


# scm

BEST PRACTICES, CASE STUDIES AND STRATEGY FOR COMMUNICATORS

Volume 14, Issue 3

April/May 2010



## Reviewing the function to maximize its business value

Balancing strategy and tactics in a leaner communication function

The proof: effective communication drives business in tough times

Moving from cascade to dialogue at GKN

Communicating through difficult change at British Airways

The end of an era: takeover and culture change at Cadbury

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## MELCRUM

Global research and training for internal communicators

### About the publisher

Melcrum is a research and information company with offices in London, Washington and Sydney. Through our publications, research, training materials and seminars, we gather best practices from businesses around the world to help practitioners make better business decisions. Melcrum has clients in over 80 countries and has an international reputation, not only for editorial and research products of the highest standards, but also for tracking important trends in organizational communication, corporate communication, knowledge management and human resource management.



# scm

**Senior Editor: Kelly Dyer**

[kelly.dyer@melcrum.com](mailto:kelly.dyer@melcrum.com)

**Editor: Sona Hathii**

[sona.hathii@melcrum.com](mailto:sona.hathii@melcrum.com)

**Editorial Assistant: Nishwa Ashraf**

[nishwa.ashraf@melcrum.com](mailto:nishwa.ashraf@melcrum.com)

**Head of Content: James Bennett**

[james.bennett@melcrum.com](mailto:james.bennett@melcrum.com)

**Marketing Executive: Daniel Gregory**

[daniel.gregory@melcrum.com](mailto:daniel.gregory@melcrum.com)

**Subscriptions Manager: Jessica Spiandore**

[jessica.spiandore@melcrum.com](mailto:jessica.spiandore@melcrum.com)

**Art Direction: Wesley Corbett**

### EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES

#### North America

1108 K St, NW

Third Floor

Washington DC 20005

Tel: 202 393 8960

Tel: 866-MELCRUM (Toll free)

Fax: 202 330 5859

#### Europe

The Glassmills, 322b King Street,

London W6 0AX, UK

Tel: +44 (0)20 8600 4670

Fax: +44 (0)20 8741 9975

### MARKETING, SUBSCRIPTIONS AND ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES:

#### North America

Tel: 202 393 8960

Tel: 866-MELCRUM (Toll free)

Fax: 202 330 5859

#### Europe

Tel: +44 (0)20 8600 4670

Fax: +44 (0)20 8741 9975

#### Asia/Pacific

Tel: +61 (0)2 9222 2810

Fax: +61 (0)2 9222 2820

### BILLING AND SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES:

Email: [subscriptions@melcrum.com](mailto:subscriptions@melcrum.com)

Website: [www.melcrum.com](http://www.melcrum.com)

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## FROM THE EDITOR

# Reviewing the function to maximize its business value



Dear Reader,

One of the key issues at the moment is how to operate effectively within a lean communication team. No one wants to be in this position, but the global recession has meant that communicators have been made redundant, roles have been reduced and those left in the team are having to cope with not only their workload but the workload of others too.

So, when you're managing with reduced resources, what are your priorities? Do you continue to offer the strategic service you always did, along with the tactical, practical day-to-day communication efforts? Even if it means spreading yourself and your team too thinly, thereby delivering a less-than perfect service? Or, do you keep the strategy side of things to yourself and outsource the tactical projects? Likewise, you could opt to do the opposite; focus on the tactics and allow an external agency (if budget allows) to worry about the strategy.

One way forward is to carry out a communication audit and learn a) where your strengths are as a function and if there are knowledge gaps to fill and b) how effective your comms channels are and whether there are any you can do away with to save costs. On page 16 of this issue, Sona Hathi looks at balancing tactics and strategy within the function and includes an extract from Bill Quirke's report written exclusively for Melcrum, "How to review the function for cost and efficiency".

### In this issue

This is an issue of exclusives. On page 24, we have an exclusive extract from the upcoming report for Melcrum's Strategic Communication Research Forum on helping managers facilitate dialogue. We also bring you exclusive interviews with two very senior communicators who are currently operating in very tough business environments: Penny Lawson, head of internal communication at troubled airline British Airways (page 28) and Andrew Moys, director of internal communication at Cadbury (page 32).

We also feature an article from Kathryn Yates at Towers Watson who reveals how their latest research proves that companies with effective communication practices fared far better in the financial crisis compared to those without (page 20). I hope you enjoy the issue.

### Kelly Dyer

Email: [kelly.dyer@melcrum.com](mailto:kelly.dyer@melcrum.com)

If you have any comments about any of the articles published in this issue, or if you have an idea for a future article, please contact: [kelly.dyer@melcrum.com](mailto:kelly.dyer@melcrum.com)

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# intouch

## EVENTS & RESEARCH

### NANDO'S VOTED BEST BIG COMPANY TO WORK FOR

Peri-peri chicken chain Nando's has debuted in the Sunday Times' annual list of the 25 best big Companies to Work for, emerging at top position.

The group, which has 220 UK restaurants and more than 6,300 staff, achieved the best score for Wellbeing (70 percent), My Manager (76 percent) and My Team (79 percent); the second best rating for Leadership (75 percent); the third best score for Fair Deal (61 percent) and My Company (77 percent), and the fourth highest score for Personal Growth (72 percent). Employees, or "nandocas" as they're known, feel there's a strong sense of family in their teams (81 percent) and say they can talk openly and honestly with their managers (82 percent).

Also debuting in the top 25 were InterContinental Hotel Group, at 19, and pub group Orchid, at 20, while KPMG has slipped down 10 places after sitting at the top of the list last year.

Factors leading to its downfall are likely due to the 400 compulsory and 71 voluntary redundancies the company has made because of the recession.

This year, 90 percent of partners and staff have agreed to reduce their working week by a day or take part-paid leave, as a result of which, KPMG has avoided a companywide redundancy program.

Investment bank, Goldman Sachs has re-entered the list at number two.

**"KPMG HAS SLIPPED DOWN 10 PLACES AFTER SITTING AT THE TOP OF THE LIST LAST YEAR."**

Reputation has been an issue for the banking industry since Lehmans crashed in late 2008, but staff at Goldman, which topped the list in 2007, insist they have confidence in the leadership of the senior management team, giving a positive score of 87 percent.

Employees say that the organization is run on sound moral principles (83 percent); they have a great deal of faith in them (86 percent) and believe that they offer inspirational leadership (81 percent) – all top scores. The company strongly commits to supporting worthy causes, and 62 percent of staff say this isn't driven by a desire for publicity.

Michael Sherwood, vice chairman, Goldman Sachs Group and co-chief executive of Goldman Sachs International (GSI), told The Sunday Times, "Contrary to what some in the media might want you to believe, I think Goldman is just a very good, fair, ethical place to work."

Another company that managed to push themselves further up the list is Mothercare and Early Learning Centre, rising from 13th to fifth – 83 percent of the 7000 employees reported that their colleagues are fun to work with and are far from dull.

### KENEXA RESEARCH REVEALS HOW PASSIONATE WORKERS ARE ABOUT THEIR JOBS

A survey carried out by the Kenexa Research Institute (KRI) has revealed that Americans are more engaged than Brits, when it comes to being passionate about their jobs.

Completed by employees in more than 18 countries, only 53 percent of UK workers felt excited about work or saw a future with their organization, compared to the global rating of 56 percent. The rate of passion was measured by the extent the employees were satisfied with their organization, felt a sense of accomplishment, got excited about work and how often they thought about looking

**"ONLY 53 PERCENT OF UK WORKERS FELT EXCITED ABOUT WORK OR SAW A FUTURE WITH THEIR ORGANIZATION."**

elsewhere for employment.

The intensity to which employees are passionate about their job varied among job types, with senior/middle management reporting the most satisfaction for their jobs at 60 percent, while service and production workers reported the least amount of passion at 43 percent.

The KRI research shows that employees in the UK would have more confidence in their companies' future and feel more passionate in their job if; they feel their skills and abilities are put to good use, have access to development opportunities, can meet their career objectives, are recognized for their work and still have time to devote to personal obligations.

Brenda Kowske, Research Consultant at Kenexa Institute, said: "Similar to romantic passion, workers won't put up with miserable relationships for long,"

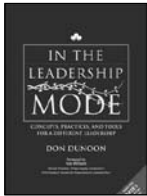
And as the economic outlook continues to improve, she advises leaders to "play cupid," she added: "Elevating an employee's passion for his or her job will keep employees happy and committed, even when other attractive opportunities come their way."

Indian workers emerged at the top at 72 percent, followed by those in Brazil (63 percent), Canada (60 percent) and the United States and Germany (59 percent) followed by Saudi Arabia, while workers in Japan trailed behind as the least fervent about their jobs with 41 percent.

## BOOKS

### IN THE LEADERSHIP MODE

► by Don Dunoon, Trafford, 2008



This book explains how anyone can demonstrate leadership (as distinct from management) qualities, and not just those in positions of authority.

It isn't directly about leadership communication. (For this I'd recommend *The Leader as Communicator* by Robert Mai and Alan Akerson, Amacom, 2003, previously reviewed in *SCM*). But much of it is about communication, such as understanding where others are coming from, how to frame issues, and what to say (e.g. in meetings) when you're discussing complex issues and wish to demonstrate "leadership".

There are 244 pages over five chapters in each of two parts. First, the "foundations" of the Leadership Mode covers what leadership really is, and how it differs from leaders and management.

Simplistically, the main argument is that leadership is something anyone can demonstrate with a "learning-centered" approach to complex issues. You don't

need a position of authority or influence. Dunoon points out the "dangers of transformational leadership" and other "traditional" approaches.

Second, is the how-to-do-it section of "practices and tools". This is called ARIES for the things you need to do to demonstrate leadership: "attending, reflecting, inquiring, expressing and synthesizing". Most readers will find that they will need to read this closely a number of times and practice ARIES a lot before they feel they're making progress. But leading isn't something that's easy.

This is a thorough book that presents detailed arguments based on the author's own experience and the work of a number of gurus such as Chris Argyris and Peter Senge. (The impressive range of sources is well-researched and referenced.) It's relatively easy to read and it really makes you examine your own assumptions about leadership and what makes a "leader".

There are lots of helpful examples, case studies, and the use of dialogue to explore "how to do it". There are many "tools" (frameworks, tables, templates, diagrams) and over ten pages of endnotes with lots of tips for additional reading. There are many concepts presented (e.g.

### "IT REALLY MAKES YOU EXAMINE YOUR OWN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP"

mindful working, relational working, creative synthesis, implicit domain) and a glossary might be helpful, although the index is fine.

There's a lot to like about this thoughtful book and it's strongly recommended for all serious students of leadership and anyone who's involved in complex decision-making in organizations or teams. It's self-published but the writing, editing and production quality is higher than most of the books from leading publishers I've reviewed in recent years.

**Rodney Gray**

Employee Communication & Surveys  
Sydney, Australia  
rodney@rodneygray.com.au

## BLOGS & URLS

### THE FLIP SIDE COMMUNICATIONS

► <http://www.theflipsidecommunications.com/blog/>



With a background in employee communication and public relations, communication consultant and founder, Loren Yaskin, combines her knowledge with useful tips she's picked up from her TV news reporter husband, and shares it here.

Focusing on both internal and external communication, The Flip Side Communications' main mission is to help products, services and companies build their brands by advising the best methods to deliver targeted messages "using both traditional and non-

traditional communications channels from the inside out".

A recent post talks about the power of a "hello" and the common mistakes that are made when sending out an email. An extract reads: "You probably wouldn't walk up to someone and say "Greetings!" or "Media Alert!".

As it picks up speed, this new blog will serve as a useful reminder for any communicator and with Yaskin's personal anecdotes, it doubles as a fun read. **NA**

### HILL & KNOWLTON

► <http://blogs.hillandknowlton.com/>

Those who are familiar with Collective Conversations may have noticed it's undergone a refurbishment. The once busy page, now has a cleaner layout that's easier to navigate. And while the result may have packaged away



the clutter, it remains content rich – sections have been added, including Editor's Picks, Latest Posts and links to

Featured Contributors.

An open-forum where anything, from key findings to social media musings can be discussed, the website is fully interactive; the reader can remain as just that, comment on posts or contribute their own - any employee can register for a blog, either as a singular or as a group.

In a nutshell, it brings a host of communicators to one place. Posts vary from light-hearted tone to tips and tricks. Great for information, keeping in the loop, and the wide array of bloggers keeps it fresh – definitely one to keep on your blog roll. **NA**

# the communicators' NETWORK

Communicators are still being asked to do more with less; less budget, fewer resources and fewer internal communicators in the team. After a period of job and budget cuts, how are communicators managing their leaner teams and in particular how has the strategic/tactical balance been affected? Also, networkers share advice on creating a policy for internal Twitter usage and for helping to improve communication with IT teams.



**Q** Is anyone managing a new-look, leaner communication function? In particular, how do you strike the right balance between strategic thinking and great tactical delivery? Have you done an audit to assess how you can be more efficient? Where did you cut back?



**Mark Godson**  
**Domestic & General Group**  
 I'm sure different sizes of organization are having different resource

issues to wrestle with. For instance, having previously worked in a multinational bank that had many teams of communicators, external and internal I can see that, for a large organization, any resource/budget reduction and reshaping of priorities, outputs, decisions and impacts will be different compared to the discussions/decisions a small organization with only a handful (or fewer) of comms people needs to make.

Speaking as manager of a smallish team who actually cover external as well as internal communication, for us the priority is to ensure we cover both elements well – strategic thinking and advice, and tactical delivery. In a small team you can't afford the luxury of doing one without the other, so any strategic work we do has got to be balanced (resource and time-wise) against ensuring that we "do the right stuff" tactically. We still have core channels to produce/manage; deadlines to meet; maintenance and administrative activities to fulfil (this time of year for instance, for us budget-planning and sign off is important). This means we have to ensure we deliver what we've agreed is going to be delivered, even if it's less in volume terms than previous. Equally, more expensive activities (typically face-to-face events, or high-end media such as films) need to

be carefully justified, or discarded, within the context of a discussion of how much it damages development of long-term engagement work.

With lower resource we need to roll our sleeves up and "do" stuff - the right stuff - and everything we do must continue to be rooted in support of organizational strategy; aligned to desired values and priorities; technically accurate and excellent and, naturally, highly cost-effective.

Circumstances such as this economic turmoil certainly make businesses re-assess what's essential to retain/do in communication terms.



**Simon Hardaker**  
**GKN**

When presented with challenges like this, my first step is to treat the demands of a need for a reduction in budget usually together with people, communicators' competencies (including managers as communicators) and terms of reference/agreed output (more about outcome in a minute) as three sides of an equilateral triangle (it's the engineer in me!).

When you have the resources, skills and (prioritized) output balanced, the outcome tends to be too.

This requires perhaps just two things to make it work well:

1. A competency framework (Melcrum published one in the report "How to develop outstanding internal

communicators"¹). If you're going to have fewer people, they'd better be good and good in the right areas. This can form the basis of your team's development plan or if you're restructuring completely, as I was forced to once, it gives a good basis for job descriptions.

2. You need to have a way of prioritizing and planning output – we used Synopsis' planning tool with some minor modifications to provide an A3 sheet as a monthly view (Air Traffic Control) of the communications output in prioritized order and got our representative on the Executive board to check our perceived priorities with his or her colleagues' views of it. This has the effect of getting Executive endorsement for things which matter most and understanding/cutting those things which don't.

When the finance officer cuts your budget for no reason other than "make it 10 percent less than last year's out-turn", for example, you can at least have a conversation about investing in what the organization (executive board) needs and are able to put the implications of arbitrary cuts into context.



**Gina Clemente**  
**MHN, Inc. – a Health Net Co.**

I'd posit that the decision depends largely on existing capabilities. That is, do you already have the talent in-house to provide strategic wisdom? If so, contracting out for the actual widget makers (production work) makes good sense (by assignment, those workers will operate in alignment with the company's strategic direction). If this competence is lacking internally, the opposite would apply.

The bottom line: structure follows strategy, so I'd recommend basing your decision on this principle and then filling your knowledge gaps accordingly.



**Q** We've recently started using Twitter and are gathering followers at quite a pace. I'd like to promote it more internally, but does anyone have detailed guidelines around its use?



### Betsy Pasley USAA

I think the quick answer is not to write a policy for a specific channel.

The main reason being the tools change so quickly. The best policies I've seen have been more generic and all – inclusive of any current tools – or future tools that we don't even know of yet.

In fact, our approach sounds like yours. It's around common sense rules and guidelines around any conversation an employee has with the public. Obviously the electronic stuff is documented and easier to forward, which makes it riskier. But the same behaviors of not sharing company secrets, employee or customer information, and so on should apply to any social setting. And if there's a personal thread, it needs to be respectful and not against any harassment, discrimination, solicitation or other rules.

While we have a good policy, we're considering adding some examples if we want to promote it more. Those could probably be more easily updated than a policy. That might be a good alternative for you.



### Benedikte H. Larsen Novo Nordisk A/S

We have two guidelines: One for social media project managers initiating

social media projects and one for employees participating in social media.

Both guidelines are all-inclusive to any tools and approved by all relevant stakeholders. However, we constantly get questions on specific platforms - such as "Can we post a video on YouTube", "How do we use Facebook for a new hiring program", "Is Twitter useful for my project" and so on. Therefore, we've decided to develop a kind of FAQ to our guidelines explaining more in details (per platform) what's possible and not.



**Does anyone have experience of communicating with an IT community within an organization?**

### Siobhan Dudding

Formerly Black & Decker, has recently joined Research In Motion (RIM)

In my experience, those working in IT are those who feel the most disconnected from the organization.

They sit at their desks and do their jobs at which they are very skilled and adept, and which in theory they could do for any type of organization, not just the one they happen to be employed by currently.

They often don't feel an emotional connection with what the company sells or does as they "do" IT.

They are all intelligent people who could be wonderful ambassadors for the brand and by the nature of their jobs they are interested in technology and innovation.

Often, but not always, their managers are not skilled communicators. Some thoughts are:

1. Invest in training managers and give them the tools to communicate better with their teams. Give them materials that they can present, keep the managers informed of campaigns and programs and make the communication part of their role easier for them.
2. Find out what they're interested in - if they're interested in development and training, or secondment to other locations, or benefits etc., get the right person to go and talk to them about those topics at team meetings.
3. Get them hooked in to what the company sells. If you make a drill get them to come and see the new release, why it's interesting, how it was developed, get them to try it out and show them why it's better than anything that our competitors make.
4. Show them how what they do makes a difference to the organization - how their systems support every step of the sales/order process for example and what, if things go wrong, the impact could be.

1. To find out more about this report, visit [www.melcrum.com](http://www.melcrum.com)

## LATEST ON THE MELCRUM BLOG

### When will internal comms finally make a TV appearance?

Melcrum's head of content, James Bennett, asks why, if internal communicators are finally being recognized by executive boards, they aren't in the public eye more? This is off the back of a new UK documentary going behind the scenes at one of Britain's biggest department stores, John Lewis. Bennett believes that rather than the head of PR showing viewers around, it should have been the head of internal communication highlighting how well the team coaches the CEO and explaining the work they've done to engage employees. Maybe then, says Bennett, it would have been worth watching. As it was "an opportunity missed [and] simply an exercise in self-promotion."

### Are you guilty of crimes against the English language?

Melcrum's newest member of the content team, Nishwa Ashraf, airs her thoughts on business jargon in light of the fact that The Local Government Association in the UK has recently clamped down on what it calls "impenetrable words". The list of 250 words now banned from use within government departments, local authorities and quangos include "trialogue" and "clienting". Ashraf is in favor of such a ban as jargon can be the cause of many problems in the workplace: "As all communicators know [jargon] rapidly becomes a problem when it prevents employees from understanding the intended meaning and can create barriers to getting crucial corporate messages out in the open."

### [www.melcrumblog.com](http://www.melcrumblog.com)

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## Using employee champions to stay current and address global, companywide issues

**PROFILE: JENNIFER SCHULTE**

# KEEPING UP WITH THE PACE OF CHANGE AT MARS

Jennifer Schulte, global engagement director at Mars, Inc., is presenting the keynote session at Melcrum's Employee Engagement conference<sup>1</sup> in London. Based in the US, Schulte's passionate about ensuring that all associates of the company have the chance to feel fully engaged with their work. Not an easy task when you're taking on a workforce of 68,000, as she explains, but inspiration is never far away.

### Tell us more about your role at Mars.

I'm responsible for the measurement (survey) process and related activities that drive associate engagement across our organization. Together with a team of engagement champions, who represent specific business segments and geographic areas, I identify engagement strategies and deploy techniques to deliver results and address specific needs at the division and unit level. This includes data (survey) collection and reporting, communication, manager and leader education and intervention processes to address systemic engagement barriers.

### What's your background?

Mine's probably not the "traditional" path to this role, if there is one. I began my career in Finance, working in three different organizations and focusing on financial management (including a couple of years in commercial banking). After gaining an MBA in Finance and joining Mars as a finance manager, I realized I got the most enjoyment from coaching and managing my team. I was lucky to be considered for a role in Learning & Development at Mars, facilitating programs for managers that focused on coaching and developing others. While in my L&D role I became a North America region champion for engagement, and that led me to my current role four years ago.

What are your biggest challenges?

My biggest challenge is being only one person, and keeping up with (or even better, ahead of) the pace of change. Our organization includes over 68,000 associates worldwide, and I have a fundamental belief that every one deserves a great manager and a chance to be truly engaged in their work. The scale can be overwhelming. Thanks to the team of passionate engagement champions who form our global community, we're able to find synergies, set and agree on standards and identify best practices that can be matched to areas with a related need. I rely on these champions to keep engagement on the local business agenda, communicate locally relevant messages while maintaining a consistent theme, and to gather and share feedback so we stay current and address issues and concerns that matter as a global team.

### Can you share with us a lesson that you've learnt the hard way?

We use a survey measurement tool (Gallup's Q12) for the purpose of providing data. The survey results show areas of strength and areas where we need to focus more effort to improve, with accountability at the lowest level possible –

between a manager and their direct work team. Our goal is to become a world-class engagement organization, which means across the business we need to be at or above Gallup's 80th percentile point from their database.

This goal was set in 2004 and began to cascade down to individual manager performance objectives. Unfortunately, bad behavior was the result. In order to get the right "score", some managers were, what we call, "gaming the survey" (associates felt forced to complete the survey and were incentivized by managers to give high scores in return for keeping their jobs, for example.)

What we learnt is that the quality of follow through – teams and managers deciding on the necessary actions and following through on those plans – is the lead indicator to high engagement scores. We've switched our focus for individual manager performance objectives to follow through (both a quantitative score and a qualitative measure), to focus individual accountability on the right behaviors vs. just the survey score. This helps us capture more honest responses on the other survey items and focuses accountability on the item that's within a manager's control.

### What inspires you in the workplace?

I'm inspired by many aspects of the Mars business: our visionary leaders, iconic brands, principle-based culture and every time I meet a Mars associate who's passionate about the work they do. Even when I'm involved in an engagement "intervention" meaning I'm working to identify an underlying cause of disengagement, I'm so inspired by the level of passion and commitment I hear – we're all dedicated to finding ways to make a difference and drive success for our business. In this role I hear that passion and commitment from all levels, from the executive team to the manufacturing floor. It's always inspiring and pushes me to do more.

1. For more information about Melcrum's Employee Engagement Conference, see the conference pages of [www.melcrum.com](http://www.melcrum.com)



Jennifer Schulte is global engagement director for Mars, Inc. She has been in the organization for nine years and has held roles in learning & development and as a finance manager. Prior to joining Mars, Schulte held financial management roles at companies including Fleet Bank and CIGNA Group Insurance.



**THOUGHT LEADER: ANGELA MOHTASHEMI**

## Adapting ourselves and our function to best serve the company

# MAKING OUR ORGANIZATIONS FIT FOR SURVIVAL

Could a whale survive in the Sahara? It's interesting how 'the fittest' is so often used to mean the biggest or the strongest, rather than its Darwinian sense of "best fit with its environment". We should bear this in mind as we look at how organizations have survived the economic crisis and how they'll evolve in the future, says Angela Mohtashemi from PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Over the last couple of years most of us have seen our organizations survive through becoming more efficient or saving costs. "Fitter" has come to mean "leaner", resulting in redundancies and freezes on pay and promotion.

### What does the future hold?

PwC has just asked this question to over 1,000 global business leaders and published the results in its 13th Annual Global CEO survey.

This shows that CEOs are cautiously confident about survival, although wary of aftershocks and are very concerned with managing risk. Although the cost-cutting isn't over for many, 40 percent plan to increase headcount and over 75 percent will be making big investments in change management and improving employee morale and engagement. Their aim is to make their workforce more flexible and to give people the skills for the future, including risk management and change capability.

Two types of organization emerge from the survey. On the one hand there are consolidators, established (mainly blue chip) businesses, who are more concerned about regulation than threats and will focus on strengthening their market position. On the other there are the adaptors: two thirds of whom are in Latin America and Asia Pacific. They're concerned about financing growth and supply chain security and are aggressively

changing their operating models and investment strategies.

### Three new worlds

This could be the first signs of tomorrow's world. PwC's report *Managing Tomorrow's People* looks back from 2020 and tells the story of how three fictitious organizations emerged from the current crisis - specifically in terms of their people strategies.

Orange World is nimble and innovative, with multiple clients and a globally diverse workforce that's tech savvy and networked to communities of other employees with similar skills.

Green World has a powerful social conscience intrinsic to the brand. There's a focus on sustainable and ethical business practice and employees are engaged with the company brand as it reflects their own values.

Blue World is where big corporates rule. It has invested in size, technology, talent and strong leadership. It has a highly engaged and committed workforce, skilled and able to operate globally. There's a clear focus on hard people metrics to measure performance and productivity as the company deals

with the long-term reality of having to do more with less.

Each of the worlds will have different models for communication. Blue companies will focus on corporate messaging and consistency, while orange companies are likely to be more externally networked and rely on self-authoring and social media. We'll need to understand the strategy of our own organization and ensure our approach to communication is "fit" for survival. This includes what sort of function we need and how we'll challenge, influence and support leaders and line managers.

Our survival is dependent on the reputation of our organization with customers and communities (both local and on-line). One of the most trust-inspiring things we can do is tell our people what's happening before they find out elsewhere. That kind of communication culture has to be the basis for better managing risk.

This means that the way we communicate internally has to change. We need to open up channels for employees to speak and listen to each other, even if it's negative. We worry about control but bringing the negative comments out into the open where we can respond is far better than letting employees stew over it. We can now monitor what's said on Facebook and Twitter but we can't monitor what they say round the coffee machine. We'll have to combine the control and consistency of the management message with dialogue and self-authoring.

### Our role in creating an open culture

According to Edgar Schein, eminent professor of organizational development, "As long as leaders believe they're in control, have to have all the answers and never ask for help - those organizations will continue to be in trouble."

How easy is it for our people to express their opinions? Can leaders ask for help? As communicators we can help leaders manage risk and rebuild trust by creating a culture of genuine inquiry. We have a great opportunity to assess our own role and see how that may need to change to make our organizations fitter to survive.



Angela Mohtashemi leads the communication consulting practice at PricewaterhouseCoopers. From crisis and insolvency in financial services to public sector transformation, she works with leaders to put communication at the heart of change.



## Behind the scenes of this year's top ten intranets from the Nielsen Norman Group

AMY SCHADE

# AWARD-WINNING INTRANETS OF 2010

Every year, influential usability consultancy Nielsen Norman Group publishes its list of the world's best-designed corporate intranets, along with a comprehensive report, *Intranet Design Annual*, that gives readers deep insight into what makes the winners "stand out from the crowd". Co-author of this year's report, Amy Schade, shares some thoughts about the winners of 2010.

Nielsen Norman Group's ten best-designed intranets for 2010, in alphabetical order, and their countries of origin, are:

1. Enbridge, Inc., a leader in energy transportation and distribution in North America (Canada).
2. GE, a diversified technology, media and financial services company (US).
3. Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), a non-profit medical research organization (US).
4. Huron Consulting Group, a consulting company (US).
5. Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), a NASA Center that manages robotic spacecraft exploration of Earth, the solar system and the universe (US).
6. The MITRE Corporation, a not-for-profit organization that manages four federally funded research and development centers (US).
7. SCANA Corp., a Fortune 500 energy-based holding company (US).
8. Trend Micro Inc., a leader in internet content security (Japan).
9. URS Corporation, a leading provider of engineering, construction and technical services for public agencies and private-sector companies (US).
10. Wal-Mart Stores Inc., a retailer with more than 8,000 retail units under 53 different banners in 15 countries (US).

### How is the list compiled?

Any company that's interested should submit some basic information about their intranet along with some screenshots.

We perform a basic evaluation process, scoring each intranet according to a set of criteria that we've developed over the past ten years of compiling the report. We look at navigation, user experience, search, any unique features on the site - and our scoring for an individual intranet in each of these attributes allows us to narrow down the entries to a shortlist of around 25. We then progress to a much more in-depth evaluation to arrive at the top ten. We start collecting entries in the preceding summer months and work on them throughout the Fall in order to publish the list and report in January.

### What trends emerged this year?

The emergence of mobile features is what really struck us. Three intranets in the top ten had created mobile intranets specifically to meet the needs of mobile employees. The three companies in question hadn't just invited employees to access existing intranet features via their cell phones - they'd custom-built

lightweight websites or applications that focused on tools and content that employees really need while on the move. Another continuing trend was the use of social networking elements on corporate intranets. Over time, corporate intranet teams are figuring out how to translate the consumer tools and the expectations that users bring from their own lives into what makes sense in a business setting. Companies that stood out this year really thought about it. The most successful ones introduced social networking features for solid business reasons - they allow employees to update team members on the progress of projects, or locate expertise within the organization or have their say on company initiatives.

### Was there a stand-out feature?

All the intranets had unique features that served their employees well. For instance, I was impressed with The MITRE Corporation "Expertise Finder". It's a different take on the standard employee directory, mixing it with a document repository. They've built a Google-based search tool that looks for documents on the intranet - but the results that are delivered show the people that created those documents. So if you typed in "knowledge management", for example, you'd get a list of people who had contributed the most content on the intranet about KM, along with their contact details.

### Do budgets matter?

Of course budgets matter - the more resources the intranet team has to work on a site, the better it can potentially be. But a bigger budget doesn't necessarily result in a better site. Every year we see both large and small organizations with equally fantastic intranets. SCANA Corp., one of this year's winners, had a tight budget for a redesign. The intranet team's creativity and resourcefulness helped them develop an award-winning site despite limited resources.



Amy Schade is a director at Nielsen Norman Group in the New York office. Schade was previously an information architect at Arc eConsultancy and has held various positions in web production and advertising.

# TECHNOLOGY UPDATE

## EMPLOYEES FAIL TO EMBRACE SOCIAL MEDIA

Employees are spending an average of six hours or more a week reading and sending internal emails, according to research from business consulting and technology services firm Concentra.

It's the equivalent to 41 working days, or just over eight weeks, every year, despite the exponential rise of social media channels for business use over recent months.

The study, which was completed by British employees in a range of industries including healthcare and the financial services, revealed that 33 percent of employees questioned admitted they spend six hours or more drafting and reading emails every week. A further 28 percent said they take between three and five hours a week to keep on top of internal mail.

Guetz Boué, director at Concentra, said: "Internal communications are a vital part of running a successful business, but organizations clearly aren't getting the value they should from these processes."

### No place for email

And with the abundance of communication channels available today, such as social media channels linked to intranets and portals, Boué believes there's no place for email, adding: "There is no excuse for relying on mass email. The alternatives provide a wealth of opportunity for effective communication."

The research also revealed that email is still the communication channel of choice for 85 percent of senior managers, and 88 percent of HR teams. Conversely, 50 percent of respondents believed that less than half of the internal emails they receive are useful.

"For a long time, email has been seen as a necessary evil, but the amount of time and energy wasted on it proves that it's gone too far. The volume of mail sent and received has to be cut down, and our dependance on the 'cc' culture of mass emailing has to stop," continued Boué.

<http://www.concentra.co.uk/>

## EDUCATING COMMUNICATORS ON MAKING THE MOST OF SHAREPOINT

With around 40 percent of corporate intranets now SharePoint based, and many more IT departments with companies already using Microsoft technologies keen to migrate to it as a communications platform, SharePoint has quickly become a hot topic for internal communicators.

This has prompted Melcrum to hold four, one-day courses – SharePoint for Communicators (London, UK) and Intranets with Impact (Orlando, US), aimed at mid- to senior-level communicators, focusing on how SharePoint can support communication strategy for organizations, and in turn their goals.

Often seen as an enabler, SharePoint can also be a potential block for those working in internal communication who may not always be well versed on how it functions.

Sam Marshall, course trainer and director of ClearBox Consulting, said: "Whilst there are many courses and books available on SharePoint, they have a strong bias towards people in a technology or administrator role. Yet a successful SharePoint deployment depends on internal communicators taking a clear lead for the site strategy and content, as well as knowing what governance to have in place."

### A business-led approach to Sharepoint

Taking a business-led rather than technology-led approach, the course aims to cover various topics including: key components and case studies, as well as, how to build an effective relationship with IT, and the role of internal communications in governing, shaping and promoting use.

Robin Crumby, managing director of Melcrum, said: "The decision to buy Sharepoint is often taken by the IT department. So internal comms teams find themselves in at the deep end tasked with populating SharePoint with news and encouraging collaboration and a sense of community without a thorough understanding of how SharePoint

works. These new courses will address this gap and make sure that internal communicators are equipped with the knowledge and skills to get the best out of SharePoint first time."

<http://www.melcrum.com>

## MICROSOFT TESTING SERVICE TO RIVAL YAMMER

Microsoft has announced that they're testing a microblogging service called OfficeTalk, a Microsoft Office Labs experiment. OfficeTalk aims to position itself next to replica solutions like Twitter, by allowing employees to collaborate and share their thoughts in a 140-character limit.

According to Microsoft, it "applies the base capabilities of microblogging to a business environment, enabling employees to post their thoughts, activities and potentially valuable information to anyone who might be interested."

Fitting in with several of Microsoft's recent attempts to be more social, including the Outlook Social Connector and SharePoint 2010, OfficeTalk is a Yammer-style internal communication tool that focuses on following people's status updates inside of a private corporate network. The client incorporates everything you would expect from a microblogging client: 140-character limit, follow option, profiles, search and threaded conversations.

"Because this is an early-stage concept, the OfficeTalk microblogging experience itself looks very similar to other well-known services. The key difference is that the enterprise owns the data since the OfficeTalk server is hosted in the customer's organization."

The tool, which Microsoft has been testing internally, is reportedly one of the company's most popular unreleased solutions, however the product is described as in its "bare bones."

For now, Microsoft is keeping OfficeTalk as an on-premise service, though it's likely it will find its way into server products like SharePoint or Exchange, or desktop software such as Outlook or Communicator in the future.



KLAVS VALSKOV

## Carrying out a communication audit to demonstrate the function's value

### AUDITING COMMUNICATION AT MAERSK LINE

**Klavs Valskov is determined to prove to senior leaders that his function makes a difference to the organization as it journeys through tough times. He explains how he carries out a yearly communication audit to assess how his team's efforts impact the workforce and also to gather evidence of the value they bring.**

Maersk Line is going through the most severe financial crisis in its 100-year history. Before the recession we had 24,000 employees but now we have 17,500 and we posted a loss for 2009, the first ever in the company's history, so we're going through a really severe downturn. Communication in this traditional company has never really been seen as a way to achieve your business targets. In fact, communication was considered something to be scared of; if an inaccurate comment was made to the external media, you could be severely reprimanded.

#### The aims of the audit

However, times have changed for the better and we want to strengthen the way communication is now perceived, which is why we carry out a yearly audit. This has two aims. The first, and the main point of it, is we want it to be a learning tool. How are our communications working? We want to see if what we're doing is right so we can build on our strategy every year. The second aim is to document to senior leaders that what we do makes a big difference. If we show that we improve business performance, our futures may be more secure.

#### Carrying out the audit

We're currently working out the results of the 2009 audit and writing the report. We aim to present the results in quarter one every year. In an ideal world, I'd

measure every quarter but it's a huge task and we don't have the resources.

Part of our research involves a bi-monthly pulse survey online. There are 15 questions designed to find out whether or not people know the strategy and understand and support it. It's not very scientific but it gives us an idea. You can quickly see if employees are experiencing change fatigue. Change occurs so fast that you can't rely on the yearly employee engagement survey, I need to be able to react fast, so that's why we've put this pulse survey in place.

We also use the annual engagement survey to gather information. We want to run more focus groups in 2010 so we can qualify the statistics that we get on readership of articles on our intranet.

#### Collecting praise for the comms team

We have an area on the server available to the whole communication team called "Trophy Shelves". This is where we keep emails congratulating us on our work. So if a business manager or the CEO praises the team, the email is stored here. They're also used in the audit report to add some colorful quotes and to underline where we've made a difference. We can explain what we did, provide the data to show what a difference

it made and add what the CEO said about it. At the end of the year we have 30-40 complimentary quotes. It gives us a confidence boost but also builds the case for communication within the organization.

#### A success story

One example of how measurement has proven the success of a channel involves a cartoon. We had a feeling that many employees understood the outline and the components of the strategy but they didn't understand what was in it for them. We gave ourselves the challenge of explaining the strategy and the benefits to them in less than five minutes. We devised a cartoon for the intranet that was similar to the Common Craft animations ([www.commoncraft.com](http://www.commoncraft.com)). A quick poll asked "After watching this film, do you have a better understanding of how the business strategy benefits you?" We had an overwhelming response – more than 500 people replied. That alone was an indicator of success.

Around 92 percent of employees said they understood what the personal benefits of the strategy were. There was also a discussion forum where people could leave messages about it so we got a lot of qualitative responses. These results meant we had a strong case that this was an effective channel. We've used this technique again and it's working really well.

Of course producing a film like this can be expensive, but when you can document this type of result, it's clearly worth the expenditure. You have a piece of communication that directly and positively influences employee engagement.

#### Words of advice

You need to be pragmatic. Of course you need good data quality but if you get too bogged down with it, it'll become too hard. Have the ability to see what's necessary and what isn't.

Think about how you're going to measure before you start the campaign. You have the goal, how will you measure whether or not you've reached it?



**Klavs Valskov is head of communication at Maersk Line. He has worked in the field of corporate communication since 1999 for companies like Accenture, L'Oréal and the largest bank in the Nordic countries, Nordea.**



ANGELA SINICKAS

## Matching the audit to your organization's aims and the available budget

# MATCHING AUDIT TOOLS TO THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

What some people refer to as a communication audit, others might call a needs analysis or a communication effectiveness study. Angela Sinickas explains how to carry out an audit depending on your organization's need and budget, starting with observational metrics before qualitative and quantitative research.

Before launching "audience-invasive" research techniques, it helps to use observational metrics to record all you can about what's actually occurring in your communication environment. Some of these can be quick and easy, while others involve more time and trouble.

Start with an inventory to identify which channels are available and compare their characteristics to see what you have too much or too little of. Then conduct a *visual audit*. This can be as simple checking what managers have posted on manufacturing bulletin boards. It can be as complex as having international communicators grade each vehicle on brand consistency, design elements, writing style and so on, and compare them against professional standards in their home countries.

A *content analysis* can compare the actual amount of coverage you give topics in a publication or on a website against the ideal topics it should cover. It can also be used to assess the themes of employee feedback you're receiving through traditional or social media.

A *reading grade level analysis* can identify how much education it would take to understand your communications, which you can compare to the average education level of your employees.

*Online usage statistics* of various elements of your intranet, including social media, can tell you who's seeking out different types of information.

Tracking the amount of time spent by communicators or managers in various communication activities, and tracking how the budget is used, can give you great insights into how time and money might need to be reprioritized.

Conducting *pilot/control group studies* can show how different approaches to communication on a topic result in different business outcomes. These results can be used to calculate the ROI for a particular campaign or channel.

Performing an *operational communication flow analysis* can help identify communication breaks in business processes that could revenue increases or cost savings.

### Qualitative research

An audit can include open-ended discussions with individuals and groups to identify communication opportunities and problems. Results will help you create the right questions for the survey you'll conduct next.

*Executive interviews* can determine what your leadership team considers ideal communication and how they evaluate the current system and the people managing it. You can include

very specific types of questions to help diagnose potential problems in communication among leadership team members called a *network analysis* or identify bottle-necks in how decisions are made and communicated.

Employee *focus groups* can also probe ideal and current communications. The groups can include a "*Starch test*" of aided and unaided recall of messages to identify what elements increase or inhibit readership of a recent edition of a main channel you use.

### Quantitative research

*Surveys* quantify many of the issues identified from executive and employee qualitative research so that you can compare results among subgroups, track improvements over time and compare your own results against database norms. Communication elements measured through employee surveys can include levels of interest and information about key topics, actual knowledge of correct answers and current and preferred sources for each topic.

Many audit surveys also probe the effectiveness of communication skills for supervisors/managers and executives, the differences between what executives say and do, and a host of other broad questions about upward communication, credibility, accuracy, timeliness, and so on. A survey can also include questions to identify which pairs of departments or units have communication barriers that prevent them from being as effective as possible.

### Conclusion

As you can see, there's no one profile of a communication audit. I've conducted some in just a few weeks; others have taken a year. You'll need to decide for yourself which combination of research tools will give you the information you need to manage your function within the reality of your own organization's needs and your available resources.



Angela Sinickas, ABC, IABC Fellow, is president of Sinickas Communications, Inc., an international communication consultancy specializing in helping corporations achieve business results through targeted diagnostics and practical solutions. For more information visit: [www.sinicom.com](http://www.sinicom.com)

**STEVE HOWARD**

## Eight key lessons in creating successful leadership communication

### BRINGING LEADERSHIP COMMS TO LIFE AT LLOYDSPHARMACY

Lloydspharmacy has around 1700 pharmacies across the UK. The company employs 17,000 staff, has a £1.7 billion turnover and dispenses over 145 million prescription items each year. So when widescale change needs to be communicated, as Steve Howard explains, it's the business leaders who need to be at the fore.

In 2008 we identified a number of organizational challenges. We had a very comprehensive strategy with a 128-page document which very few people outside the Board Room fully understood. We were in the midst of a challenging new national contract for the profession from the Government, which fundamentally changed what we needed our people to do. There was much greater competition and complexity and there had never been a more important time to ensure that all of our people were engaged.

At the time we had no formal internal communication department, with the responsibilities for communication sitting largely under the training and development function. What we did have, however, was an incredibly enthusiastic Board and a managing director who passionately believed in the need to engage everyone about where the business was heading.

#### Our initial response

We've always believed very strongly in the power of face-to-face communication and of creating genuine dialogue with our people. We spent time and effort creating a simple story which described the business journey we'd need to undertake. We underpinned this with a set of six behavioral values that we built in to our performance management system and all of our management and leadership development programs.

We invested heavily in taking the

message out to our people through roadshows, conferences and forums for every manager, which were all supported by robust cascade toolkits to ensure we could reach all our employees. We measured impact, we listened intently through both internal and external surveys and we made the results and subsequent action plans very visible.

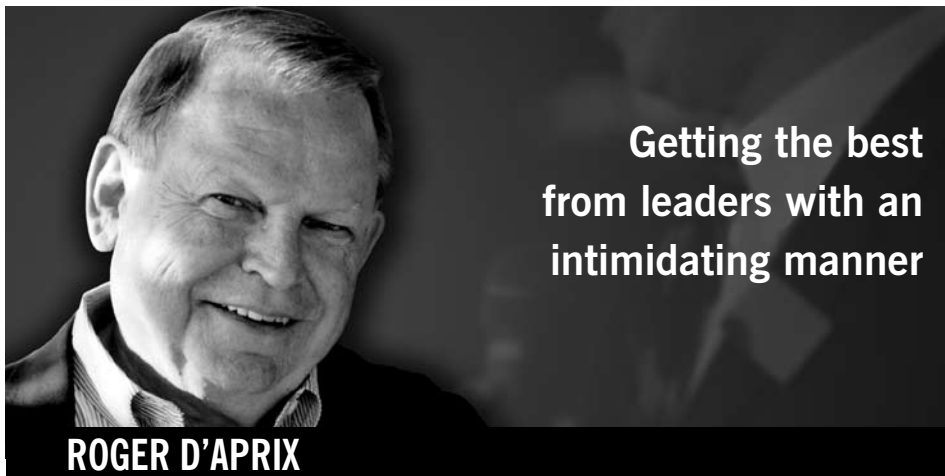
#### Lessons learnt

Over the years we've refined what has become the Lloydspharmacy Story, but we haven't fundamentally changed it. It is very visible within our business and we continue to talk about our values, and recognize and celebrate heroes who are living them each day. We've learnt a lot of lessons about leadership communication on the way, and while we haven't got everything right we're certainly on the right track. Here are our key lessons:

1. It starts with leadership – I'm fortunate that we have a genuinely enthusiastic set of leaders to work with. They have a profound respect for what people can do given the right circumstances and support. Help your leaders to be visible and to engage your people.
2. Encourage organizational integrity – most companies have values, but it's the ones who make them live that realize the biggest benefit. Ensure there's no gap between the espoused values and the behavioral norms in your business. If there is, there will be distrust and that will strangle your leadership communication efforts.
3. Develop a clear business narrative – create a simple and compelling story of the business, about where the organization is going to and why. Make it compelling and visually exciting to create impact and interest. Help your people to understand the parts they'll play and the contribution they can make.
4. Train managers – the narrative is at its most powerful when it's interpreted locally. Spend time and effort on helping your managers to completely understand your story and how to make it live for their people.
5. Make engagement important to your business – there are lots of definitions but what I've found powerful is making it live in the language of our business. Spend time talking to your operational leaders in a clear business language about engagement and use data relentlessly to prove beyond doubt the impact that high levels of engagement have on business metrics.
6. Make measurement a priority – it's not just about doing an engagement survey and delegating action planning to HR. Involve and engage the business leaders in understanding and taking action on the key issues.
7. Give your people a voice – develop channels that enable your people to have a voice at the most senior levels of the business. Listen forensically and take visible action.
8. Refine and bring to life – make your leadership story live. Make it visible everywhere, on walls, screensavers, pay slips. Talk about it relentlessly and bring it to life for everyone if you want to bring about truly transformational engagement.



Steve Howard is head of internal communication and employee engagement at Lloydspharmacy. A qualified pharmacist and previously director of training and development, Howard has been in his current role for 18 months.



ROGER D'APRIX

## Getting the best from leaders with an intimidating manner

# COACHING THE UNPREDICTABLE EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATOR

Roger D'Aprix recalls his experience of working with and coaching a leader who had a reputation for being particularly aggressive and unapproachable. Until one day when a Town Hall meeting arranged by D'Aprix to appease many disgruntled employees took an unexpected turn.

Do you know the story of “Machine Gun Kelly”? Unless you’re a big James Taylor fan and recall a song by that title on his 1971 album “Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon”, probably not. The real Machine Gun Kelly was a notorious American gangster who earned his name during Prohibition in the 1930s because of his favorite weapon, a Thompson submachine gun. He was eventually captured in 1933, convicted of kidnapping and spent the rest of his days in Alcatraz prison.

About the time of the James Taylor album, I worked at Xerox for a senior corporate executive named Jim O’Neill. Aside from his Irish heritage, he bore no resemblance to Machine Gun Kelly, but he was soon nicknamed by company wags as “Machine Gun O’Neill”. The title, half respect and half resentment, stemmed from one of the most nimble minds I’ve ever encountered. He was one of those corporate leaders you dread – the kind who can listen to what seems a flawless presentation and then ask two or three penetrating questions for which you have no plausible answers. Like a relentless prosecutor, he was on to another question before you’d finished your last reply. Hence, the nickname.

The trouble was that he also thought he was a brilliant communicator. In a sense he was, but really scaring employees is a serious limitation. My problem was how to help him understand

what his behavior did to chill a meeting, large or small. In truth, I was also more than a little intimidated by him.

### Support at the town hall session

Despite my personal misgivings, I had been urging him to preside at a Town Hall session with a group of his engineers. There were some perplexing technical and political problems with a new product development effort he was responsible for, and his employees were upset and angry.

Invariably, he resisted, citing his schedule and travel commitments, but he finally agreed. With the meeting as my cover, I gave him some gentle coaching and drafted his opening remarks, which urged people to be candid and ask him any question on their minds. When he saw that invitation he asked if I thought that was a good idea. “What if they get into the political stuff that’s too sensitive for an open meeting?” he asked. Privately, I believed that with his reputation, our real problem would be to get anyone to ask tough questions.

We invited 75 engineers to attend, giving them an opportunity to send anonymous questions in advance. No one

took us up on the question offer, which confirmed my fears.

On the long-awaited day, O’Neill was pacing the corridor in the hall outside the small auditorium. He was obviously counting the attendees. There were only around 12 people seated at the tables we’d set up for the anticipated 75. With two minutes to go, and his well known penchant for starting all meetings on time, around 35 people had arrived.

He glared at me and muttered, “This had better be worth my time.” I thought about the missing 40 and quietly cursed them for boycotting the meeting.

### An unexpected outcome

O’Neill began by pointlessly asking the gathering where the others were. The ones who had “been invited but decided not to come.” He was greeted by an embarrassed and nervous silence. But then he did something totally unexpected. He launched into an absolutely candid description of all of the factors, including the political ones, that had untracked the project and that had badly upset the engineering staff. He made no excuses and even named names of the senior-level obstructionists.

The nervous audience was totally disarmed. If they’d come to passively listen to a set of familiar excuses, they were now aroused to ask tough questions. For the next 90 minutes they peppered him with questions and got honest answers to every one, including his own views of where he’d personally failed. It was one of the most brutally honest dialogues I’d ever heard in corporate life. At the end of the meeting the audience stood as one and gave O’Neill the resounding applause he deserved. He’d proven as a communicator that he could take as much as he could give.

### Takeaways from that experience

Among the many lessons I learned that day were: never underestimate the power of honest face-to-face communication; don’t prejudge a leader’s ability to communicate because he or she doesn’t fit your image of leadership, and wait for the right timing to orchestrate an important event.



Roger D'Aprix is vice president of ROI Communication. He’s had a distinguished career in consulting and corporate communication. His latest book, published by Jossey-Bass, is “*The Credible Company: Communicating with Today’s Skeptical Workforce.*” He’s been a member of SCM’s advisory board since its founding.



SUE DEWHURST

## Eight techniques to benefit you, your team and the organization

### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE TRAINING ROOM

Personal development shouldn't be just about attending the odd training course. There are all kinds of ways you can slot activities into your daily working life that will benefit you, your internal customers and your organization. Sue Dewhurst has eight suggestions to help you on your way.

Most internal communicators I meet struggle with pressures of time and conflicting priorities. One of the costs can be that "nice to have" tasks such as personal development fall by the wayside. But when communicators, quite rightly, want to add more value to their organization, scheduling in regular opportunities to take a step back, reflect and get a new perspective becomes a "need to do" rather than a "nice to have". Here are eight suggestions to get you started:

#### 1. Team meeting question time

Schedule regular short sessions in team meetings to get people thinking about how to add more value. For example, you might pose the question "imagine external consultants have been brought in to review all support functions to establish where headcount and budget can be cut. If you were those consultants, what three questions would you ask the internal communication team to work out how much value they were adding to the organization? If we were asked those questions, how well would we be able to answer them?"

#### 2. Post-project review

Take the time now and again to reflect at the end of a major activity or project. Review any measurement you've gathered. Ask yourself "what difference did we make to the success of this project? What would the impact have

been if we hadn't been involved at all?" "What worked? What didn't work? How could we make a bigger difference next time?"

#### 3. Read and report back

Choose one to three subjects your team is focusing on this year and task each team member with researching case studies, tips or good practice that might be applied. They might try talking to other internal communicators in a global organization, reading industry magazines or searching the forums on networking sites such as Linked-In.

#### 4. Do a temporary job swap

Switch someone from the group communication function with a communicator from a business division. Or someone from the channels team with a business partner. It can help develop skills, give people a new perspective and improve both team collaboration and the service offered to the business to appreciate the pressures and priorities on the other side.

#### 5. Shadow a line manager

We often ask "why don't line managers get it? Why aren't they doing the things

we'd like them to?" So find out for yourself. Shadow a manager for at least a day. Experience the time pressure, the conflicting priorities and the scenario of trying to lead a discussion on a subject you don't understand and being asked questions you don't know how to answer. Then consider how you can work in ways that makes life easier for them.

#### 6. Take on a stretch task

Look for opportunities to work on something that will push you outside your comfort zone. Volunteer to support a change project, offer to lead a communication audit or facilitate a session at your next team meeting.

#### 7. Team up with a buddy

There are internal communicators like you everywhere feeling the same pressures and challenges. Find a "buddy" – someone doing a role like yours in another organization who you can meet for coffee now and again to swap ideas, discuss how to tackle a challenge or offer some mutual support.

#### 8. Find yourself a mentor

Look for a senior mentor who will question you, stretch you, advise you and help you learn about things you might not experience in your own job. For example, how about looking for a mentor from the strategy team, the operations team or the finance department? They may not be able to help you write your next communication plan but they can probably help improve your knowledge of the organization and challenge you to be more of a business person.

#### Make the effort

There are so many ways to make professional development an integral part of the team's way of working. They don't have to cost a lot in money or time. And the effort they take should pay off in more skilled, motivated internal communicators who can add more value.



Sue Dewhurst runs The SD Group and leads Melcrum's Black Belt training program in Europe. She's also the research associate director of Melcrum's Strategic Communication Research Forum.



LAURA TEMPLE

## How changing your approach can improve your value as a communicator

### BEING AWARE OF “SELF MISDIRECTION”

Laura Temple, corporate communication manager at SABMiller, explains how easy it is to believe you have a good understanding of what’s going on in an organization only to realize that “self misdirection” can happen a lot more than we thought. Temple gives some background to this phenomenon and describes how tackling it has made her a better communicator.

It’s an odd thing, but sometimes when things change you don’t realize it at the time. Only hindsight gives the clarity of how significant a change can be. This was the case when I attended a workshop by an organization called The Management Crowd a few months ago. A good friend had suggested that I would find it different, enjoyable and challenging. The subject was “Self misdirection – how we misdirect ourselves in our everyday lives”. I couldn’t quite figure out what it meant, but I trusted my friend’s judgement and went along.

#### Being duped into seeing what isn’t there

We all know the expressions about “perception is reality” and “you only see what you’re looking for”. What the workshop showed me was just how true these expressions are. Not by explaining it all in dry and dusty academic terms, but by allowing the group to experience just how our cognitive abilities are so limited and limiting for each of us.

We were shown how magicians, for example, use misdirection to take our attention away from what’s really going on and fool us into seeing what they want us to see. Then the very provocative point was made that there’s a magician in our head who misdirects us all the time. The magician is us and very capable we are too. So capable that we’ve no idea that we do it. This was demonstrated to the group by an experiential learning

session, rather akin to street theater. Like everyone else, I tend to believe that my grip on what’s going on is pretty good and that I’m not fooled easily. But we learned very quickly that we’re all subject to this phenomenon of self misdirection and, to be honest, it was a bit of a shock.

The rest of the session focused on how this leads us into poor decision making, misunderstandings and conflict and how we can become better at not misdirecting ourselves. This starts with the need to build better internal representations of our relationships and working environments, including our organizations, and how we might go about doing so.

#### Improving the way we relate to others

Much of the ground covered was about how we comprehend and communicate in our business and private lives because this is where our understanding of any relationship or situation comes from. Whether it’s with our partner, our work colleagues or our customers, there are some easy to learn techniques that can radically change and improve how we relate to others. Rather than explain the techniques in a theoretical way, compelling stories were told about each

of them. The stories were sufficiently engaging and dramatic (and tugged at my emotions) that they made their mark and have stayed with me. This use of storytelling is something that’s gaining a lot of ground in the corporate world.

#### Taking the lessons learnt back to the workplace

This is all very well, we all go to workshops that sound great and we come away enthusiastic. But then it starts to fade and no significant sustainable difference comes from it. We all know that the touchstone for communication is to understand before trying to be understood. The techniques I learned have helped me by firstly changing how I relate to people, especially how I communicate with them to try to understand what’s going on, what their point of view is and why they feel the way they do about a particular issue. I can compare that with my own perspective, have a conversation that cuts through a lot of potential misunderstanding and then build a view that combines both perspectives and is better than either of them.

The workshop also taught me that whenever I approach a person with whom I’m familiar I’ll already have a view of how they’re going to behave. This will include potentially negative feelings too, and that can generate further negativity – it’s a vicious circle. Now I approach situations with a fresher perspective and find that I can break the circle, barriers come down and I can make much more progress, even in situations that I’ve found to be difficult in the past. This has led to me being able to do more, in less time.

Another tangible benefit is that before I’d go into new organizations and look for the same problems and thus implement very similar communication frameworks to “fix” them, that’s because I was misdirecting myself to look for things that I expected or wanted to be there because I knew how to fix them. Do I still self misdirect? I suspect the answer is “yes”, but not as much as I used to. And that’s a clear difference.



Laura Temple is corporate communication manager at SABMiller. Prior to joining, she was head of internal communication at Grant Thornton, where she implemented and rolled out an internal communication function and new communication framework.

# Balancing strategy and tactics in a leaner communication function

A four-part tool to ensure the function is offering the most value-adding communication service

COMPILED BY SONA HATHI

Not for the first time, communicators are being asked to do more with less. What makes it even tougher in the current financial climate is the fact that teams are now smaller and budgets are tighter meaning communicators are having to work in a smarter and more cost effective way than ever before. Sona Hathi presents an idea by Bill Quirke, which enables communicators to rethink the strategic and tactical activities carried out by the function to ensure they're making a real contribution to the company's objectives.

The need to balance strategy and tactics is, of course, an evergreen challenge within the communication profession. A widespread reduction in resources and headcount across the industry following the recession, however, means that the issue has resurfaced and needs readdressing in light of a new economic climate, in which business models are changing and each function is being assessed for the difference it's truly making to the bottom line.

Will businesses in today's world gain value from communicators rolling up their sleeves and producing the content required from traditional communication channels (newsletters, videos, campaigns, handbooks, toolkits, for example) while simultaneously investing in external consultants to develop a vision for the function? Or, do practitioners need to outsource the tactical tasks in order to focus on creating a long-term

communication strategy that's aligned with the business objectives – thus, transforming the role of the function to advisory rather than production-led?

To find out how communicators are dealing with the issue, Melcrum conducted a poll asking the question, "How do you balance strategy and tactics in a leaner communication function?" The majority of respondents (33 percent) felt that communicators need to continue to do both but simply cut back on how much they produce. (One suggestion was to combine this with upskilling the business). A quarter felt that the production work should be outsourced, allowing for more strategic planning to be done in-house. Just over a fifth (21 percent) felt that communicators need to simply get on with the tactical work, and spend the bulk of the communication budget on external consultants to develop future strategy. So, as you can see, there's no definitive solution. But before we go any further, we need to first diagnose the true cause of the struggle.

## The four Cs of the communication function

In a report recently authored for Melcrum, *How to review the function for cost and efficiency*, Bill Quirke, managing director of Synopsis, explains his belief that the trick to managing the strategic and tactical aspects of our work is to understand what exactly the business expects from the communication function and how the organization perceives it. "Often, confused expectations mean that internal communication departments are forever busy, but not seen as particularly valuable," he warns. In the report, Quirke advises communicators to try and find a balance between

four key areas: Customers, Channels, Capacity and Capability. The approach is explained further in the following excerpt from the report.

### 1. Customers

“Part of the pressure on communicators comes from internal clients’ expectations, spoken or unspoken, of what kind of service they’ll receive. Internal clients tend to think through their problem, decide on a solution and then look for someone to implement the solution. However, they often ask for what they believe the internal communication department can provide, not what is actually needed by the organization. What they ask for depends on their perception of the department, and the skills and abilities of the people within it.

Internal customers can fall into two categories – employees and senior managers. Employee surveys and communication audits can track what employees want, and how satisfied they are. However, it’s more often the senior managers who dictate the fate of the communication function. Mismatched expectations between departments and their internal customers inevitably create frustrations unless the service being offered is clear to both sides.

Communicators may want to reposition themselves in the eyes of their organization, to take a more strategic role and to provide advice and support. However, communication department staff may be viewed as skilled wordsmiths who can turn out beautifully crafted messages and then distribute them efficiently. It’s easy to become preoccupied with tasks that you believe are valuable but which your internal customers do not – for example, developing strategy when they’re desperate for a video, or publishing newsletters when what’s needed is a major change in employees’ attitudes.

More often, communicators complain about being deluged with requests for immediate tactical help that divert them from taking a longer-term strategic view. The job that communicators feel they should be doing may not be the one that the rest of the organization expects of them.

### 2. Channels

Internal communication teams have to ensure they’re investing their money in channels with clear and demonstrable return on investment. They often operate a full range of communication channels which duplicate coverage, use inappropriate content and compete with each other and with other channels in the organization. Internal communication teams need to understand which channels are used by employees for what different types of information and where, therefore, they should be investing time, money and effort.

### 3. Capacity

The number of communicators in organizations is increasing as management recognizes the importance of the function. Matrix organizations, in particular each line of the matrix – geography, function, product line – often hires its own communicator. Faced with this growing band, more and more organizations are asking whether they need all these communicators and how they should be managed.

In looking at how different businesses structure their internal communication functions, some clear principles emerge.

Internal communication teams have to make sure they’re putting their time and energies into areas of strategic importance to the business, as defined by the leadership team – otherwise they’ll always be stretched, usually putting most work into areas of relatively low value – endlessly redrafting leaders’ emails and scheduling events.

The greatest amount of communicators’ time often goes into the lowest value activity. This is driven by the fact that internal customers expect high degrees of support in areas of tactics and execution but more rarely expect or welcome support in the higher value areas such as planning, coaching and message articulation.

Internal communication functions often support activities that are hangovers from the past, or they get asked to do things by managers who can’t find someone else to do it. Internal communication departments, trying to be helpful and provide a good service, then take on low value activities which are not legitimately theirs.

A toxic combination of helpful communicators, uneducated clients and tactical approaches gives rise to a high volume of expensive but low value activity which can include producing more and more local newsletters and organizing drinks parties.

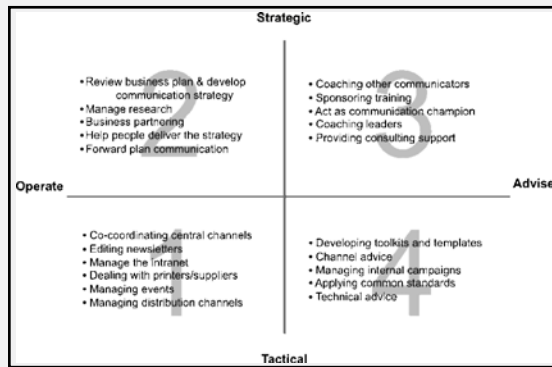
The internal communication team should identify where it’s currently operating, and where it should be operating, if it wants to add greater value. Internal communication teams should also ▶

## KEY POINTS

- In a financial climate where cutbacks mean fewer communicators and tighter budgets, should the priority of the internal communication function be tactics or strategy?
- Melcrum commissioned a report from Synopsis’ managing director Bill Quirke, *How to review the function for cost and efficiency*, an extract of which is included here.
- Ideally, communication should be the responsibility of the whole company and communicators need to equip managers with the tools they need to achieve this.

## THE ACTIVITY GRID

Figure One: Typical activities of an internal communication department



### BOX 2

This is an area of greater added value, acting as a strategic partner to the business rather than as a tactical provider of communication products. This includes getting alongside senior management to link communication to business strategy, acting as experts in their audiences and offering insights into how employees will think and behave. Communicators will provide coaching support to senior managers, 'air traffic control' of internal communication and partner with other functions.

### BOX 3

Those internal communication departments that have account managers or business partners tend to operate in the upper right hand box – they provide strategic support and advice to business leaders, and may not necessarily get involved with providing tactical support and implementation.

This is perhaps the most important box for internal communication heads to focus on. This is because this box reflects a key area of need for the business – strategic advice from knowledgeable people who understand how communication can affect a business.

The danger is that if internal communication heads don't look at this box, others will. This is the box where you find an influx of consultants, contractors and enthusiasts offering their services. Perhaps more importantly, it's where project leaders and senior managers enthusiastically buy support and where turf battles and initiative overload occur.

### BOX 1

This is the traditional area for internal communication – operating a range of communication channels and providing tactical support. This is the foundation for everything else - if you do not get the basics right, you won't have the credibility to move into other areas. However, while this area is expected by the business, it is not necessarily valued by it.

### BOX 4

The fourth box is the area in which implementation is provided to those projects initiatives and functions that fall outside the core area of the internal communication team. This is where initiative leaders go when they're looking for high-impact events, innovative communication channels and novel media. This kind of advice is sought by senior project leaders who want to make their name in the business, who understand the importance of communication to success, and want to take innovative approaches to increase their chances of success.

identify what other communication activities are going on outside their department that have an impact on the business.

### Activities of an internal communication function

Figure One (left) looks at the typical activities of an internal communication department in two ways:

1. What's the balance of strategic work they do versus the amount of tactical work they do?
2. What areas of communication do they effectively own and operate, and in which others are they providing advice and support?

The left hand side of the chart in Figure One shows those areas that internal communication departments can expect to own and move into. The right hand side of the chart shows areas which are more problematic, less clear and more contested.

### Capability

If you decide that you need to raise your game, you'll need to invest in developing the skills of your team accordingly. If, on the other hand, the business is expecting a good post office service and you don't have anyone who can find the employee database, or you don't have the employee email list to get things to – the business is going to get very impatient with you very quickly.

Internal communication teams have to develop their skills. The business needs a range of skills from the basic requirements of writing, crafting and drafting, to advice, message creation and challenging and coaching of leaders.

Working in internal communication demands the ability to work with internal clients at three levels:

1. *Strategy* – involved in the development of strategies, policies and frameworks; involved with the high-level alignment of communication strategies with business objectives and plans.
2. *Management* – planning and managing the implementation of communication strategies; managing communication resources.
3. *Execution* – designing events and newsletters, distributing materials and coordinating activities.

With luck, a communicator will be able to operate at all three levels. However, sometimes communicators are expected by the business to operate at one level while being restricted to another – expected to deliver change while only being allowed to deliver newsletters.”

### Case Study: AstraZeneca R&D

The communication leadership team at AstraZeneca R&D focused on these four areas in order to diagnose the current state of the communication function.

### Interviewing customers

A series of detailed interviews with internal customers identified what was working, what wasn't, what they valued and what they didn't. Interviews also looked at how internal customers defined their own role in communicating, and how well they felt they understood, could access and use communicators to help them.

Customer feedback was at best mixed. The perception was that communicators weren't always giving the business what it needed. Internal customers expected more from communicators than they were getting. They weren't very happy about the quality of the communication tactics. Messages were muddled with an overload of different themes, initiatives and projects which weren't pulled together coherently.

The team was also seen to be large and expensive – over and above the industry benchmarks. The team was high on quantity and low on perceived quality. Leaders expected proactive partners – someone who could look ahead, anticipate communication issues before they hit, assess what was required and ensure that communication and messages were aligned. They wanted help when it came to making change happen, particularly in understanding their audiences, anticipating responses and articulating messages. They felt instead they were getting “crafters and drafters” who though useful and helpful weren't providing the impact or value leaders suspected was possible.

### Investigating capacity

A decentralized model of communication meant that while resources were relatively slim at the center, it had built up in the regional hubs – something which was equally true of other support functions such as HR and finance.

This meant that certain communicators in the various regions, who are responsible for supporting R&D communication, were not actually part of the R&D communication group. This inevitably led to communication that wasn't joined up, inefficiencies and duplication.

This explained, in part, why there was such a muddle of messages. Communicators in all parts of the organization were communicating a raft of different messages on behalf of their different internal customers.

This decentralized model meant that it was more difficult to coordinate between the hubs. Agreeing service levels, resources and priorities could be more time intensive and bureaucratic, involving lengthy discussion, and protracted negotiations.

### Reviewing the channels

While the decentralized model meant that local channels had proliferated, there were few if any

R&D divisionwide channels. They reviewed the number, cost and quality of the various communication channels. This meant reviewing how many there were, how well aligned the channels were and what they cost to produce, how much they cost to support and keep them updated and fed with content. Analysis of channels showed that they had over 120 channels within R&D, for 6,000 employees.

### Reviewing capability

Communicators were allowed to showcase their skills through their participation on a number of projects as well as their day-to-day work. In most cases, this revealed good, sound communication ability while highlighting basic failings, such as a lack of common approaches to communication planning, channel strategy, or coaching a leader. Where communicators were effective as individuals, they each followed different approaches, and there was a lack of common definitions, and consistent processes across the communication function.

### Companywide accountability

Good communication should be a value the entire company lives by and in doing so, it will become a key enabler to improving the function. Every leader across the organization needs to be held accountable for effective communication with their employees. In order to do this, however, internal communicators need to carry out an important tactical task: Create and distribute to managers the tools and templates they need to be self-sufficient communicators and deliver key messages to their own teams. This will take some of the pressure off the function allowing it to become a more value-adding advisory service.

With the right processes and training in place, best-practice communication should become ingrained in the culture of the organization. It may feel like an over-ambitious goal but it's one that the communication team at AstraZeneca R&D achieved. The assessment work they did led to a decision to upskill the communication team and establish a companywide understanding that leaders are expected to communicate, and business partners are expected to support them in doing that. The function shifted from being local support, to being true global business partners, whose role is to plan, guide and coach communication but not primarily to execute. Now, any tactical support provided has to be for those priorities, programs and projects that add the most value to the business. **scm**

### CONTACT DETAILS

**Sona Hathi**  
sona.hathi@melcrum.com

# The proof: effective communication drives business in tough times

The latest research results from Towers Watson on the ROI of effective communication practices

BY KATHRYN YATES

**T**owers Watson has recently published its 2009/2010 Communication ROI Study Report, *Capitalizing on Effective Communication: How Courage, Innovation and Discipline Drive Business Results in Challenging Times*. The designer and leader of the study, Kathryn Yates, explains what the results show and why they prove the importance of effective communication for improving a company's bottom line.

Innovation and discipline in the context of effective organization communication may seem familiar, but courage? Yes courage. It's exactly the behavior organizations should be focusing on – especially now.

In fact, the Towers Watson 2009/2010 Communication ROI Study Report, *Capitalizing on Effective Communication: How Courage, Innovation and Discipline Drive Business Results in Challenging Times*, found that utilizing these characteristics of effective communication can have a major impact on the bottom line.

The fourth study in eight years found that effective employee communication remains a leading indicator of financial performance and a driver of employee engagement – and companies which are highly effective in organizational communication had a whopping 47 percent higher total returns to shareholders over the last five years compared with firms that are the least

effective communicators. The message is clear: Be communicative especially during changing times.

## Acknowledging change

Focusing your conversations on ROI, especially when your company is looking closely at costs and resource allocation, is something that gets senior leaders to listen carefully. And there is plenty to talk about. The research consistently shows firms that acknowledge and deal with a changing landscape by communicating effectively perform better in the market than those who don't.

Today's status quo is that there is no status quo. Change is constant, and with the economy in flux, communication techniques need to be more consistent, more on message and more heartily transparent than ever before. Why? Because managers and employees need clear direction in uncertain times. And just as important as clear direction is meaningful context.

## Be brave: address the problems

It can be a little easier said than done, but companies that are highly effective in communication have the courage to talk about the tough stuff. They address what employees want to know and understand, and they redefine the employment deal in light of significant takeaways or shifts in focus.

Towers Watson's study found that highly effective communicators explain the rationale behind difficult business decisions, provide leadership training and actively address the impact on employees. All of these actions can help

TOWERS WATSON 

Towers Watson is a leading global professional services company that helps organizations improve performance through effective people, risk and financial management. It has 14,000 employees around the world and its global headquarters are in New York, US.

keep employees engaged – which is key. Towers Watson’s WorkUSA study and Global Workforce Study have also shown that engagement is a leading indicator of company performance.

### Training leaders and managers to communicate change

The messages about and during times of change should be clear at all levels of the organization. That means senior leadership, communication and HR executives need to trust and train leaders to talk about change. Managers in highly effective companies in the report support senior leadership’s vision and implement changes actively and enthusiastically.

Companies need to go beyond simply providing managers with information and talking points in advance of changes. They need to prepare managers to lead employees through significant change.

The Communication ROI study found that managers in high-performing organizations are much more effective at implementing change and supporting the organization’s vision. And about half of the highly effective are investing in training their managers to make sure they understand expectations and have the skills they need. Only a third of the low-effectiveness communicators report they’re training managers to be effective communicators.

### Explaining the new Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

Right now, organizations are presented with an opportunity. Whenever there are benefit changes or other business modifications, employees are thirsty for information. It’s a teachable moment. Yet only 14 percent of respondents in the Watson Wyatt Communication ROI study reported that they’re explaining the terms of the new employee value proposition (EVP). [See Figure One on page 23.]

There’s much room for improvement. The best organizations invest in helping leaders and managers communicate with employees – not only about what the business wants them to understand but on topics employees need to understand from both a personal and professional perspective. While only three out of 10 organizations reported training managers to deal openly with resistance to change, highly effective communicators are more than three times as likely to do this as the least effective communicators.

Put simply, when an organization’s employees know what their deal is, they’re more likely to be engaged and productive – even when the deal could be perceived as less valuable. Communicating the EVP effectively helps companies get the most out of their investment

in talent, compensation and benefit programs. It promotes attraction and retention during a time when every productive employee is asked to do more with less.

EVP isn’t just about recruiting new talent. Companies can include the message on the “broad value of working here” as part of the overall employee communication strategy, and ensure it aligns to the external brand. If this is carried out well, it will increase employee appreciation of the total package, reinforces the value of their employment, helps better connect employees to the brand promise and helps retain them through times of change. Even though employees are less mobile in a downturn, the tide will turn and the highly productive always have options. It’s good business to make the value of employment clear.

### Be innovative, but apply caution to social media

In addition to being courageous about communication during tough times, organizations have new opportunities to think differently about how they reach people. New tools, such as social media, are one option – but be careful. While highly effective communicators in the Communication ROI study reported using social media tools two to three times more than the low-effectiveness group of companies to reach employees, on average, usage is fast outpacing effectiveness.

To get a better return on their investments in social media, companies will need to build on their knowledge base and:

- Document a social media policy
- Develop tools to measure the success of social media in the company
- Integrate social media into an overall communication strategy
- Build executive support

Innovation isn’t just about social media. It’s a way of challenging yourself to make sure you’re



**Kathryn Yates** leads the global Towers Watson Communication and Change Management practice. She led the global team that designed the company’s change management methodology and its groundbreaking Communication ROI Study. With 25 years’ experience in communication and operations management, Yates has particular expertise in helping organizations develop strong, productive employee-employer relationships.

## KEY POINTS

- Towers Watson’s 2009/2010 Communication ROI Study Report is called *Capitalizing on Effective Communication: How Courage, Innovation and Discipline Drive Business Results in Challenging Times*
- The report reveals that companies which are highly effective in organizational communication had a 47 percent higher total returns to shareholders over the last five years compared with firms that are the least effective communicators.
- The best organizations invest in helping leaders and managers communicate company changes.

**“COMPANIES WHICH ARE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION HAD A WHOPPING 47 PERCENT HIGHER TOTAL RETURNS TO SHAREHOLDERS OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS, COMPARED WITH FIRMS THAT ARE THE LEAST EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS.”**

- ◀ maximizing limited resources and reaching audiences in the most effective and efficient means possible. Think about ways to reach a dispersed audience – in real time. Try new tools to reach a culturally diverse and geographically varied audience. Just be sure to have a plan in place when you do.

#### **Measure twice, apply once**

Discipline and measurement are critical. Companies that are less effective as communicators are three times as likely as highly effective communicators to report having no formal measurements of communication effectiveness.

According to the Communication ROI study, high-performing organizations are two to three times more likely to have a documented communication strategy than low-performing organizations. A communication strategy helps make sure you're focused and aligned, including how you're going to measure your success. Without clear data on how your programs are faring, how can you make good decisions on what to keep and what to change? And without clear measures in place how can you show leadership

## **WHAT IS EVP?**

**We define employee value proposition (EVP) as the value an employee derives from his or her job and what's expected from them in return.**

**It's evidenced in an organization's business drivers, human capital strategy, architecture, reward and talent management design – as well as implementation and ongoing delivery, and ultimately ROI on reward and talent management.**

**In defining your organization's own EVP, consider these points:**

- **EVP is influenced by the organization's brand, values, culture, leadership, environment, talent and reward programs.**
- **Employees determine the worth or value of their experience and determine whether to join, stay or give discretionary effort.**
- **Employers can shape the organization's EVP through talent and reward program design that's aligned with both their culture and current/future employee expectations.**

the impact of your efforts? We advise companies to look at three types of measurement: activity, awareness/understanding and behavior change. Measurement is discipline – remember, the plural of anecdote is not data.

#### **Build your business case on metrics**

When creating a communication strategy or plan, one important step is to build the business case. Show potential impact, as well as resources needed in order to continuously improve overall communication effectiveness.

Highly effective communicators don't leave much to chance – they benchmark and use advisory groups. They include the communication strategy and metrics in the overall business scorecard. And they report on their impact (as well as their mid-course corrections).

Simply put, the best communicators are serious about delivering results to the business and they aren't afraid to measure (and occasionally to fail). Those communicators who are unable to link communication initiatives with business results will struggle to succeed.

#### **Communicate well now for future success**

In all times – but especially in uncertain times like these – HR professionals and senior leadership can't shy away from delivering difficult messages to employees. In the absence of consistent messages, employees will fill the void with rumors and speculation instead of giving you the focus and effort needed to succeed. It takes 10 times the effort to correct misinformation than it does to deliver correct information in the first place – even when that message is, “we don't have all the answers but here's what we know and here's when we expect to know more.”

Start now to create the company you want, as you emerge from any change with these pieces of advice:

- Be courageous as you communicate centrally and locally.
- Be sure your managers are doing the same, with integrity, authenticity and consistency.
- Let managers stay on message using their own words to deliver key messages.
- Leverage all of the tools you have, and use them well.
- Don't be afraid to pilot something new.
- Be very sure to have metrics in place so that you can be sure your communicated messages are being received the right way.

Communicating with courage, innovation and discipline will give your organization a leg-up during these difficult economic times, and will leave you better positioned to succeed down the line. **scm**

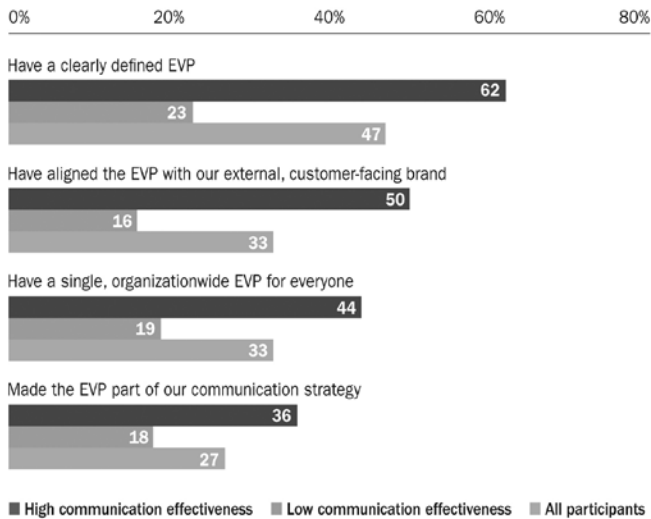
## DETAILS ON THE RESEARCH

Towers Watson, a global leader in consulting on human capital and financial services issues, launched the first Communication ROI Study in 2003. Since then, through four surveys in the series, more than 1,100 employers have participated in the study. The bi-annual study reports are consistently among the most popular of Towers Watson's in-depth research reports – evidence of companies' need for quantitative data to help them plan effective communication programs. Programs that will help them survive the downturn and prepare for the recovery.

The most recent Communication ROI survey, conducted in April and May 2009, included 328 organizations that collectively represent 5 million employees in various regions around the world. The study report, released in November, identifies what companies with highly effective communication practices are doing to inform and engage their employees in challenging economic times, and shows how these practices vary around the world. More details about the study can be found at [towerswatson.com](http://towerswatson.com).

“THE RESEARCH CONSISTENTLY SHOWS FIRMS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE AND DEAL WITH A CHANGING LANDSCAPE BY COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY PERFORM BETTER IN THE MARKET THAN THOSE WHO DON'T.”

Figure 1. Highly effective firms establish a coherent EVP strategy and align it to their brand



### CONTACT DETAILS

**Kathryn Yates**  
 Towers Watson  
[kathryn.yates@towerswatson.com](mailto:kathryn.yates@towerswatson.com)

# Moving from cascade to dialogue at GKN

Helping managers communicate more effectively with their teams

**BY SIMON HARDAKER**

The current research project for members of the Strategic Communication Research Forum focuses on dialogue and how companies are facilitating employee communication. In this exclusive extract from the report, Simon Hardaker (who will be presenting at Melcrum's Employee Engagement Conference in London) shares what he's doing in this area.

Simon Hardaker defines "cascade" as, "Me telling you and giving a directive briefing". He believes team briefing is the nearest most people get to dialogue by providing an opportunity for questions and answers. But he says true dialogue is, "A conversation rather than briefing."

He recognizes there are times when dialogue is not appropriate, for example around a regulatory issue. Similarly, people might need to be briefed that the company has adopted a certain type of software – to explain how and why this has come about – and that unauthorised use of another software package isn't allowed. These types of issue don't lend themselves to a discussion as they are a matter of company policy and a compliance requirement.

## Measuring the employee climate at GKN

To improve efficiency, GKN has adopted a lean and continuous improvement culture. "Our sites have daily start-up meetings using 'primary visual display' boards that indicate any problems with the machines or processes. The team discusses the

day's objectives, reviews any historical data and discusses production efficiency." These meetings last between five and 15 minutes depending on the complexity of the work cells.

Sites also conduct weekly employee involvement sessions, where employees are involved in reviewing the process to suggest improvement ideas. These team meetings are for everyone. "The whole work cell team contributes," Hardaker says. "They're run by the supervisor, but where team members have captured ideas or particular issues during the week and have asked for 'outside' help, someone from engineering or quality, for example, may attend. Sessions are typically an hour long, where ideas are collected and summarized on 'primary visual displays' with indicators to show progress to completion."

Hardaker explains that GKN is running two types of employee survey. One is a bi-annual standard engagement survey to provide internal benchmarks related to the Business Excellence Model – the business assessment model designed by the European Foundation for Quality Management.

The full survey contains 35 questions, but the leadership engagement subset has 16 questions that are run monthly everywhere in the business. This subset, the "Positive Climate Index" (PCI) involves every member of staff once during the year.

## How does this relate to dialogue?

"The 16 questions are answered by employees using electronic voting handsets, which we keep on sites throughout the business. This means we



GKN is a leading automotive, off-highway, aerospace and sinter metals manufacturer. Approximately 35,000 people work in GKN companies in more than 30 countries around the world.

can run the feedback process each month.” As the process is run live each time, it’s easy to engage employees in a dialogue about each session’s results.

“The process is owned by HR and implemented locally by local Management,” Hardaker explains. “The policy is ‘steered’ by a business excellence working group and the suppliers play no part now. The PCI results are analyzed only in so far as presenting a score order and detail behind the weighting against the 16 questions. It takes only seconds to display the scores on the screen in the session and then begin the discussions about the most pressing issues.

“First we look at the top one or two results and ask how we can get closer to full marks. Then we discuss the bottom two or three and ask people what they think. We ask, ‘What do you think we should do about it?’” Hardaker is quick to stress the “we” – not necessarily just about what managers should do, although there may be specific actions for himself or the site leader.

This live process, with its associated dialogue element, enables the business to understand the reasons behind the feedback it is given. For example, one site might report a drop in “trust in leadership”. When this is explored with the group, it might turn out that something that had been promised for a particular date was not delivered until later – a pay issue for example.

Each feedback session lasts for an hour to an hour and a half and Hardaker says these sessions are quite challenging. “We’re forced to address what’s bugging people.” Managers are becoming more practiced at running these sessions now, particularly to engender dialogue. Each session is led by the site plant manager supported by HR. “This dialogue process is forcing the site manager to address the difficult question – ‘What’s not working?’” Hardaker calls these conversations “courageous conversations”.

These sessions are run monthly for all staff and people attend depending on the date of their birthday. “We can have directors, secretaries, supervisors and managers all in the same session,” he says. These sessions relate to the monthly PCI and the group size ranges from between nine and 20 people.

GKN employs 35,000 people and has now achieved almost 100 percent coverage with this site-based feedback process. In addition, the company is achieving around 90 percent coverage through its full bi-annual survey.

“We use the PCI to measure several things,” Hardaker says. “We can also measure dialogue more generally, which often comes up. We can quickly spot a downward dip on a site. For example, we’ve seen where a ‘change’ activity has caused a sudden dip in morale. But we can

also observe ongoing trends and can intervene where necessary.” The business isn’t investing a substantial amount of money in this process, but it does invest a significant amount of time.

### Changes to the way the sessions are run

“In the spirit of continuous improvement, we’re always looking for ways to develop the effectiveness of our PCI.” Hardaker has piloted an adaption that has helped develop the dialogue culture further at HQ and other sites in the UK.

“I break the group into smaller discussion subsets of three to four people first. They discuss the issue together and report back using a flip chart.” He explains that previously, the way the sessions were run tended to place the session leader in a more confrontational position – in a way challenging the group about the issue under consideration. “Session leaders are now coming to understand the need to listen and help people come forward with ideas.”

### Team briefing at GKN

GKN has adopted a written and verbal team briefing system. In headquarters, for example, the team brief is written and given verbally for all heads of department. It’s then embellished with local information to provide a further verbal briefing to the distributed teams around HQ.

In the operational areas, the team briefing tends to be more focused on general local issues, but the core content of the team brief is published for all GKN’s managers. “The business updates for each business are a useful way to appraise managers and their teams of wider GKN activities. The team brief material is inserted into existing team meeting arrangements – there are no additional meetings arranged for this purpose,” Hardaker explains.

The company invests a substantial amount of time in face-to-face communication. This is happening in a traditionally “difficult” environment – on the factory floor. In summary, a ▶



**Simon Hardaker** is director of Group Employee Communications at GKN. In this role, he’s responsible for developing and implementing the engagement and communication strategy. Starting his career in the UK’s Royal Navy, Hardaker moved from engineering into marketing and has held senior employee communication roles at Rolls-Royce and QinetiQ.

## KEY POINTS

- This is an exclusive extract from a soon-to-be-published report for Melcrum’s Strategic Communication Research Forum.
- Simon Hardaker explains when cascade-style communication is more appropriate than dialogue and how each method is facilitated within the company.
- The communication team at GKN offers a lot of support to leaders and managers across all levels, helping them to improve their communication performance.

## “WE’RE ENCOURAGING LEADERS TO WORK WITH VIDEO AND RECORD A VIDEO DIARY TO GET THEM USED TO WORKING WITH THIS MEDIUM.”

- ◀ typical plant-based employee would experience:
  - Once a day – 5 to 15-minute pre-shift briefing
  - Weekly – employee involvement session
  - Monthly – team brief
  - Once a year – participate in PCI dialogue feedback session.
  - Every two years – full employee survey

In addition, the CEO holds quarterly “earnings and results” conference calls with 700 leaders followed by a release of podcast material for everyone. It’s a 20-25 minute brief where the CEO gives information on the key issues and might talk about a particular focus. “The CEO is also keen to give recognition, for example by talking about a new sales win or the business achievement in taking £100 million out of our inventory. There are opportunities for questions afterwards. People can ask questions on the call but almost never do. If there’s a session coming up, I’ll usually get six to 12 questions submitted by phone and email, which I put to members of the executive.” Sometimes these questions may have been answered during the CEO’s brief, but Hardaker – who chairs the sessions – always indicates where a question on a topic has been asked. He’ll generally ask the director concerned, “We had a question on this topic. Do you have anything further to add?”

Hardaker says the actual cash investment in these activities is very low, but quite high in terms of the time people must take to prepare and deliver material. The business uses regular measures such as the PCI and ad hoc “Survey Monkey” surveys to assess effectiveness of particular communications or messages.

Does team briefing engender dialogue? “It depends on who’s doing it. It provides a useful update, for example at headquarters, to see what others are doing.

### Supporting managers in briefing

A monthly brief is generated at Redditch, near Birmingham in central England. It began by being for Redditch employees, but is now available globally and used widely as an addition to local briefing.

“The Redditch monthly team brief is supported by an intranet site with public and private areas. The private area is accessible to the top 700 managers and contains briefing notes and additional materials to help convey information. We’ve

included podcasts to help managers answer team questions.”

The intranet is a useful way to support managers in understanding the quarterly briefing information. “The CEO’s quarterly call and questions are recorded for a podcast, which is held on the private part of the site. We also upload a transcript of the call. These items are important for managers to be able to access because although all our managers speak English, it isn’t necessarily their first language,” Hardaker says. People use the podcasts in several ways, some simply listening on their computers. “But team leaders have taken their laptops into workplace briefings and played the podcast back so team members can hear it straight from the CEO. It also provides an opportunity to follow up with ‘what that means to this site,’” he adds.

“We have managers in the UK, but many are abroad including sites in South America, India and China. The podcast means they can listen again and have the script to read, which has come directly from the CEO. We often find that when briefing their teams, managers will literally cut and paste. They tell their teams ‘If you want to know what the boss said...’ and put it in quotation marks.”

### Dealing with confidentiality

“We’ve had no recorded examples of it leaking. We’re careful on the call to ensure that if anything were leaked, we’d be upset that it wasn’t kept in the company, but not actually embarrassed.” To help with this assurance process, the CEO’s notes go to investor relations and the other senior executives.

“Managers go on to brief their teams, but this isn’t a formal process. We tell them the information is to ‘help you communicate how things are to your people’. Anecdotally, and using Survey Monkey, we know people are getting the information. We also make the podcasts available on the public side of the intranet, but we don’t publish the script there.

“We recognize that not everyone has 35 minutes to listen to a podcast, but we’re getting 4,000-7,000 hits on the site and you can start, stop and restart in the same place which helps. However, people can’t yet access this information from outside the company firewall – from home for example.”

### Training managers to better communicate

Hardaker explains that GKN provides leadership development, which includes training on communication.

“We provide ‘Essential leadership for managers and supervisors’, which has been taken up by about 2,500 people. This program includes basic leadership competencies such as

starting to develop coaching and feedback skills. Managers learn when to use which channels – for example not to use email for everything.” These communication modules also explain how to deliver a team briefing and make it more engaging. “For example to use visual approaches, such as making a drawing when the manager is explaining a point.”

Hardaker’s team publishes a communication guide for leaders, which contains a mix of helpful hints and tips for dealing with different scenario examples.

“‘Advanced leadership development’ is a program where individuals can develop their coaching and facilitation skills further. They also learn how to develop the leaders reporting to them to enhance their own teams. This program includes the development of many other communication skills such as appreciative enquiry.

“We’re also now encouraging leaders to work with video and record a video diary to get them used to working with this medium. We plan to introduce more YouTube-style communication internally when getting leaders to give a message that needs mass delivery to a particular timescale that may make more conventional face-to-face communication difficult to achieve.”

### Advice for generating more dialogue

“Don’t try and go for the whole thing at once,” Hardaker advises. Instead, he suggests reviewing current processes and building dialogue into them. For example, consider one month’s team briefing and use one element where it would be good to generate dialogue to get input.

“Consider how to get people to talk about issues in small groups first,” he says. This takes his learning from the success of GKN’s PCI feedback discussions. In this way, session leaders can avoid having one individual appearing to be the “troublemaker” by giving their own point of view. Instead have the feedback come from the group – more a case of “we think” than “I think”.

“Starting with the team brief may be all you can do,” he says. Taking more of a dialogue-based approach will break up the usual, maybe up to one hour, briefing-only session. “If it’s engaging, people are more likely to take on the approach.” It is also useful to remember Hardaker’s argument that this approach is much easier for session leaders than always being the one doing the “telling”.

He has an important caveat when dealing with team members out in the factory. “Remember that not everyone is comfortable with the pen to write or to speak out for the group. Be careful when electing the speaker and writer because someone in the group may have learning difficulties, for example.

“People are easily embarrassed by their inability to communicate well and are positively disengaged if put on the spot; rather, put the pen into the middle of the group and let someone from the group volunteer to write and speak on behalf of the other individuals.

“People are promoted to manager and we immediately expect them to be able to use spreadsheets like an accountant and to be a great communicator. The longer you don’t help people, the worse it gets for them to admit that this didn’t happen for them and ask for help.”

Hardaker explains that although the communication team controls the executive conference call and the web communication, “Our strategy for employee communication is that it’s just about our leaders – not about us. We’re here to coach and help them do a better job of leadership and provide some of the material to support dialogue with their teams. The most important relationship most people have at work is probably with their line manager – so they better be good. It’s part of our job to see that they are – or become that!” scm

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Simon Hardaker will be speaking at Melcrum’s Employee Engagement Conference being held in London from May 11th-13th. Visit [www.melcrum.com](http://www.melcrum.com) to download the program.

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# Communicating through difficult change at British Airways

An interview with Penny Lawson, head of internal communication

BY KELLY DYER

British Airways is going through a particularly turbulent time at the moment with cabin crew members striking and the future of the airline looking uncertain. In this exclusive interview with Melcrum, Penny Lawson, head of internal communication, talks about what it's like to be in the thick of it and how she and her team are keeping employees aware of a constantly changing situation.

I've met Penny Lawson on two separate occasions now and both times the word used to describe her by those around me has been "impressive". Not that you'd expect anything else from one of the country's leading change communicators.

The first time we met was in 2008 when Lawson was presenting her case to the judging panel of the CIPR awards as part of her entry to win the internal communication accolade. Then, she was representing her team in the role of director of internal communication at British television channel ITV. Her entry didn't win, but it left my fellow judge marveling at her professionalism and capabilities during such a challenging time at the station.

Her ITV experience obviously set her in good stead for her next position - head of internal communication at Britain's national airline, British Airways (BA). And as events unfolded it was clear she was going to need to draw on every bit of that experience.

## Delivering tough messages

Lawson has now been at BA for 16 months and has communicated through some of the most difficult periods of the airline's history.

A couple of years ago, it became apparent that British Airways could no longer rest on its laurels as the "world's favourite airline". It was having to manage competition from "no-frills" rivals like EasyJet for its share of passengers and given the cheaper alternatives available, no doubt many former BA enthusiasts swapped allegiance. Also in the competitive market place were airlines such as Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic, seen by many as a "sexier" and younger brand compared to BA.

Already on the backfoot when the economic crisis hit, things got progressively worse for BA. When cost savings had to be made to counter the downturn and ultimately save the 50-year old brand, cabin crew hit back, unhappy at the cuts being proposed to onboard teams, salaries and benefits. Suddenly BA faced a new wave of challenges.

At the heart of the ongoing dispute is the fact that the airline, with cost in mind, decided to reduce the number of cabin crew on long-haul flights from 15 to 14. A two-year pay freeze has also been introduced. Other proposed changes to cabin crew members' salaries and career prospects have caused conflict with the workers' union Unite, who are concerned not only about the treatment of their members, but also that customer service will be seriously affected.

BRITISH AIRWAYS 

British Airways PLC is a full service global airline that provides international and domestic passenger and cargo airline services. The airline operates hubs at London's Heathrow and Gatwick airports that serve 147 destinations in 75 countries. The company employs around 40,000 people.

## Working with unions

On the day I met Lawson for the second time, at Melcrum's Internal Communication Change Conference in London, she was presenting on the huge change she's currently helping to steer employees through. She and her team were also expecting further talks to happen that same day with Unite. [It has since been announced that cabin crew are expected to walk out in three separate strikes in March and April, each lasting three or four days and causing widespread disruption.]

How she was handling the relationship with the unions was obviously what delegates at the conference were keen to find out. When one attendee asked about it, Lawson remained her calm and professional self. Saying that the talks were being carried out in a "dignified and adult manner" she said she believed both parties were trying to be mature and to achieve the best outcome for all concerned.

If anything good can come from this situation, it's the strong relationship that has been built between the internal communication function and the media relation and the industrial relation teams with whom Lawson works "hand in glove". She doesn't have a seat at the negotiating table during the strike talks, "as I think is right," but she and her team of 30 are ready on hand to communicate and are "absolutely committed to publishing things internally at the same time they become news externally and if we can, a little before."

## How the function has fared in recent times

Being such an iconic brand in Britain and around the world means being under the media spotlight and attracting much public scrutiny and criticism. It was the same at ITV. So how have the past two years been for Lawson as a senior internal communicator? "What I've seen in both companies, as the recession has kicked in, is the change in the tone of internal communication. We've gone from being a function that's regarded as being a bit of a cheer leader (we always tell ourselves that we're not, but there are parts of the company who expect that of us) to being much more grave, business-focused, "tell-it-like-it-is" communicators of tough information. It was like that at ITV and it's like that at BA. I think in lots of ways that's a very good thing."

So what effect is this having on the development of the function? "To use that dreadful cliché, 'internal comms has never been so important'. It's without question at the table for everything now and it's seen to be crucial. That's the silver lining in a very, very difficult period. I know from other colleagues in other organizations that it's the same for them too. We're very much looked to now by

the management board to help the company help their people. We need to be the people with, if not the answers, then the encouragement and a clear message. Clarity of message is absolutely crucial."

Working within this constant state of crisis must take its toll. How does Lawson protect herself and her team from the stress of it all? "On a personal level, it's all go, all the time. There has been no time for reflection, which takes its toll. You have to look after yourself and your team. Understandably they get very tired. They need to feel like a team.

"We're responsible for helping keep a positive attitude [within the organization], we're also responsible for creating an atmosphere of understanding of the problem. The internal communication function is usually associated with upbeat comments on everything so we've almost had to go the other way and stress the problems of the recession and international aviation and underline the fact that the company is in extreme difficulty. So we've been responsible for, at times, painting a rather gloomy picture and creating a sense of urgency and then confidence moving forward, but with thunderclouds overhead."

## Keeping employees aware

In a world where breaking news is reported on Twitter faster than mainstream news channels or websites, Lawson admits that keeping employees up to date with events as they occur is tough. "I think in the days of 24/7 rolling news, we kid ourselves in internal comms if we think we can let our people know before the rest of the world. But we use email and we have a very good intranet to post breaking news. We've done a lot of work on management communication and increasing the strength of the cascade internally. We tend to get together our top 150 managers more frequently now and brief them. Everything we do is carried out in conjunction with our media relation colleagues and of course our industrial relation colleagues. It's exceptionally important that we're



**Penny Lawson** is head of internal communication at British Airways. She has worked for a wide range of organizations including the Prudential and Norwich Union, the Metropolitan Police and HM Customs and Excise as well as a range of media companies: BSKyB, the BBC and ITV.

## KEY POINTS

- Britain's best-known airline, British Airways, is currently going through a very difficult period as cabin crew members strike and tough talks are being held with unions.
- In this interview, Penny Lawson, head of internal communication at the airline, shares how she and her team are communicating through this period of instability.
- Lawson reveals that the internal communication function has a close relationship with CEO Willie Walsh and is planning on using more social media in an external and internal capacity.

## “WILLIE [WALSH] IS JUST DOWN THE CORRIDOR AND HE VISITS THE CORPORATE COMMUNICATION TEAM SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK.”

- ◀ all joined up. The year has been dominated by having to get the attitudes and negotiations right.

### Working with Willie Walsh

BA's CEO, Willie Walsh has a reputation (probably perpetrated by the unforgiving British press) of being a formidable and ruthless business man. Not the sort of CEO who would happily chat to employees or hold internal communication in particularly high regard. This, it seems, couldn't be further from the truth.

“Willie is just down the corridor and he visits the corporate communication team several times a week,” says Lawson. “Being so close to him was a deliberate move by a former corporate comms director. The management board recognizes the importance of managing reputation. We speak with him once a week, as we write a column for him in our weekly employee newsletter and we craft messages with him. We have a confident, open relationship, which is essential for the company.”

But how seriously does Walsh take the need to be connected with his employees? “He takes it very seriously. I inherited a terrific structure of big briefing meetings where Willie and the chief finance officer, Keith Williams, make a lot of time available to senior and middle managers, as well as employee groups. They travel round the company to meet people and have briefings. He's at the airport a lot, meeting people. He absolutely believes that in a service company, face-to-face contact is vital and he places a lot of value on meeting people. He's exceptionally articulate and people appreciate that.”

So, will BA employees be seeing their CEO in YouTube-style films anytime soon? “We are starting to do more on social media with Willie, particularly during the dispute. His weekly column is online as well as in print and we do webcasts. Although we've had to be careful as this has on one occasion been hacked into and the content was taken out of context and shown on a prominent news channel. Within the constraints of there being exceptional scrutiny, he's up for it. We're planning on using social media more externally and then versions of it internally.”

### Employee forums

Providing employees with a forum where they can vent their anxieties, fears and frustrations is imperative when the organization is going through change of any scale. But it's especially important when large numbers of employees work remotely, as is the case at BA.

“We've got a very well developed set of employee forums,” explains Lawson. “These are specific to each individual part of the company, recognizing that people want to feel part of a unit as well as the overall bigger company. For example, engineering has its own online forum, as does cabin crew and so on.

“We also hold open-access director sessions approximately every month after which members of the management team, including Willie Walsh, are available for a couple of hours to answer questions from employees. People go on and ask questions and get a live response. There are also chat rooms, which are important for allowing employees to express their opinion. We've found that if you remove this open access, people will go off and say things externally.”

How much is communicated online? “Print communication remains important. In an online world print is vital to our colleagues who are constantly traveling. There's a high proportion of employees who go online, not least because pay check and pension information are all accessible on the intranet. Around 65 percent of people log-on at home each week to the intranet and around 90 percent of the company overall goes online at some point every week. So it's a very powerful way to reach people. We make sure there are links to up-to-the-minute news and there are director messages from each director's area.”

### Looking to the future

The prospect of a cheerier future probably isn't at the forefront of the majority of employees' minds at present. When the situation does improve, however, how is Lawson planning on recruiting new talent to a company that is publically criticized on a fairly regular basis?

“In common with lots of companies, we're not doing much recruitment at all at the moment!” she says. “In fact, quite a few people have opted to take voluntary redundancy or have volunteered to work part time. We've reduced the number of planes flying and we've also let a third of managers take voluntary redundancy. We've taken a lot of people out so recruitment is very quiet. In terms of recruiting into the marketing and communication departments, I'm not experiencing a problem with people being unwilling to come to the company. In fact, in a recession, what tends to happen is that people are attracted to very big, well-known

brands. I wondered if there would be an impact, but I haven't seen one."

### Challenges for 2010

So, what are Lawson's major challenges for the rest of this year, bearing in mind that at the time of writing a three-day period of industrial action had just ended? "Our focus is very much on managing the operation effectively through this period and also on trying to re-build a sense of unity after the very bruising period that we're currently going through.

"Associated with that is the importance of re-stating our brand, which we'll be doing externally as well as internally. We want to move the company forward based on the power and popularity of the brand and I can't stress enough how proud employees are of the brand. People have a huge affection for it. Of all the companies I've worked for, BA wins the most pride from its employees. It's a very well-loved organization. We need to look at who we are, where we're going, and how we can come together as a company to grow.

"The company is also looking to merge with Iberia later in the year and to greatly strengthen relations with American Airlines in a trilateral deal, although they'll both retain their identities and remain their nations' flagcarriers. Both of those are big challenges as they'll affect how people work and it'll affect what we say and how we feel about two companies that were previously key competitors. Those are big challenges. There could be some job impact through synergies between those two companies. There will also be big customer benefits as we try hard to improve the experience of customers flying round the world."

In addition, there are other events in the pipeline that give reason for positivity including a new charity partner.

"This year we'll be focused on the change from working with UNICEF as our charity partner to Comic Relief. We've worked with UNICEF for a number of years and have a great relationship with them, but we've decided to change to Comic Relief, which marks an exciting new beginning. This is particularly exciting in the run up to 2012 where we're a sponsor for the London Olympic Games. So we'll be doing more preparation for that and using the excitement that people have for the Games to bring people together."

So, once the difficulties of the present have been resolved, Lawson will transfer her "impressive professionalism" toward building a stronger and brighter future for Britain's iconic airline. scm

**"OF ALL THE COMPANIES I'VE WORKED FOR, BA WINS THE MOST PRIDE FROM ITS EMPLOYEES. IT'S A VERY WELL-LOVED ORGANIZATION."**

### CONTACT DETAILS

**Kelly Dyer**  
Melcrum  
kelly.dyer@melcrum.com

# The end of an era: takeover and culture change at Cadbury

Helping employees get through an unsettling period of change with the use of social media

BY JAMES BENNETT

The news that British institution Cadbury was going to be taken over by American rival Kraft Foods, shocked the whole nation. But none were more saddened than Cadbury's loyal employees who thought the 186-year old company to be safe from such threats. James Bennett talks to internal communications director Andrew Moys about how the tough messages were delivered and efforts to help employees look to the future.

If you thought the last 18 months have been chaotic, think again. This year has seen cutbacks cutback even further, redundancies rise and the threat of industrial action at several British behemoths including British Airways, the BBC, Network Rail, and Royal Mail damage company reputation, brand, careers and profit margins.

The UK may technically be out of recession but "the repercussion", the sequel to the financial crisis if it were film, is in full swing and continues to cause aftershocks that disturbingly don't seem to want to disappear. For example, multi-billion pound bonuses have been dished out to senior bankers at majority taxpayer-owned banks to ensure top talent remains while they continue to reveal record losses. Social media increasingly serves to feed employee and customer backlashes – car manufacturer Toyota is the latest casualty of a dramatic product recall – while British brands, many of whom have already been swallowed up, remain vulnerable to foreign buy outs. The

issues facing internal communicators and their employees have shot up overnight and meant that the function has come under more pressure and scrutiny than ever before. But if you're not taking advantage of this to showcase your personal skills and knowledge then ultimately you could face the danger of fading into obscurity. It will be those communicators who show the most flexibility and courage to step out of their comfort zones that will survive and be singled out for praise and reward.

One of these people is Andrew Moys. A communicator who started his career as a marketing intern with Pernod Ricard in 1997, quickly climbed the ranks to become head of communication at Heathrow Airport followed by group head of communication at BAA, followed by internal communications director at BAA – within the space of ten years.

Recently, however, as global internal and interactive communications director at Cadbury and following the 186 year-old British company's takeover by US food manufacturing giant Kraft Foods, he faced his biggest challenge yet.

## The communication challenge at Cadbury

So just how do you communicate to more than 45,000 employees concerned that factories could close, jobs could go, cultures could clash and that the way of life they've known for decades could be changed forever? The answer is you communicate fast, with flexibility, and plenty of planning.

Fortunately for Moys and his team, the £12 billion bid had been in the pipeline for some time. The British confectioner had been battling the US food group for four months. On September



Prior to its March 2010 acquisition by **Kraft Foods, Inc.**, Cadbury Plc, was a British-based confectionary company. Kraft Foods, Inc., is the largest confectionary, food, and beverage corporation headquartered in the US, and the second largest in the world

7th 2009, Kraft Foods surprised the London stock market with a cash and shares approach for Cadbury, valuing it at £10.2bn, or 745p a share.

However, the offer (which was made privately on 28th August) was swiftly rejected and on 22nd September it asked the Takeover Panel for a “put up or shut up” deadline giving Kraft Foods until 9th November to make a formal bid.

Then on 4th December, Kraft Foods posted a 180-page circular explaining its bid to shareholders meaning the 60-day timetable that dictates how City takeovers play out began to count down.

But despite raising its financial targets again and promising shareholders higher dividends, as well as holding informal talks with Hershey about a “friendly deal”, the Cadbury board recommended a £12 billion sale to Kraft Foods on 18th January.

### The day it all changed

On 2nd February, the deal was made unconditional; Cadbury’s reign as a 186 year-old British institution was over and its employees were desperate to know what was going to happen. Communicating as rapidly and as accurately as possible was crucial.

But behind the scenes the hard work had already been in operation for months. A project team had been set up timescales set out and endless hours of planning – for every eventuality – had been meticulously drawn up.

Uncertainty is an ever present reality when a merger takes place; during the bidding process; once the deal has been confirmed; and for many years afterwards, but Moys and his colleagues, both in the UK and the US, had contingency plans in place – something he says any successful internal communicator should do.

“Before the recommended offer when Cadbury was defending itself from a bid, we set ourselves up to provide as much news and information to employees as possible. The business case was to keep people focused on their jobs and winning in their markets. To do this we had to make sure they weren’t distracted by uncertainty and rumors in the press, and that they saw internal comms as the most reliable source of information. So everything we did revolved around real pace and real clarity.”

### Using the extranet

Once the deal was done, Kraft Foods set up an extranet so that both companies could access news, information and Q&As as the business went through each stage of the integration process.

Moys says in the first weeks this became the main source of information and news for employees. “Kraft Foods is taking a “best of both” approach to make sure we captured the best of both companies. Cadbury was bought because its great people, great brands and great ways of working.

So people are positive about showing what they do to make sure that’s understood and can be considered for the new combined world.”

### Starting the integration process

The 2nd February was the last day of Cadbury and with systems in place Moys and his team set to work to ensure a fitting sense of closure. “We got together across the business to acknowledge the end of Cadbury’s independence and co-ordinated informal gatherings across all our markets. It was normal for town halls to happen across our markets, but the events of that day were different,” he says looking back.

“They were very informal, more of a celebration than a business presentation. They acknowledged the end of Cadbury’s independence, not in a morbid way but marking what Cadbury had achieved in its long history. It was totally up to the local market on how they ran them. Not all markets felt the same way about the acquisition depending on their history with Cadbury – some were relatively recent acquisitions themselves, for example.”

The project team produced, as he calls it, a “very moving film” on the history and achievements of Cadbury from 1824 to 2010, which was given to people as a personal memento. “For a lot of people it helped them move on a bit easier the next day to being part of a new organization,” he adds. “If you think of the change curve that we talk about a lot in communications and change management – this was a good example of helping people mark the end of something before they can move on.”

Moys’ team worked hand-in-hand with their Kraft Foods counterparts after the offer was recommended by the Cadbury board, planning for integration communications if shareholders accepted it. So on the 3rd February, the first full day of integration when employees had had the chance to let the news sink, they were ready with two complex (both logistically and technologically) webcasts with Irene Rosenfeld, Kraft Foods



**Andrew Moys** is the global internal and interactive communications director at confectionery company Cadbury. Moys has previously held a senior communication role at BAA, the world’s largest airports group, and prior to this he worked with Smythe Dorward Lambert, one of the leading consultancies in internal communications and change management, working with clients such as Orange, British Airways and Scottish Enterprise.

## KEY POINTS

- In February of this year, one of the oldest and best-loved British brands, Cadbury, was taken over by American firm Kraft Foods.
- This news didn’t come as a total surprise so the communication team had been able to prepare for a number of eventualities.
- One of the most successful channels of information was a webcast from the Kraft Foods CEO broadcast to more than 130 sites in 60 countries.
- An extranet was used to stay in touch with employees in manufacturing and sales roles.

## “THE INTEGRATION TEAM PRODUCED A ‘VERY MOVING FILM’ ON THE HISTORY AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF CADBURY FROM 1824 TO 2010, WHICH WAS GIVEN TO PEOPLE AS A PERSONAL MEMENTO.”

- ◀ chairman and CEO, that were broadcast across more than 130 global sites. “They went down really well,” he says. “The amount of clarity Irene very quickly gave about the integration process, the nature of Kraft Foods and its background surprised people. It was important to very quickly to give Kraft Foods’s view of the new business. I think that really helped the new company get off to the best start.”

Since then, the Cadbury and Kraft Foods team have continued to work together to help make the transition as painless and as smooth as possible. “We’ve been working together really well and that [webcast] was the first example of it. It was hosted in Cadbury’s Uxbridge headquarters but organized with the Kraft Foods communications team,” he says.

“It showed what an internal communication team can do for a business. People listened to what Irene had to say and were more open-minded about the future as a result. It helped debunk some myths and concerns,” he adds.

The two webcasts may have managed to win some of the employees’ hearts and minds but it wouldn’t have happened without the internal communication team working closely with the Cadbury and Kraft Foods IT departments to beam such a mammoth event across the world. “We’ve done global webcasts before and had learned a lot including how to put it across from an IT point of view and to make sure the network can cope. It’s a huge undertaking when you think these webcasts are going to 130 sites across 60 different countries, across the world and all of them with very different network capabilities. It was an amazing result.”

### **Informing employees before they see it externally**

This was, however, far from the end of the exercise. As a communicator you should plan for every outcome. Cheap technology and internet access to 24-hour news, alerts and websites using smartphones, laptops and desktops, for example, may have increased the number of channels at our disposal, but it hasn’t aided the communicator’s cause. As we all know, sensitive corporate news can often leak into the external world before its had the chance to be released internally. Moys’

team had a plan to combat just this outcome all the way through the bid process.

“A lot of employees have Google Alerts on their Blackberries and their PCs set to their company names so the minute any press coverage is released it comes to them immediately. We had to do the same so we set ourselves the target of ‘beating Google’ for every piece of communication throughout the entire process,” says Moys. “This meant scenario planning. We had to have things drafted for different possibilities throughout the process, and we brought in new tools such as text alerts that people could subscribe to,” he explains.

“We put up an extranet that could be used by our colleagues in sales and manufacturing who can’t remotely access our IT systems. We also changed our translation approach so we proactively started translating in advance whereas previously we had relied on local markets, and we also expanded the number of countries we translated into. We did lots of things to be as proactive as possible and get news out accurately so that wherever possible employees heard from us first rather than from other sources. Where that wasn’t possible, we summarized news coverage across markets so people could understand the different contexts of what was being played out in different areas because it did affect everyone differently,” he adds.

Speculation about the outcome of the process, often by major shareholders or influential financial analysts and rumors in markets about potential job losses can also spell danger for any communication team. Moys and his colleagues addressed this, as he puts it, “head on” through the use of Q&As and notes for leaders and leaders’ briefing guides, all translated and put on the extranet in 13 languages.

As Moys and many of his peers point out when discussing online channels, employees want to communicate and to be communicated with inside the workplace in the same way as they communicate externally. Moys’ experience at BAA when it was taken over by Ferrovial stood him in particularly good stead.

“The idea of pace was important. It’s important to say something but in a crisis situation sometimes you can’t say exactly what you want to or give people the information they want. The key thing, however, is to make sure you’re saying *something*. I learned this very quickly at BAA. There are other dynamics involved in a deal like this such as working closely with legal advisors to get things signed off, so you learn to be much better prepared, what you can and can’t say and understand the whole process. It was really useful having been through that before.”

## Lessons learned

Not everything has gone smoothly. On a personal level, communicating the takeover meant long, arduous hours in the office planning, reacting, channelling and monitoring the takeover and external events, as well as dealing with a constant stream of employee requests and feedback. Moys worked with the corporate affairs teams in local markets to give the Uxbridge HQ staff feedback, as well as setting up an email address for employees to send through their thoughts and ideas.

So what about the negative feedback? Sadly, as with any takeover, uncertainty can rule for some time. “People obviously have questions about company structure, jobs, synergies between the two businesses that can’t yet be answered now. It was important that we acknowledged them all and set out the timescales for when we will be able to answer them. People respected that.

But despite the huge changes that have taken place in the last seven months Moys and his team constantly revert back to the central focus of the comms exercise – to always be clear to focus on business as usual and not just on the takeover. “That said it took a lot of time and focus,” he laughs.

“Communicating proactively and quickly through this period has been the most important thing for us to work on. It showed there was a very clear business case for internal communications. It’s very motivating to work on a project like this because people can clearly see the benefits for employees. The feedback throughout the bid process was just fantastic.” scm

**“MOYS AND HIS TEAM CONSTANTLY REVERT BACK TO THE CENTRAL FOCUS OF THE COMMS EXERCISE – TO ALWAYS BE CLEAR TO FOCUS ON BUSINESS AS USUAL AND NOT JUST THE TAKEOVER.”**

## EASING EMPLOYEES’ ANXIETY DURING ACQUISITION

If your company is the target of an acquisition bid, how can you best support employees to deal with the stress of this “limbo” period?

“Uncertainty will cause varying degrees of stress in different types of people,” says consultant Helen Coley-Smith on the *Internal Comms Hub*. “They may be feeling all sorts of emotions including fear, excitement and resignation and some will be in denial. In this situation, it’s best to cater for the lowest common denominator i.e., aim your communication at people who are likely to be most concerned, unfocused or unproductive, and for information purposes, also share the communication with people who are less worried.

“What I’ve seen work well in similar situations is a weekly, ‘acquisition news’ e-update (in print, in order to cater for those employees without email access), setting out what you know and don’t know at any point in time. It’s best for this to be put together by HR, comms and operations and it needs to demonstrate the following principles for communicating in times of uncertainty. Here’s a brief summary of those principles:

- Brainstorm the questions people will have, and the potential benefits to them of an acquisition.
- Show them that you care through both what you say and how you say it.
- Tell the truth.
- Get to the point quickly.
- Give people only the information they need.
- Outline any choices the organization has/people have.
- Keep your messages and supporting facts short and simple.
- Filter out negative expressions and get rid of jargon.
- Offer additional support to those who need it.

In addition, you can get your CEO to explain to employees what’s going on, rather than pretending nothing’s happening or thinking silence is fine. You can also supplement an e-news update with an online Q&A site and/or face-to-face communication as soon as there’s something concrete to say.”

## CONTACT DETAILS

**James Bennett**  
Melcrum  
james.bennett@melcrum.com

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comma

comma (n), punctuation mark (,), a discrete intervention that creates meaning

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**Contact:** Rodney Gray  
**Tel:** +61 (0)2 9909 2900  
**Fax:** +61 (0)2 9909 2911  
**Email:** rodney@rodnegray.com.au  
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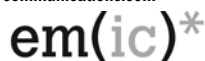
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**Email: cristina.harvey@wmwuk.net**  
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**Tel:** +44 (0) 1738 828524  
**Mob:** +44 (0) 7921 252269  
**Email:** [jonathan@speak.co.uk](mailto:jonathan@speak.co.uk)  
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