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# Internal communication

*Liz Yeomans and Liam FitzPatrick*

## Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define internal communication and recognise its development as a discipline
- identify the roles of the professional practitioner
- identify the communication options available to the IC practitioner in helping an organisation achieve its objectives
- evaluate and segment internal publics within an organisation
- assess the channels that are available to internal communicators
- explain how data gathering and research insights help practitioners to develop and evaluate internal communication strategies.

## Structure

- What is internal communication? Perspectives and definitions
- What does an internal communication function do?
- What matters to employees: motivation in the workplace
- Planning internal communication
  - Outcomes rather than outputs: choosing effective channels
- The importance of evidence in IC planning and evaluation
- Professionalisation: attributes, competencies and skills in internal communication

## Introduction

Organisations communicate: in many ways communication is the defining factor that determines whether a collection of humans exist in an organisation or are just a random group of people. It is

the process of communication that helps us find a common purpose, agree on objectives and work together. The tone or culture of an organisation is expressed through communication.

And that communication happens inside organisations, whether it is managed or not. While daily interactions between colleagues are a necessary part of getting the job done, organisations also need to ensure that staff understand the overall goals and priorities. Also, as organisations grow larger and more complex, so does the challenge of engaging staff in the 'bigger picture' – the many challenges, threats and opportunities faced by the organisation as a whole.

Internal communication (IC) has developed as a growing specialism inside the broader fields of strategic public relations, strategic communication and corporate communication. Just as the concerns of public relations have developed beyond one-way broadcast of messaging, so has internal communication developed an interest in maintaining 'internal conversations'; encouraging employees to discuss and debate issues among themselves and with upper management. In the same way that PR is not just about media relations, IC is about much more than company newsletters or parties.

IC is not just a concern for multinational or large organisations that need to communicate with thousands of employees. While it is essential for an international company such as Sony or BT to have a sophisticated communication system in order to engage with their employees worldwide, a small, family-owned printing firm also benefits from information sharing and feedback to help the business perform better.

Further, IC is also vital when an organisation of any size or sector is undergoing some form of change or transformation. Internal publics will have to have a clear understanding of what is needed of them. Businesses need to explain customer needs, public sector organisations need to promote understanding of service priorities and every organisation needs staff who are committed and enthused about the task in hand.

This chapter, which combines academic and practitioner perspectives, discusses the role that internal communication has come to play in contemporary workplaces. It discusses, in particular, the importance of the concept of employee engagement, how IC is managed and planned in

practice and the tools and approaches that are used. We also examine the role that communication professionals play in supporting an organisation's leadership as well local managers to hold conversations with their teams.

## **What is internal communication? Perspectives and definitions**

Internal communication is the term used to describe an organisation's managed communication system, where employees are regarded as an internal public or stakeholder group (Vercic et al 2012). Other terms used are 'employee communication', 'organisational communication' and 'internal marketing'. An organisation's managed communication system may include a variety of channels and activities, including newsletters, noticeboards, staff briefings and intranets, to name just a few. But how can internal communication be defined and why is it important?

Until relatively recently, internal communication received little attention from public relations theorists since their focus of attention was on external communication. However, internal communication is now of great importance for many organisations, and theorists are re-examining internal communication in the light of developments such as employee engagement (Welch 2011; Karanges et al 2015; Zerfass et al 2015;).

Among the early leading PR theorists advocating the 'excellence theory', Grunig asserted that if a system of two-way symmetrical communications is adopted then 'open, trusting, and credible relationships with strategic employee constituencies [groups] will follow' (Grunig 1992: 559). Kennan and Hazleton (2006) take a relational perspective that places emphasis on trust (between management and employees) and identification or connectedness among employees as the key features of internal relationship building. The corporate communication school of thought, on the other hand, regards employees as important stakeholders whose behaviour and communication contribute to corporate identity and project it to external stakeholders (Welch and Jackson 2007).

The development of a 'strategic communication' perspective in public relations over the past decade (Hallahan et al, 2007) has led some theorists to consider internal communication differently, thus placing emphasis on helping employees to make sense of organisational change and complexity. Furthermore, all employees, not just managers and communication specialists, are understood to have a communication role within organisations and contribute to sense-making (Yeomans, 2008; Heide and Simonsson, 2012; Mazzei, 2014).

Definitions of internal communication vary. For example, a Europe-wide study of practitioners found that internal communication is commonly defined as a tactical, one-way function that is responsible for producing and disseminating internal media (Vercic et al 2012). This contradicts definitions of internal communication as a function that enables two-way communication, including the definition that has been presented in earlier editions of this chapter. Nevertheless, the management concept of employee engagement, which we discuss later, suggests that 'building two-way, trusting relationships with internal publics, with the goal of improving organisational effectiveness', is a strategic concern for leaders (Yeomans and Carthew 2014) and practitioners (FitzPatrick and Valskov 2014). Furthermore, while *listening* to employees and other stakeholders (e.g. through research and other techniques) is often neglected in communication strategies, 'excellent' communication departments claim to use a variety of techniques in organisational listening, which suggests a two-way orientation (Zerfass et al 2015).

Internal communication is inextricably linked to supporting an organisation's need to effectively communicate information about important changes - for example, a merger with another company, a re-branding or the introduction of a new product. In theory, at least, internal publics should be among the first to know about these changes so that they are able to see their own role in the 'bigger picture'.

<b>Box 15.1</b>
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## A brief history of internal communication

Very little has been documented on the history of internal communication although it seems to be closely intertwined with changing attitudes to management practice and the need to motivate employees (FitzPatrick 2008). A recent account of the history of internal communication from a UK perspective by Yaxley and Ruck (2015) draws on a mix of archival, academic, practitioner and anecdotal sources to trace its development. The authors note that the roots of formal internal communication lie in the production of the 'employee publication'. The employee publication emerged from nineteenth and twentieth century industrialisation in Europe and the United States. As companies grew larger, so grew the need for a means of communication between employers and employees.

From these early days, a tension existed between giving the employees control of their own publication and producing a 'house organ' under the company's editorial control. For example, Lever Brothers, the British soap manufacturer, established an employee-run publication *Port Sunlight Monthly Journal* in 1895, but this was superseded by a company run journal, *Progress*, in 1899, which "was a 'means of intercommunication' between the company's head office and its Port Sunlight works, branch offices in the UK, offices and other concerns overseas, as well as 'customers and friends'" (Yaxley and Ruck 2015: 5). This tension between giving employees a voice, and an internal communication system controlled by managers, continues to the present day in terms of debates on who has ownership of internal social media. Yaxley and Ruck (2015) present four historic strategies in internal communication, reflecting a 'telling and selling' approach through to an 'engage and consult' approach as follows.

### **Paternalism:**

**19<sup>th</sup> century** – the establishment of the employee publication.

Companies at the forefront of this practice were concerned with the welfare of their employees. Such welfarism can also be seen as a strategy to combat organised labour and industrial unrest.

### **Presentation:**

**1940s** – the era of the 'in-house journalist' or industrial editor

who was paid to write stories that employees would find interesting. The struggle for a credible, professional editorial role, independent of management interference, characterised the role

	of the industrial editor.
<b>Persuasion:</b>	<b>1980s</b> – emphasis on internal communication presenting ‘a case for change’ to employees during a period of economic upheaval. A ‘what’s in it for you’ message reflected a period of persuading employees. Internal communication as a system of planned communication became more closely aligned with management.
<b>Participation:</b>	<b>21<sup>st</sup> century</b> – a period which reflects an interest in the concepts of ‘engagement’ and ‘consultation’ with employees against the backdrop of factors including a lack of trust in management and an ‘engagement deficit’, changing labour practices and transformational communication technologies.

Yaxley and Ruck (2015) argue that while these four strategies are linked to four historic periods, they do not belong exclusively to these periods. They shift back and forth and overlap, thus, “Rather than seeing the history of internal communications simply as one of progression, a model is proposed that sees trends or themes continuing or replicating over time” (Yaxley and Ruck, 2015:11). (See Fig 15.1) The three recurring trends or themes are:

**Propaganda:** within the context of internal communication, ‘management propaganda’ refers to one-way, information-giving which prioritises management-controlled messages over other content and presents the organisation in a favourable light at the expense of more credible content and two-way exchange of ideas. This is a continuing theme for internal communication.

**Employee voice:** refers to the opportunity for employees to have their voice heard. While “voice” was evident in the very early days of internal communication practice when employees were found to run their own publications, the voice of the employee has been subject to ebbs and flows in perceived importance in organisations. While staff surveys are one way of capturing the employee voice, social media potentially empowers employees to write their own blogs and tweet ideas – within the framework of company policy on using these tools.

**Professionalism:** refers to the increasing professionalism of internal communication – from industrial editors in the 1980s seeking management support, through to internal communication

as a strategic practice underpinned by a qualification. The 'downside' of seeking strategic management status, however, is a potential move away from considering the 'employee voice'.

[INSERT FIGURE 15.1 from Yaxley and Ruck, 2015: 11]

[INSERT PICTURE 15.1 of the cover of Port Sunlight monthly journal]

### **Think about 15.1 Learning about the organisation**

Think about an organisation you have worked for – perhaps as a part-time employee. How were you made aware of the business, its products or services and other activities? Was it through your line manager, colleagues or other methods? List the methods of communication that helped you to understand your employer's business.

Now list the methods of communication that you have used to communicate with a line manager and colleagues. Why did you choose these methods? Consider which methods were likely to be the most effective.

### **Feedback**

It is likely that you will have learned about the organisation from your line manager, more formally, and from your colleagues on an informal basis. Other methods, such as e-newsletters, provide the 'bigger picture' on what the business is about. However, you may prefer to communicate with people, including your line manager, face to face.

## **What does an internal communication function do?**

Internal Communication teams tend to be involved in a range of activities. Priorities will, of course, vary from organisation to organisation and will depend on the challenges they face and how IC can help the organisation be successful. Broadly speaking, most of the communication activities fall under six general headings that



relate to organisations and their employee-related objectives (FitzPatrick 2016):

- Ensuring the organisation meets its legal obligations to talk to employees
- Supporting major change
- Promoting collaboration and a sense of community in the workplace
- Promoting external advocacy – getting employees to tell the outside world about their organisation
- Encouraging good employees to stay
- Ensuring employees know what is expected of them and know how to achieve it

A communications team will tend to focus on the activities that most closely relate to organisational objectives. For example in some industries, such as oil and gas, shortages of highly skilled technicians make it a business imperative to retain staff. A hospital might need to explain hygiene and hand washing policies to staff or an airport might need workers to explain to friends and neighbours the argument for developing new runways and terminals. In all of these cases, good internal communication will make a real contribution to the success of the organisation at retaining valued staff, getting employees to follow essential rules or promoting external understanding of a major issue.

The objectives of encouraging employees to act as advocates, getting them to stay and to work harder are often grouped together under the heading of *employee engagement*; a subject that is of increasing interest in academic and practitioner discussions over the past two decades (e.g. Fawkes 2007; MacLeod and Clarke 2009; Welch 2011; Schaufeli 2014; Johansson 2015).

***Employee engagement: helping people stay, work harder and speak up***

Employee engagement can be defined in a variety of ways but there are consistent themes which focus on ‘an attitude, a psychological or motivational state, or a personality trait’ (Welch 2011: 335). Writers talk about outcomes such as engaged employees saying positive things about their organisation internally and externally, staying or committing to being a member of the team, even though there are other opportunities elsewhere, and working harder; putting in extra time energy and effort (Schaufeli 2014).

Organisations are interested in achieving high levels of employee engagement because there seem to be clear links with business profitability, customer service levels, productivity and innovation in the workplace. Engagement is also specifically linked with low levels of people leaving their jobs voluntarily (often called ‘employee turnover’), lower absence or sickness levels and lower accident rates (Bridger 2015).

Communicators are interested in this area because engagement is a mix of *attitudes* (feeling positive or proud), *behaviours* (recommending the company as a place to work or working harder) and *outcomes* (better organisational performance); all of which can be strongly influenced by communications (Bridger 2015).

It is communication that enables employees to make judgements, for example about fairness, and communication is the route by which people are recognised in the workplace. People will decide if there are opportunities for personal growth based on the stories they hear about their peers or information about the availability for training. And, as we discuss later, material benefits are often not as powerful motivators as some of the psychological and social elements of a job.

#### **Think About 15.2**

##### **What motivates you in your job?**

Do you have a job? If so, what motivates you in your job? Is it the change to earn money or perhaps you like the people you work with, think the work is enjoyable or feel you are helping

people somehow?

### **Feedback**

What makes people feel engaged will vary from person to person, and organisation to organisation. People working in a bank might base their engagement on the size of their bonus while a doctor's commitment might be mainly shaped by the interesting nature of the work. An engineer might want to work with a strong community of colleagues who share a fascination with the chance to solve technical problems. Smythe (2007) contends that organisations should identify the drivers of engagement that are peculiar to them and trust their instincts by shaping the experience of work around them.

## **What matters to employees: motivation in the workplace**

In most workplaces employees are there voluntarily. Most of the time we choose where we work and we feel entitled to be treated well and with respect. Even if we feel trapped in a job because of high unemployment or limited opportunities elsewhere, we make a choice about how much effort we make at work. For some time writers have talked about *discretionary effort*, arguing that money only makes us show up to work; doing a good job depends on our motivation (Yankelovich and Immerwahr 1983; Schaufeli 2014).

Historically, communicators were influenced by the work of Maslow and his theory of the hierarchy of human needs (Maslow 1943). Maslow argued that people need to satisfy some basic physiological needs such as finding security, food and shelter before turning their minds to more psychologically fulfilling factors such as personal achievement (see Mullins 2013). In the workplace, Maslow's ideas would suggest that people fearful of losing their jobs or struggling to survive on their wages will probably not be too receptive to messages about innovation or the CEO's vision for the future. How-

ever, the concept might be of less use at explaining positive motivations; what makes people choose to work harder or more effectively?

Later work by Herzberg et al (1959) suggested that we have two types of motivation factors at work (see Mullins 2013). These he described as Hygiene (or Maintenance) factors and Motivator (or Growth) factors. Hygiene factors such as being paid properly, being treated fairly or being safe only matter when they are absent – they are a source of discontent rather than a basis for positive satisfaction. ‘Extrinsic’ (or external) motivating factors such as the opportunity for advancement or recognition, by contrast, add to the desire to work harder and better. The main contribution of Herzberg’s two-factor theory is that it enables jobs to be designed with ‘quality of work life’ in mind (Mullins 2013: 258). A communicator will understand that talking endlessly about pay and fairness will not automatically excite people. Rather, celebrating achievements or highlighting personal opportunities may make be more compelling messages when trying to create positive expectations and engagement.

Recent popular writing draws on the theory of ‘intrinsic motivation theory’ to highlight the three essential components that are needed to get workers enthused (Pink 2009). These motivations come from an individual’s desires for self-determination:

- Autonomy: the urge to be in charge of our own lives
- Mastery: the desire to keep improving the way we do something we care about
- Purpose: the drive to have a greater reason for doing what we do

Essentially, in order to get people to stay, to work harder and better, to say positive things about their employer and to support change, an organisation has to give them some sense of control, a chance to develop and something to believe in. Understanding human motivation and how it manifests itself in different organisations is key to the role of the internal communicator. At its most basic the IC professional has to produce con-

tent that people are going to want to read or view, but perhaps more significantly, the role involves advising leaders on how to interest and enthuse their people.

### ***Employer brands and employee value propositions***

When we begin to talk about motivation it quickly becomes clear that large parts of the ‘deal’ between an employer and a worker will rarely be formally defined. An employment contract may cover issues such as pay, bonuses and expected behaviour but may leave unsaid fundamental things like what it takes to be promoted, the culture of the organisation and the things that really matter inside the organisation. This unwritten or ‘psychological’ contract is increasingly addressed using the conventions of marketing or brand management and communicators are often called upon to help define or support an *Employer Brand* (Ambler and Barrow 1996) or *Employee Value Proposition*; tasks that would not be possible without a firm grasp of workplace motivation. Importantly, they hinge on the idea of trust: employees have to trust employers to keep their unwritten end of the bargain (Middlemiss 2011). When trust breaks down in a workplace, people are less willing to be flexible or change ways of working when necessary.

Communicators have an important role in maintaining trust in the workplace. Trust includes *cognitive* elements – actual delivery of the practical components such as pay or promotions – and *affective* components – the emotional attachments (Atkinson 2007). It seems that until the practical or *cognitive* elements are satisfied, the emotional trust cannot develop. But, it is exactly this emotional trust that is linked to employees enhancing their contribution to an organisation (Atkinson 2006).

Organisations now devote considerable time to defining their *Employee Value*

*Proposition*, thinking through its tangible (e.g pay rates) and intangible (e.g. workplace culture, corporate values or impact on the future employability of staff) elements. And they call on communicators to help articulate all of these components in a way that makes workers and potential employees feel able to speak positively, work harder and remain loyal.

### **Box 15.3**

#### **Defining employee engagement: the UK context**

A report to the UK government by MacLeod and Clarke (2009) is widely cited in discussions of employee engagement. The report defined employee engagement and the characteristics of an 'engaged organisation' as follows:

'We believe it is most helpful to see employee engagement as a workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organisation's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being.

'Engaged organisations have strong authentic values, with clear evidence of trust and fairness based on mutual respect, where two-way promises and commitments – between employers and staff – are understood, and are fulfilled.'

*Source:* MacLeod and Clarke 2009: 9

### **Think about 15.4**

#### **Your next job**

Think about your next job and what you would hope to gain from it. If you could choose from a selection of employment offers which of the following features would matter and in what order?

- Good pay
- Additional material benefits like a pension or healthcare

- A friendly team
- A supportive manager
- A chance to learn
- A good name to have on your CV
- A chance to make a difference to the world
- A nice place to work
- Being allowed to get on with the job
- Investment in your training
- The prospect of promotion
- Long term job security

- Something else

Once you had landed your dream job, what role would communication play in helping you feel that you were getting what you signed up for? Would you need to hear stories confirming that loyal employees had been promoted or given additional training? Would you want to see evidence that your work was changing lives for the better? Would it be useful to meet co-workers socially or informally to confirm that you have joined a supportive and collaborative organisation? How could internal communications influence your satisfaction?

## Planning internal communication

As with most branches of communication, practitioners are increasingly concerned with the impact that they have. Just as an advertising campaign is intended to make consumers buy a product and a health PR campaign might be designed to encourage a healthy lifestyle, internal communication is expected to promote specific actions. In the past, internal communicators may have been valued simply for their skill at producing good internal stories and great project management. Organisations now expect to see results and communicators are exhorted to think about *Outcomes* (the beneficial impact they should be having) rather than *Outputs* (the content that they produce). (See also Chapter

9 on Strategic Public Relations Planning and Chapter 10 on Public Relations Programme Evaluation.)

### **Setting objectives**

An opening question therefore in any communication planning is “what steps do we want people to take as a result of our communication?” As we said before, employee-related objectives might be to remain loyal to an organisation, to follow specific work instructions, to be external advocates or ambassadors, to collaborate more or to embrace some form of fundamental change (FitzPatrick 2016).

As a shorthand, many practitioners approach objective setting by laying out three essential outcomes that they would like to achieve. This is illustrated in Table 15.1 – three planning questions reflecting the communication practitioner’s interest in messages that elicit conative (doing), affective (emotional) and cognitive (thinking/knowing) responses (Gregory 2014). The approach suggests that we *do* things because we *feel* that they are a good idea because of what we *know*. Although human actions can have more subtle drivers, many communicators find this approach a useful general starting point for planning (FitzPatrick and Valskov 2015:46).

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE <b>DO</b> AS A RESULT OF OUR COMMUNI- CATION? <b>CONATIVE</b>	WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE <b>FEEL</b> OR BELIEVE AS A RESULT OF OUR COMMUNICATION? <b>AFFECTIVE</b>	WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE <b>KNOW</b> AS A RESULT OF OUR COM- MUNICATION? <b>COGNITIVE</b>
Are there specific behaviours that our organisation needs to promote, such as good cus-	What do people need to be- lieve in order to prompt the desired behaviours e.g that	What information do people need in order to shape their beliefs? This could be data



tomer service, safe working or selling new products?	good customer service matters, that safety is a personal responsibility or that selling a new product will generate better commission?	about customer satisfaction, case studies about safety incidents or details of a new sales commission structure.
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**Table 15.1: Three planning questions**

### **Think about 15.5**

#### **Getting employees to follow procedures**

How might the IT department of an organisation persuade employees to follow security procedures? While most people, including students, normally have to sign a User Agreement before they can use a workplace or college network, bad practices such as password sharing or downloading suspect programmes are rife.

Clearly, people are given information about what is acceptable use and by signing a user agreement they could be said to know the risks and rules. But bad practice in many workplaces suggests that knowledge of the rules alone is not enough to get people to do the right thing. What communication steps could an IT department take to increase concern for observing rules and encouraging the right behaviours?

#### **Feedback**

Communication might focus on the consequences to individuals and the organisation of breaches of digital security. Messages about the likelihood of cyber crime, for example, could make people take their responsibilities seriously.

### ***Two-way communication and impact***

There is a widely held belief that people, in Western economies with strong notions of democracy, individualism, and having a voice, are less likely to adopt desired behav-

iours if they are communicated in the form of an order or through one-way broadcast messages. Popular writers and researchers on leadership communication stress the value of meaningful ‘conversations’, and dialogue rather than the delivery of speeches or monologues with no scope for feedback (Men 2014; Murray 2014; Illes and Mathews 2015). There are two main reasons why this is likely to be true.

First, even if communication were simply a process with a transmitter and a receiver, few pieces of information are understood on the first time of telling since many complex factors are likely to affect message comprehension, including a good deal of filtering according to effort, motivation and interest (Früh 1980 cited in Windahl and Signitzer 2008: 181). Commonly, as participants in a social network, we need to check we have understood something and we may want to see if other people have received the same message as well what they think about it in order to develop a shared understanding of the message (Rogers and Kincaid 1981). Impactful internal communication processes therefore allow people to ask questions and perhaps discuss a piece of news. When a message is sent just by email, there may be no opportunity to ask questions. A team meeting would, by contrast, be a great place to test if a message is understood.

However, a second reason to promote ‘conversations’ is that people are more likely to do something if they are part of a genuine dialogue from the outset and have had a hand in deciding what actions are necessary (Quirke 1995; Smythe 2007). Essentially, if employees have been consulted and their views taken into account, there is a powerful emotional motivation to execute the plan (Kotter 2014).

In practice, few organisations have the resource, capacity or patience to involve all employees in developing their overall strategy. However, there is often considerable scope for teams to decide how a strategy will be implemented in their local area.

Much effort is commonly invested in employee communications in supporting managers to hold such conversations as illustrated by Case Study 15.1.

### ***Social media inside organisations***

There is much interest in exploring the role that social media inside organisations can play in collecting ideas and promoting ‘conversations’ and involvement. Recent years have seen the growth of many tools designed to mimic inside organisations the widely available social networking tools that exist outside (Lombardi 2015: 156). Lombardi highlights that internal (or enterprise) social networks are typically being considered as vehicles for:

- Co-creation - bringing together people to solve a particular problem or challenge
- Collaboration – enabling people with a similar problem or as members of a work or project group to support each other with advice and information
- Community – helping people with work or recreational interests to connect with each other for predominantly social purposes.

In her writing Lombardi also points out that managing these social networks inside organisations requires specific skills and clarity of roles. Without care, organisations can invest considerable sums in technologies only to find limited usage or involvement.

#### **Box 15.4**

##### **Social media inside organisations**

Social media has generated discussion in recent years among employee communicators

and several tools have been developed specifically to promote conversations among colleagues at work. Many of these mirror externally available tools – for example Yammer has strong similarities to Twitter. And Facebook has developed a secure version that can be used inside the closed IT networks of organisations.

Most of the literature on the subject is very recent so it may be too early to evaluate the lasting impact of such tools on issues like performance, collaboration, retaining valued team members or generating external advocacy. A critically minded observer may therefore want to ask questions about impact and participation rates; is a particular tool helping the performance of an organisation and what proportion of employees are using it?

Research from external communication may also be instructive as well. For example, there is a suggestion that people remember information better if they get it from a magazine or a newspaper rather than reading it online (Santana, Livingstone and Yoon 2013). Many organisations are also nervous about the risks of providing a general platform for employees to talk to each other. Although staff are quite free to express themselves in personal conversations, the thought of having candid opinions on screen for everyone to see may be a significant obstacle for some leaders. There is also a limit to the impact that social media can have in generating some of the benefits that exist in the external world because of the size of most workforces. The sheer number of people using Facebook, Twitter or Instagram brings a dynamic that is hard to replicate in a workplace of a few hundred colleagues.

Nonetheless, advocates of internal social media point to the potential and significant benefits which new communications tools can bring. If the exact impacts are as yet unknown, the proliferation of tools and the widespread use of social media outside the workplace would suggest that it is likely to have some influence.

## **Mini case study 15.1**

### **Social media making a difference internally at Pearson**

Pearson is a large and complicated company supplying services to education. Over 40,000 staff, working for different brands within the group are involved in publishing textbooks (like this one), providing tests and examinations and the technologies used by teachers and students around the world. The group realised in 2011 that it needed its people, regardless of business area or location, to be able to collaborate and have access to common information about where Pearson was going and its plans.

Staff now use a social network called *Neo* which uses a commercially available platform called *Jive* ([www.jivesoftware.com](http://www.jivesoftware.com)). *Neo* offers a chance to track down colleagues with useful experience and know how, spaces for sharing files and videos as well as areas for announcements and discussions. Staff use it to hear the latest news from the organisation, to make their own comments on developments and to hold conversations on line about work and non-work matters.

Kim England, Pearson's Global Community Director, aims to keep discussion and debate flowing but stresses the importance of getting regular staff enthused about the possibilities of the Platform. "When we launched, we worked with enthusiasts and champions. We wanted them to discover how to make *Neo* work for them, rather than being told what it was for and not for". She explains that the value of a social tool inside an organisation lies in getting people to actively seek each other out and have discussions about business challenges and possible solutions. Importantly, it enables people to make connections outside their day to day network; people form communities that connect with each other across countries, brands and businesses.

Initially, England reports, that there was some concern among managers about a social platform in the workplace. There were fears about staff wasting time, saying inappropriate things or, more simply, there being no real value to the organisation from a multi-million dollar investment in technology. "We spent a lot of energy", she explains, "briefing managers about how the platform works and we came up with some clear guidelines about what *Neo* should and shouldn't be used for. It also helped that the CEO was a big fan from the very beginning".

Showing results is important for any investment and social media is no different, “We were able to share usage rate and progressively we have been able to replace around 150 different intra-nets which were costly to maintain”, says Kim, “but we also had an impact by running regular campaigns to find successes; for example we run annual awards for things like the best Cost Savings and Best Innovation – results that matter to our leaders.”

Importantly, *Neo*’s openness means that leaders are engaging with staff as never before; talking and sharing are seen to make the difference in a complex, multi national business. “When people are not ready to engage in debate it really sticks out now”, England explains. “In the past people may have thought that knowledge was power; now we say ‘collaboration is influence’”.

*Source:* by kind permission of Pearson UK.

With thanks to Kim England, Pearson.

### ***Understanding the diversity of internal publics***

As with any branch of communication, practitioners need to have a good understanding of the stakeholders or publics (Vercic et al 2012) with whom they are working. Internal communication is no different and in fact has to cope with a number of special dimensions. It may be argued that employees are naturally a more knowledgeable stakeholder group than most others (see Box 15.4). They know what works and what does not work in the organisation and they know its history. They will know that management have been trying to close a particular site for years and they will remember promises made decades ago. As a result, they are often more demanding consumers of internal information and potentially more critical or sceptical of corporate “spin” (Theofilou and Watson 2014).

Official communication is also not the only reliable source of information in the organisation. People may like to receive information from their trade unions, and ru-

mours from colleagues very often travel faster than the 'official' version of events. Sociological studies of organisational culture and resistance to it provide interesting insights into the dark side of employee behaviours. For example, negative word-of-mouth communication among frontline workers could be damaging to company performance (Harris and Ogbonna 2012). Staff also draw inferences from their experiences and what they see: an organisation might claim to value diversity, for example, but staff will reach their own conclusions when the bullying of gay colleagues is ignored or if the board is dominated by white middle-aged men.

Although they may work for the same organisation, a workforce may not perceive things in a uniform way. Marketeers may view the world differently from finance people; factory workers may not share similar interests to maintenance engineers visiting customers. This is because different occupational groups will share their own norms and values, possibly due to the specific professional training that they have received, or simply because they are located in a part of the organisation that is remote from central services (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2010).

A communicator needs to understand the diversity that exists in their organisation and be ready to help leaders tailor messages and reflect the needs of individual internal publics (Edmondson et al 2009). As discussed earlier in this chapter, internal communicators need to be aware of what motivates their colleagues. When communicators know why their colleagues come to work and what enthuses them, they can begin to shape communications that appeal to them and encourage the relevant actions that support the organisational culture (see Box 15.6).

### ***Leadership communication***

It is not difficult to find examples where poor leadership communication has undermined trust inside organisations: the business pages of newspapers frequently report

disastrous comments by senior executives and their impact on their workforce. Equally, leaders who model a personal commitment to good communication are often mentioned and celebrated.

Communicators are often involved in helping senior leaders to lead. Usually, this will mean ensuring that senior managers' visions and plans are understood. However, as we have argued earlier in this chapter, effective communication involves more than top down communication, ensuring that messages are received and understood by employees. Therefore it is worth examining two key concepts of leadership which are relevant to internal communication.

The first, and perhaps most popular form of leadership, is 'transformational leadership' whereby leaders provide compelling visions and plans to their followers and ensure that listening and dialogue on these plans takes place in order to achieve their objectives. However, transformational leadership has been criticised for its over-emphasis on leaders and less on listening to and involving employees in making decisions (Tourish 2013).

A second approach to leadership is 'communicative leadership'. Here, a leader consciously places emphasis on communication and empowerment. This type of leader engages "employees in dialogue, actively shares and seeks feedback, practices participative decision making, and is perceived as open and involved" (Johansson et al 2014: 155).

The key difference between the two approaches to leadership is the distribution of power. Empowerment is when there is greater opportunity for workers to influence decision-making. Examples of empowerment and 'communicative leadership' are commonly found in Scandinavian countries, as demonstrated in Case Study 15.1.

The challenge for the internal communicator is to know when and how to support their senior leaders. Naturally, there are times when it is appropriate for a CEO to lead



communications and others, such as when the subject is trivial or needs much detailed local, or team-level explanation. Any communication programme will need to include careful analysis of the role for the CEO and the channels through which they communicate. For example, a major organisational change will demand that leaders are visible to the workforce and are able to discuss the changes with honesty in terms of how they affect employees. In this case, a communicator is likely to advise on the importance of face to face communication, and a good leader will recognise the value of this advice if communication is their priority.

### ***The importance of local managers***

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the role of line managers or supervisors in effective employee communication processes has been a preoccupation of practitioners and researchers for some time. Writers on management processes have, for a long time advocated making communication a clear responsibility for people with leadership roles (Buckingham and Coffman 1999) Processes, often based on military models of hierarchical information and order giving were widely recommended (McGeough 1995). This has been referred to as treating managers like animated noticeboards (FitzPatrick and Valskov 2014:122).

Over time, thinking has evolved. Managers are more commonly expected to be flexible in how they manage conversations with their teams with an increasing emphasis on problem solving and discussion, rather than the delivery of instructions (D'Aprix 2011; Illes and Mathews 2015). Managers matter in the communication process because of their ability to explain things in terms that are relevant to the team around them. A corporate announcement about a new company strategy, for example, will need to be translated into practical terms for the people who need to implement it. A local

manager is able to explain how the announcement changes the work that people do and can be available to provide clarification in terms that their team will understand.

However, managers are not always the best channel of internal communication; there are limits to their usefulness. A manager might be the ideal person to talk about changes to shift patterns or efficiency, but perhaps will be ill-equipped to explain the technicalities of a pension scheme. Sinickas (2004) suggests that no one expects a manager to be an expert in every single topic that might come up and that employees generally prefer to hear from the person who is the most knowledgeable on a particular subject. In many, but – crucially - in not all cases, that could be the local manager or supervisor.

An internal communications team will therefore be involved in making sure managers and supervisors are ready to communicate. FitzPatrick (2008) argues that line manager communication works best when effort has been invested in:

- Explaining to managers that communication is one of their responsibilities
- Briefing or educating managers about the issues which need discussion
- Providing training in communication skills
- Providing materials that managers can use in team meetings
- Gathering feedback and making sure senior leaders

#### **Think about 15.6**

##### **Why are line managers trusted more than organisations?**

In a workplace, who would you expect to be trusted more by regular employees? The chief executive officer (CEO) or a local supervisor/team leader?

##### **Feedback**

On the one hand the CEO will know about the direction of an organisation, how well it is

performing overall and what plans exist for the future. Yet a local manager will have a personal relationship with the team. They will know about their likes and their concerns. There will be a shared history; team members will know when a manager can be depended upon to keep their promises and they will know how to 'read' them. The CEO can seem remote; perhaps being based far away. A local manager is local and present.

## Outcomes rather than outputs: choosing effective channels

Every organisation needs to have ways to deliver messages. A communications manager will commonly want several different channels at their disposal so that they can ensure that information and feedback touches every corner of the workforce in ways that are appropriate and accessible. For example, an online forum may be popular with office workers but have little uptake in the factory where no one has access to computers. A poster series may be an exciting or powerful way to remind people about workplace safety, but ineffective at explaining detailed changes to company rules and procedures. Additionally, channels themselves may have several different purposes. The company magazine may not be much use for sharing urgent news but could be fantastic for building a sense of community or providing deep background on current issues..

Broadly speaking an organisation will want to have channels to:

- **Push** out information such as news, company results or changes to policies and procedure
- Allow staff to **Pull** out information as they need it
- Aid **Understanding** because we often want to check what we think we heard or get help to see the personal implications of an announcement from head office
- Promote **Community**; helping people feel that they are part of something and perhaps able to seek support or ideas from their colleagues

- Generate **Debate** about issues and give employees a space to ask questions

### Think about 15.7

#### Communicating bad and good news: Is the medium the message?

In internal communication, as with other branches of communication and PR, *how* you say something is often as important as *what* you say.

Imagine you work for an organisation that announces job losses to the media before staff or that you hear news of your sacking via a text message. How would you feel and how might that influence how you feel about your employer?

Or perhaps, you work for a very big company but the chief executive comes and finds you in person to thank you for a recent project. What impact might that have on your commitment to your job?

#### Feedback

From an IC communicator's perspective, there are practical constraints which have to be observed. You might want to ensure everyone hears a piece of news at the same time or you might have to observe financial regulations about telling the local stock exchange before anyone else. However, putting yourself in the shoes of the employee will help you to think through possible emotional reactions to how a message is perceived using different channels.

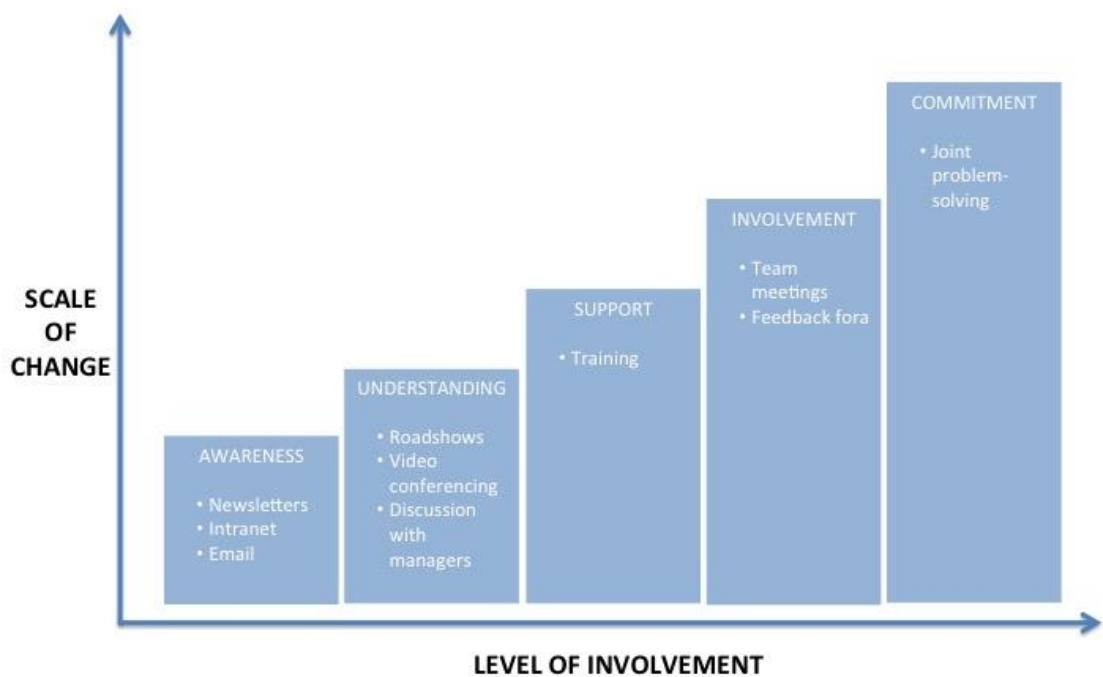
A communication manager might also be responsible for promoting collaboration across the organisation. Not every IC team has this role but, if they do, it is likely that specific channels will be dedicated to helping people share ideas of work problems.

PURPOSE	COMMON CHANNELS OR MEDIA
PUSH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff emails</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News pages on intranet</li> <li>• Newsletters or magazines</li> <li>• Internal TV</li> <li>• Noticeboards or digital displays</li> <li>• Memos left on desks</li> <li>• SMS or text messaging</li> </ul>
PULL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intranet</li> <li>• Video content on intranet</li> <li>• “Change Champions” – well briefed colleagues who have a deep understanding of issues or events</li> </ul>
UNDERSTANDING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team meetings</li> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Face to face events (e.g. lunch with the CEO, internal road-shows)</li> </ul>
COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intranet news</li> <li>• Events</li> <li>• Collective activity e.g. CSR</li> <li>• Instagram</li> <li>• Yammer (or similar)</li> </ul>
DEBATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yammer (or similar)</li> <li>• On-line forums including webinars</li> <li>• Face to face events (conferences or focus groups)</li> </ul>

**Table 15.2 Common internal communication channels and their uses**

Previously we mentioned that employees are more likely to support change if they are involved in its planning and development. But it is not always practical to involve everyone so an organisation will want to identify those groups who need to be more deeply involved than others perhaps because of their skills, expertise or authority. Accordingly, different groups will need different approaches to communication. For colleagues who only need to be informed about something a memo or intranet post could be enough. Figure 15.2 illustrates the idea that if you need people to support an idea you will need a mechanism for engaging them in a conversation or perhaps even help to design the solution.



**Figure 15.2** The greater the level of personal change, the greater the need to involve people in the decision (*source: Quirke 1995: 128*)

### Mini case study 15.3

#### Face to face still matters at UK financial regulator

Three and half thousand people work for the Financial Conduct Authority, the UK's regulator for financial matters. With the remit to protect consumers, ensure the UK financial system is run with integrity and promote competition there is a diverse workforce based in London and Edinburgh which include highly skilled financial experts as well as people in operational roles.

Communicating with the FCA's employees is the job of a specialist IC team who have a range of channels at their disposal.

A well established intranet is the principal medium for sending out general messages as well as providing a reference point for colleagues to catch up on news and other information. Tools such as posters, leaflets and desk drops are used but sparingly because of a commitment to sustainability and value for money.

Explaining the FCA's strategy and how well the organisation is performing has increasingly involved giving the CEO and the most senior leaders platforms to talk directly to people. The CEO has an internal blog which is more effective at reaching staff than general email which can get lost alongside all the other messages competing for attention. In addition, short videos are valued by the IC team for putting a human face on potentially complex announcements. Overall, this preference for face to face communication is a central plank in the IC strategy.

Senior leaders meet weekly to discuss current priorities with the CEO. The meeting agenda is managed by the IC team who also draft a briefing note for leaders to use for consistent communication after the meeting. When major announcements are needed, much effort goes into preparing the FCA's 350 managers so that they can answer questions from staff and ensure that the wider context is fully understood.

These briefings either happen as specific events or at the *Manager Conference* which provides an opportunity to network. Managers also receive *Manager Essentials* – a monthly email digest of people-related issues that help them to be effective. The IC team know that over 80% of managers normally open the email.

For the wider workforce, a series of events called *Exco Unplugged* has been developed to help people at all levels to raise and discuss current concerns in an informal and candid environment. And every year, all staff are invited to attend the *Annual Strategy Meeting* when plans for the coming year are shared and discussed in a conference format.

So far [2015], internal social media isn't used widely at the FCA. There is some experimentation with a micro-blogging tool to promote collaboration but the focus of communica-

tions is still heavily on providing opportunities for people to talk in person to each other.

IC manager Ben Firth emphasises that his role involves ensuring that communications goes up to the leadership and is not simply one way. “We’ve developed channels to promote a conversation and our measurement activity enables us to report on what is getting through and how people are reacting; it provides us with the intelligence we need to tell leaders things which they might not know through other channels”.

## **The importance of evidence in IC planning and evaluation**

As with every branch of communication, evidence matters when planning and evaluating internal communication (see Chapter 10 Public relations programme research and evaluation). While personal judgement and experience helps the communication manager to develop the right instincts about messages and tone of voice, facts and figures are needed for securing budgets, defining the best approaches and understanding what is working (and what is not). Later on we talk about the importance of deep understanding and empathy as one of the core competencies for successful practitioners.

Internal communications managers will approach the tasks of developing understanding and gathering evidence in a number of ways. These include using a range of informal and formal research methods listed in Table 15.3. Some of the most common methods for evidence-gathering in internal communication are discussed below.



Many organisations conduct an annual survey of their employees (Bridger 2015). These surveys will commonly address issues such as overall morale and commitment. Routinely they will ask a few questions about communication and will give a limited insight into whether staff are receiving the information that they need to do their jobs. However, many staff surveys are limited in their usefulness for internal communicators; mainly because employees don't take them seriously; because the survey only touches on a few aspects of the internal communication mix or because the study only happens once a year (Walker 2012). Further, many of these studies are disconnected from the actual effectiveness of the organisation (Coco et al 2011). Just because the survey results are positive, it does not mean that everything is running smoothly. Additionally, measuring an issue through a survey does not mean that action has been taken to improve it (Bridger 2015).

Communicators therefore tend to look for a mix of evidence that tells them what people are thinking, what channels are working and what people are hearing from their communication. Since communication is just one of the factors that influence attitudes and behaviours in the workplace, it is helpful to understand what else matters to employees.

PURPOSE	COMMON APPROACHES
Understanding internal demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing HR data about employee numbers, grades and locations</li> <li>• Tracking HR information such as sickness rates or resignations</li> </ul>
Understanding employee attitudes and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting out and about</li> <li>• Work shadowing</li> <li>• 'Temperature checks' (mini-surveys run at specific points in the year)</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Monitoring internal forums for comments</li> <li>• Annual staff surveys and attitude surveys</li> <li>• Reviewing feedback from line managers</li> <li>• Deep statistical analysis of other surveys</li> </ul>
Communications processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications audits</li> <li>• Monitoring channel usage (e.g. webstats, email)</li> </ul>

	opening rates, attendance at staff meetings) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveying users of individual channels</li> <li>• User focus groups</li> <li>• Qualitative content analysis of upward feedback</li> </ul>
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**Table 15. 3 General approaches to information gathering**

## ***Approaches to information gathering***

### ***Building informal knowledge of the workforce***

Communicators are routinely advised to spend time away from their desks talking to colleagues (FitzPatrick and Valskov 2015). If the value of a specialist advisor lies in knowing stakeholders better than anyone else, meeting and listening to colleagues has to be a priority for any internal communication practitioner. From this experience, the practitioner will become well aware of the size and shape of the workforce. Desk research into information about location, numbers, ages, gender, languages spoken is essential. Additionally, it is possible to draw conclusions about morale and commitment from data about things such as staff sickness rates, customer complaints or labour disputes (Walker 2012).

### ***Monitoring channel usage***

A communicator will be interested in knowing what tools or channels are working and how to manage them to maximise their usefulness to the organisation and to its internal publics. There is much to be learnt from information acquired through desk-research, such as monitoring the number of people who are reading particular types of article on an intranet. Modern email programmes can tell you how many (i.e. quantitative information) people are bothering to read the latest message from the CEO and which of the links interest them enough to open. As well as tracking actual usage, the communicator

can learn a lot from the reactions that staff have to communication (i.e. qualitative information). What comments are they leaving in on-line forums or what are the questions that they ask at open staff meetings? Leaders will often ask for immediate feedback on specific communication activity and the internal communication team is best placed to explain what is working and where more effort is needed.

### ***Managing formal internal communication research***

Using informal research methods such as getting out and spending time work shadowing are essential approaches that help build an awareness of the perspectives of colleagues. Additionally, a communicator will want to formalise continuing information gathering. Broadly speaking, communicators have the choice of *qualitative* research, such as focus groups and interviews; or *quantitative* tools, such as surveys (Walker 2009). The practices are not so very different from those used in external communication research. (See also Chapter 10 Public Relations Research and Evaluation.)

In general, designing research requires some essential skills in order to ensure that the findings are useful and credible. Commissioning, or outsourcing, research from an external agency might be the best choice to ensure that the research is carried out professionally, particularly if in-house research skills are limited. There are a range of commercial organisations who can help an internal communicator manage the process and they bring the benefit of experience and objectivity. If budgets are tight, however, the only option available to a communication manager will be to utilise in-house research skills. A communication manager will need to define the purpose of the study and prepare a proper brief to ensure that the results are of value regardless of whether the work is done internally or outsourced (Walker 2012).

***Explore 15.1*****Outsourcing research**

Go on to the internet and look for firms that conduct internal communication research. What do these firms offer to the IC specialist? What information do they require from their clients in order to undertake a research project?

***Preparing a research brief***

As well as clearly defining the aim and purpose of the research study – for example, is to gain insight into employees' opinions of a new website to evaluate its usefulness? Or is the research more comprehensive, covering all the channels of communication? In addition, it is important to consider ethical and cultural issues which will help limit bias in the results.

***Confidentiality and anonymity***

Often employees are asked to express opinions which they might fear could damage their workplace relationships and or even long-term job prospects. Even when such a fear is unfounded, the researcher should be aware that responses could be unreliable. Therefore significant steps to assure anonymity should be taken. This might include employing an external contractor, limiting the detail with which groups are reported on or simply asking fewer questions about the participant which could allow them to be identified.

***Action***

Employees expect something to happen as a result of their contribution. Declining response rates in employee surveys are often due to staff knowing that the whole exercise is a waste of time so it is important to report back to them on what happened as a result of their comments.

### *Culture*

While organisations tend to develop their own corporate cultures, they may also be shaped by the social and cultural norms of organisational subcultures, occupational cultures and national cultures (Hofstede and Hofstede 2010). For example, workers in China may approach a questionnaire very differently to their Dutch colleagues; engineers might behave very differently in a focus group to HR professionals and older staff may have a different approach to digital media to younger team members. (See Box 15.6 Organisations and Cultures). A researcher has to recognise the potential for cultural bias inside a workplace.

## **Box 15.6**

### **Organisations and cultures**

Organisations and their cultures have been defined and interpreted in many different ways and continue to fascinate researchers. Yet they are essential for internal communicators to understand. Among the most widely cited analyses is the work of Edgar Schein who argued that while first encounters of an organisation might reveal some aspects of culture – for example, open plan offices, informal dress and enthusiastic staff, it is the underlying ‘cultural assumptions’ that should be understood to explain an organisation’s culture and possible source of conflict or misunderstanding (Schein 2010). Underlying assumptions, or norms, are learned and tacitly understood between groups of workers and may be based on past experience or the ideas of a group leader. For example, Schein (2010: 12) found that engineers at Amoco held the assumption that they did not have to “go out and sell themselves” because “good work should

speak for itself". The engineers' assumptions may have run parallel to very different assumptions held by Amoco's senior executives.

Researchers note that while organisations espouse a common **corporate culture** through values statements, it is groups of people, known as subcultures, who hold a 'shared interpretation of their organisation' which 'differentiates them from other groups of employees' (Conrad and Poole 1998: 117). Organisational subcultures might include *professional*, *administrative* and *customer interface* groups (Hofstede and Hofstede 2010).

The challenge for communicators arises when there are 'cultural rifts': large gaps that open up when a group of workers (e.g. doctors) has significantly different perspectives and concerns about an issue from another group (e.g. senior executives). Organisational cultures and subcultures are also likely to be influenced by a range of intercultural norms or assumptions arising from national cultures, gender, religion, class, and generational differences (Hofstede and Hofstede 2010). In an increasingly globalised business environment, it is therefore vital for communicators to be sensitive to cultural diversity and dissimilarity (Banks 2002; Kent and Taylor 2011).

### ***Telling the story: reporting on data-gathering***

Employees can often be cynical about data gathering because they believe that nothing ever happens to the information they have shared (Walker 2014). When people doubt the value of answering questions or taking part in discussion groups, participation rates suffer as does the reliability of the insights being collected. A communicator therefore needs to generate demonstrable action from any data gathered. This involves producing a summary of the results in a format that enables senior leaders and colleagues to take decisions. A report might therefore cover a list of actions from the research undertaken: what products, materials or events have been produced and for whom (FitzPatrick and Valskov 2014). Additionally, it would be helpful to report on upcoming issues and po-

tential risks (reflecting a deep knowledge of the audiences). When decisions have been taken and actions implemented, it is wise to tell study participants what happened and how their feedback helped shape policy. This might be no more complicated than a reference here or there in intranet articles or a thank you note from a senior manager.

## **Professionalisation: attributes, competencies and skills in internal communication**

In recent years internal communication has developed a body of specialist professional practitioners who enjoy a growing status among their peers in other branches of PR. The UK Chartered Institute of Public Relations' IC section is one of its largest and most popular groups: 931 CIPR members out of a total institute membership of 11,000 professionals subscribed to the CIPR Inside Group (CIPR 2015). This reflects in part the importance placed on the specialism by directors of communication. Furthermore, research across Europe routinely identifies internal communication as a priority for leading communication managers (Zerfass et al 2010).

Within the specialism of internal communication there are a broad variety of skills practised ranging from technical tasks such as writing and project management through to more strategic roles providing sensitive advice to the most senior leaders in organisations. Therefore the attributes, competencies and skills that a practitioner needs can be very varied. Research undertaken in 2007 (Dewhurst and FitzPatrick 2007) found that practitioners emphasised the importance of advisory and managerial skills. Although being able to produce high quality materials and write well were deemed valuable, these represented only one set of competencies from a list of 12 core areas that included the ability to develop relationships, understand the overall business, conduct research and to manage projects. In terms of the ability to develop relationships, recent studies highlight

the personal attribute of empathy, or being able to step into another's shoes, for internal communication managers (Jin 2010; Tench and Moreno 2015). An aspiring internal communicator can therefore expect that professional development will involve recognising the importance of personal attributes alongside gaining wider competencies and management skills, such as data-gathering, that might be applicable in other disciplines outside the world of PR.

## **Case Study 15.1**

### **Pharma giant Novo Nordisk focuses on making leaders better communicators**

Together with a willingness to use a variety of modern and sophisticated tools, the communication team at Novo Nordisk still places a heavy emphasis on supporting leaders to tell the company story. Copenhagen-based Novo Nordisk is one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in the world, focusing on the treatment of diabetes and haemophilia. Its products play a major role in the long-term health of millions of people around the world. The firm is known for its leadership style which driven by very clear corporate values . High expectations are placed on the 40,000 or so people it employs in 79 countries; it's a footprint that has expanded rapidly in recent decades. Its staff include people working in factories, highly qualified scientists and a strong sales force.

#### **How internal communication is organised**

The name of the department gives a strong clue to the focus of the internal communications team. The central Organisational Communication team is part of the wider corporate communications function. The group head of communication is a member of the company's overall Executive Management Team; reflecting the importance the company places on getting its message across internally and externally. The ten person Organisational Communication team runs the internal channels that would be expected in a modern organisation. They have a



well-developed intranet which has a central news role and the facility for local business units and functions to add their own updates and information. There is also a high quality print magazine, a mobile platform for news sharing and the capability to produce events and video. Additionally, around the company there is an extensive and organised network of communication specialists partnering with local business and central functions like IT, manufacturing, HR, Quality and R&D. Much effort is put into keeping these specialists connected to developments at head office so that they can create local programmes that reflect core messages and the company values. Although the central head office team does not control these locally employed specialists, they offer support and guidelines to ensure a consistent quality for communication.

Further, within the central team, there is a particular focus on developing the communication effectiveness of managers across the company. Mats Bark, Senior Advisor Organisational Communication says, "Our most senior leaders are very much engaged in explaining the strategy; and it is part of our core company philosophy that people feel involved and engaged. Real engagement is not something that you can run from Head Office - our challenge is to make sure that middle managers are equipped to take the high level messages and turn them into something that is relevant locally".

"So at the centre we use our channels to spread information widely", he explains, "but it is when the local leaders stop and take time to discuss the strategy that we see real understanding and enthusiasm; we provide the awareness, but it's your leader who ensures you understand and that you know what you are meant to do".

### **Tools for managers**

The corporate team has developed a wide ranging toolkit to support managers in their communications role. On-line, leaders can find toolkits around specific topics such as the company performance and strategy, competitive intelligence, business ethics and products in development. There is also advice on issues such as managing change or holding more effective team meetings and examples of good practice from around the company. "Most of the things that we promote are not radical really", says Mats, "we just want to promote local conversations and helping leaders make the time to communicate."

Additionally, the company has a series of training courses to offer leaders who want to develop their communication skills. Four times a year there is a centrally organised training programme but many business units prefer to have it delivered locally. Simpler training is also available through the communications network; there has been an investment in ensuring that local communications managers are able to run training when it is needed.

### **The communication effectiveness review**

A key tool in the team's armoury is the Communications Effectiveness Review (CER), a standardised internal listening and consulting process to help local leaders understand how communication can support local business priorities. A CER is focused on an individual business area or subsidiary and follows a set of common steps in close collaboration with the local general manager, HR Director and communication colleagues.

"We're a science-based company, so data matters around here", explains Bark, which is why the CER begins with an on-line survey of everyone working in the business under consideration. The study does not look at the impact of general channels but rather explores communication outcomes such as awareness of the business strategy and how well people see the link between their own jobs and company goals.

The review also involves a series of interviews with the local management team. These conversations look at how communication fit into their business plans and how satisfied they are with the processes. A series of focus group discussions are also included. Typically, office staff, field-based employees and middle managers will have sessions which allow the review team to get a deeper understanding of the issues that are emerging from the survey and the research with leaders.

Finally, the review team run an extended workshop meeting with the whole management team to discuss findings and to make plans. “We’re not there to impose things”, explains Bark, “our aim is to help the local leaders develop communications solutions to business problems; solutions that they can own and which work for them”. He also stresses the importance of reporting back findings to employees “At the next available opportunity, there is an all-employee meeting in the business when the leaders reflect back what they have heard and what they plan to do next. It’s a question of credibility and trust”. About a year later there is the opportunity to run a follow-up survey when the business gets to see if there have been real improvements. Says Mats, “we normally see real change in the quality of communication; which is why leaders are normally pleased to have us visit them for a CER”.

### **Conclusion**

Novo Nordisk has always looked at managers as a key part of the communication operation and over 20 years or so has been able to see the benefits of effective local leaders. Says Bark, “It’s part of our company philosophy to have high expectations of managers at every level; they are expected to deliver results but in line with our very strong values. Having engaged employees is part of the formula that has made us so successful.”

*Used with permission from Novo Nordisk*

### **Summary**

This chapter has examined the growing specialism of internal communication in organisations. It has discussed the key considerations and skills for internal communicators in helping organisations achieve better relationships with their employees. We argue that a sound understanding of the diversity of internal publics, as well as their motivations and concerns – based on evidence – is the starting point for carefully planned communication. We also argue that good communication programmes involve listening as well as informing and have

discussed the role of the communicator in helping managers and leaders to create work cultures that enable employees to have a voice.

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Figure 15.1: Voice, professionalism and propaganda (source: Yaxley and Ruck 2015)

