

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS: COMMUNICATING TO A DIVERSE & DISPERSED WORKFORCE

Technology has made the world a much smaller place. Transmitting and sharing information as well as hosting conferences without having to be physically present means organisations can find the most cost effective means of keeping in touch with their employees worldwide. The workforce can also enjoy dynamic & effective virtual working relationships. Below are some simple tips on how to ensure that whilst celebrating overcoming the distance barrier, we don't inadvertently create another – communication.

GENERAL TIPS

- // **Make sure that there is leadership commitment to reaching the diverse and dispersed workforce.** There is no place for underestimating the resource required in reaching your workforce. If they are important, then challenge the desire to rationalise resources or have this as a bolt on exercise to the main internal communication strategy in the organisation.
- // **Be clear on the purpose of the communication.** The purpose of the message will be a key factor in deciding how to communicate. A general awareness message to the workforce could have a lighter touch, whereas if real behaviour change is required, a more direct approach may be necessary.
- // **Have a plan and justification for any activity.** It will help when you need your leaders to take action in reaching the workforce they don't see often. It must be linked to the organisation's overall vision and strategy to get buy in.
- // **Beware of the email trap.** It may be sent in an instant but does not constitute 'full circle' communication until feedback or action is carried out. You may need to follow up with another means of communication.
- // **Know your audience.** What does this communication mean to them and why should they pay attention/act on it? As everyone is busy, impressive podcasts, videos, brilliantly scripted emails and carefully managed websites are only effective if they are looked at. If the workforce know and understand the purpose for the communication, they can decide whether they need to pay closer attention to it or not.
- // **Solicit feedback.** Formally or informally (depending on the situation), feedback will provide a useful management tool to gauge the effectiveness of reaching your diverse and dispersed workforce. It allows the communicator to justify current methods or provides the case for corrective action.
- // **Link in with any local or 'on the ground' communicators that are available.** They are the ears, eyes and mouth in the local area. It would be a shame not to tap into their knowledge, expertise and networks.

A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Staff here may have different perceptions and needs. The aim should be that communication is inclusive and appreciates these differences.

// **Pay attention to language.** Words can be interpreted to have different meanings. Keep it short and simple. Avoid colloquial speech and ambiguous statements.

// **Be as clear as possible.** Often, key messages/instructions are buried in the text of written communication. Communicating to a diverse audience means you have to appreciate that individuals assimilate information differently. In order to ensure that the key message or instruction is relayed, it is better to be direct about your needs. This could be in the form of a sub section called 'Action required from you' or 'key message' for instance.

// **Consider translations.** Would the message have a greater impact if conveyed in the local language? Is this expected?

// **Respect cultural differences.** For instance, Thanks Giving Day (US) is possibly not the best day to host a multimedia live meeting if you expect many US colleagues to show up. Scheduling a call/ meeting around sunset during Ramadan won't see many of your Muslim colleagues turn up either.

// **Confirm receipt & understanding.** Effective communication does not end when the message is delivered. Formally or informally consider ways to make sure that the recipients understand the message.

A DISPERSED WORKFORCE

Staff here can subscribe to the 'out of sight, out of mind' paradigm. The communicator needs to ensure that they don't become the forgotten ones.

- // **Research & maximise your organisation's available communication tools.** You can use instant interactive tools to achieve face-to-face communication that may be crucial.
- // **Be realistic about the expected level of engagement to the communication channel you decide to utilise.** For instance, hosting a teleconference with a large audience, running through a presentation deck of 50 slides with endless bullet points is not likely to be very engaging.
- // **Don't assume that your dispersed workforce has access to the same tools as you.** Some media web tools need to be downloaded and hence will instantly cut off those who cannot access these tools. Knowing your audience will help, as not all staff are office/home based with access to a personal computer. Field based staff need to be taken into account.
- // **There is no harm in augmenting general messages with a personal touch if possible.** After a general worldwide or nationwide message has been relayed, local leaders can enhance this by hosting smaller groups or one to one sessions. This will ensure the right messages are being received and valuable feedback is given. A day spent making calls to various parties that are not physically together may give a better result than just sending a general communication via email, or other means to the same audience.
- // **Respect local time zones where possible for live meetings.** You may be happy to host a meeting at 10pm at night, but don't assume this is acceptable universally, especially if it is going to be 3am at the other end. Draw up a table of relevant time zones and inquire first about acceptable times. Hosting the same conference more than once to ensure that the dispersed public is reached is a valid option.
- // **Action oriented communication should give a clear format of the action required and deadline.** Does close of business mean 17:00 GMT or 17:00 GMT+1? Or neither?
- // **Consider all costs and benefits.** It may be a financial cost saving to host live web casts, but to really win the hearts and minds of your workforce, perhaps a senior leader (not necessarily the CEO) needs to fly out to a location to demonstrate commitment. Employee commitment could prove a benefit outweighing that immediate cost saving.

BY **KAEGO UBA**, SHELL INTERNATIONAL

Kaego Uba ACIPR works as a Business Readiness Manager for the new buying process in Shell.

She is responsible for stakeholder engagement, including change management and activities ranging from communications, training and role mapping, through to post go live support and stabilisation. Prior to this Kaego led a variety of large scale change programmes and projects for Shell, including the introduction of a new expense system for over 3000 European employees, for which she received special recognition. She is Vice Chair of SAN. Shell African Network (SAN). Coming from an accounting background, she is not afraid of complexity, yet she strives for simplicity and complexity reduction and believes that simple messages are always better understood.



Downloading and reading this skills guide is worth **5 CIPR CPD points.**