identify trends only. Likewise, you should also remind focus group and interview participants that while notes will be taken to capture their comments, they will be presented in a collated report format only.

Review your data objectively

Draw conclusions from the data you've collected and combine your findings in a report that includes:

- > an overview of the research and why it was conducted
- > a description of the methodology you used to execute the research
- > an executive summary of the findings
- > analysis of employee opinions and perceptions
- > recommendations for improvement.

Communicate your findings

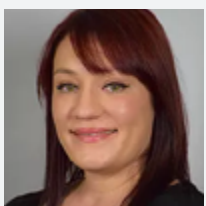
Whatever you do, don't forget to communicate what you have learned through your audit. This is important for all your audiences and stakeholders, and especially for those who participated in the research. People support what they help to create so make sure you tell people what you discovered, how you plan to address it and by when.

One last thing

Don't underestimate how long your audit will take from start to finish. The more people involved and the more people you need to influence to conduct your audit; the longer it can take to complete. A targeted audit (e.g. where you evaluate one element of your internal communication strategy) can take anywhere from three to six weeks, while a more comprehensive audit typically takes around three months to complete.

Confidentiality and anonymity

This comes up every time I conduct research for my clients. You should ensure that your communication to employees includes reassurance that you will protect their confidentiality and anonymity during the research process. This is particularly important when conducting surveys. You are more likely to inspire participation when employees are assured that you will not be collecting identifying information (e.g. name, IP address, email address etc.). Remind



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Sia Papageorgiou is Cropley Communication's Director, Strategic Internal Communication and Digital Media. She is an experienced and sought-after facilitator, speaker, and internal communication professional with a 20-year track record of delivering creative communication strategies and employee engagement programs that drive understanding, engagement and performance. [Learn more.](#)