

## **READ MY LIPS: Leaders, Supervisors, and Culture Are the Foundations of Strategic Employee Communications**

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***Abstract:** Decades of research confirm that leaders, supervisors, and organizational culture are crucial foundation stones for strategic employee communications. Yet, many organizations have weak communication foundations and don't act on this research knowledge. As a result, levels of employee trust, engagement, retention, and other performance indicators remain distressingly low. This article explores these three foundation stones, identifies 17 reasons why organizations ignore the research findings, and includes a list of 48 checkpoints that practitioners can use to assess the relative strength of the communication foundations in their organizations.*

### ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***

Communication research has long documented the crucial importance of leaders, supervisors, and organizational culture in strategic employee communications.

This article explores the three foundation stones that are crucial to strategic employee communication, identifies 17 reasons why organizations ignore the research findings, and includes a list of 48 checkpoints that practitioners can use to assess the relative strength of the communication foundations in their organizations.

The early history of strategic employee communication dates back more than 80 years, when researchers at the Western Electric Company in Chicago discovered that a worker's performance improves not because of workplace variables, but rather because of interaction with employees.

In the early 1950's, this idea was further established when Pelz found that the most important feature for supervisors wasn't style, but rather *power*—defined as having a voice with, and being listened to by executives, as well as being empowered with strategic information.

Although these earlier studies provided clear guidance for employee communication practice, few research studies have been conducted to explain why organizations don't embrace this research knowledge and act on it. This is surprising because such an embrace could lead to real payoffs in productivity, engagement, retention, and financial returns, as well as in social relations and cultural richness.

This article examines the three foundation stones that are crucial to strategic employee communication—the qualities and influences of 1) leaders, 2) front-line supervisors, and 3)

organizational culture. They are antecedents for successful programs dealing with many communication issues—employee engagement, trust, onboarding, retention, change management, branding, and so forth.

The article also discusses the 800-pound gorilla in the employee communication debate, delving into the reasons why more organizations don't do certain kinds research even though best practices clearly indicate these studies might improve employee communication effectiveness. The article suggests 17 possible reasons why organizations avoid these research opportunities and culminates with a list of 48 checkpoints that practitioners can use to evaluate the relative strength and quality of the three foundation stones in their organizations.

## **READ MY LIPS: Leaders, Supervisors, and Culture Are the Foundations of Strategic Employee Communications**

### **Preface**

Researchers at the Western Electric Company in Chicago reached a startling conclusion 80 years ago about worker performance. Examining the influences of factory lighting and other workplace variables on production levels, the researchers discovered these factors had little effect on production, which increased in both the test and control groups. They concluded the positive effects were a result of their own attention to employees, with whom they interacted closely during the studies (Hawthorne Studies, 1924-1932). The workers' performance improved because they felt more informed, involved, and valued (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

Two decades later, Donald Pelz (1952) revealed an iron-strong link between employee productivity and informed and communicative supervisors. At a time when leadership studies emphasized style above all else, Pelz found the most important feature for supervisors wasn't style, but rather *power*—defined as having a voice with, and being listened to by executives, and being empowered with strategic information. Supervisors with power who shared information regularly with employees produced an increase in job performance and satisfaction, the so-called "Pelz Effect" (Jablin, 1980).

Older communication studies like these are often lost in the flood of new research. Newer studies are attractive because the world has changed dramatically. Globalization and the arrival of the digital age, for example, have added critical new dimensions—think volume, velocity, and variety of information—to communication in and out of the workplace. In addition, organizational demographics have changed, organizations are flatter, teams are the primary work structure, and communication is fast, multidirectional, and continuous.

Nevertheless, some old concepts in employee communication research are still vital to successful practice. This article makes the case that research has told us forever that three foundation stones are crucial to strategic employee communication—the qualities and influences of 1) leaders, 2) front-line supervisors, and 3) organizational culture. They are antecedents for

successful programs dealing with many communication issues—employee engagement, trust, onboarding, retention, change management, branding, and so forth. How important are they? If the communication foundations are weak, the outcomes of internal communication programs are likely to disappoint or fail.

These earlier studies and theories have provided clear guidance for practice. Yet, they are often ignored, though most agree that internal communication is a crucial activity in organizations. It helps groups and individuals coordinate activities to reach objectives, and it facilitates socialization, problem-solving, decision-making, and change management processes (Berger, 2008). Companies like FedEx, Florida Power & Light, General Electric, IBM, and Southwest Airlines, among others, have demonstrated the benefits of excellent internal communications.

However, communication ineffectiveness characterizes other organizations as evident in low employee trust, engagement, retention, and performance levels. A study by the American Psychological Association, for example, found that one-quarter of American employees don't trust their companies (Weber, 2014)—and that's one of the most positive recent studies about workplace trust.

Such problems are due in part to an unwillingness or inability on the part of organizational decision makers and professional communicators to act decisively on research and best practices knowledge concerning the crucial relationships among leaders, supervisors, organizational culture, and employees' communication needs. Strategic internal communications elevate individual and organizational performance by meeting employees' needs. The best way to do so is to build a strong foundation of capable and communicative leaders and supervisors, and a rich culture for communication.

This article first reviews the research threads for these foundation stones. Then the 800-pound gorilla in the employee communication debate is discussed—why don't more organizations do what research and best practices clearly indicate they should do to improve their communication effectiveness and better meet employee needs? Seventeen possible reasons are suggested. The article concludes with a list of 48 check points that practitioners can use to evaluate the relative strength and quality of the three foundation stones in their organizations.

### **Foundation Stones in Employee Communication—A Research Trail**

Effective employee communications are the result of many interrelated factors—research, executive support, employees' communication needs, communicator capabilities, communication climate, channel availability and use, measurement, organizational culture and history, messaging and listening, and employee empowerment, among others. However, research over the years has consistently highlighted the crucial importance of three factors or foundations in effective communications—leaders, front-line supervisors, and organizational culture. Each factor is briefly reviewed in this section, and some key studies are highlighted to document a trail of research footprints leading from the past into the present.

## Organizational Leaders

It's no surprise that what leaders say and do have long been considered influential in internal communications. Employees watch leaders to see what's important, whether their walk matches their talk, how they interact with others, what's acceptable and what isn't, how things get done, and how rewards and resources are allocated. Leaders set the overall communication tone for organizations. Indeed, leadership is fundamentally a communication process used by individuals to achieve specific goals or needs (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

Since the late 1970s the transformational leadership approach has been a leading perspective in organizations. This approach emphasizes leaders' affective dimensions—they are charismatic individuals who possess a compelling vision and convey a collective mission; they are empathetic and inspire trust and respect; they create emotional attachments with followers; and they empower others to act (Bass, 1990; Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders emphasize relationships, individual considerations, and empowerment—all of which bear important communication implications.

Summarizing a study of best employee communication practices of 50 companies nearly two decades ago, Powers (1996-97) concluded that top executives were the primary enablers of internal communications. They enabled by being visible, championing communication, creating a clear line of sight for employees, empowering managers and front-line supervisors with information and decision-making authority, and relying on face-to-face (F-T-F) communication.

Research regarding excellence in public relations over the past 30 years has consistently confirmed that top executives largely determine the structure, culture and system of internal communication in an organization (L. A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & D. M. Dozier, 2002). Flauto (1999) found that communication competence, including listening skills, is a prerequisite for effective leadership at any level. Shaffer (2000) determined that organizational leaders exerted the strongest influence on employee perceptions and attitudes—55% of total influence. Job and work unit processes (30%) and formal company media (15%) were far less influential.

Jin (2010) found that a strong transformational leadership style and greater empathy were more effective in gaining employees' trust. Keyton and Smith (2009) concluded that the leader's behaviors and open communication influenced employee trust. Men (2011, 2014) determined that transformational leaders positively influence an organization's symmetrical communication system and employee-organization relationships.

Despite these and similar findings regarding the crucial roles of leaders, serious issues remain in the workplace. One large employee engagement study (BlessingWhite, 2011) found that fewer than 60% of employees believed their leaders communicate honestly with them and actually model core organizational values. Findings from the Maritz Research Study (2011) were more sobering: only 10% of the 1,900 employees surveyed believed their top leaders were ethical and honest, and only 12% believed their employers listened to them or cared about them.

Why does this disconnect exist between research knowledge and employees' perceptions of their leaders' communication performance? In a study of professional communicators in 472 organizations, nearly half (46%) said one of the biggest issues they face is educating and engaging leaders and supervisors in their roles in employee communications. Barriers included leaders not being on the same page, lack of leader visibility, lack of trust, and leaders simply not understanding or not accepting their communication roles and responsibilities (Gay, Mahoney, and Graves, 2005).

### **Supervisors and Front-line Managers**

Many studies post-Pelz (1952) have confirmed that supervisors influence employee job performance and satisfaction, engagement, organizational identity, trust, retention, conflict resolution, and the implementation of strategic change. For example, Falcione (1974) found that supervisors who use two-way communication and maintain an open communication system gain credibility and trust with employees and facilitate employee participation in decision making. Roberts and O'Reilly (1974) concluded that supervisors are crucial in building employee trust and commitment. In a study of 700 employees, Muchinsky (1977) determined that trust in supervisors, and supervisory delivery of accurate and adequate information, contributed favorably to organizational climate and job satisfaction.

Supervisors also can help reduce employee stress and burnout by providing employees with decision-making opportunities and offering them social support (Miller, Ellis, Zook, and Lyles, 1990). In a book popular with professional communicators, Larkin and Larkin (1994) argued that the cycle time for employees to understand and implement change could be reduced by empowering supervisors to communicate the change, relying on F-T-F communication as the primary channel for change information, and communicating the relevant performance of, and impact of change on the local work unit.

Supervisors also play a key role in strengthening organizational identification (OI). Myers and Kassing (1998) concluded that OI was linked with supervisors who were seen as competent communicators who also provided more interactive involvement. Scott et al. (1999) found that employee communication and OI contributed to retention. Employees who experienced favorable relationships with their supervisors, and who felt they were well informed and listened to, were less likely to leave the organization.

More recently, Madlock's survey (2008) of Midwest employees found that a supervisor's communication competence was the greatest predictor of employee satisfaction. O'Neil's study (2008) of 2,800 employees in a global firm determined that F-T-F communications with immediate supervisors, managers and unit business leaders were the most highly valued information sources. In a university study, White, Vanc, and Stafford (2010) found that F-T-F communication was the most preferred channel, and top leaders were the most important source of information. Burton (2013) reported that a study of channel preferences among four generations revealed that the majority of employees in all generations preferred F-T-F communications with supervisors versus other channels for personal and strategic change information.

## Organizational Culture

Organizational culture refers to the general culture within an organization, which is “central to all aspects of organizational life,” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 1). Culture is a deeply rooted, shared system of knowledge, symbolic communication, patterns of behaviors, values, and assumptions. Culture is how things get done, and it is created, sustained, and changed by its members and subcultures. Communication and culture share a reciprocal relationship (Modoff et al., 2008). Communications influence culture through formal and informal channels, stories, rituals, shared experiences, and social activities. Culture influences communications because employees interact through shared interpretive frameworks of culture such as distinctive company vocabulary and established structures, protocols, processes, and practices.

A “culture for communication,” or one that embraces communication, is participative rather than authoritative; structured in a decentralized and deformed manner; promotes open and symmetrical communication and dialogue; and embraces diversity and facilitates involvement in decision-making (L. A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & D. M. Dozier, 2002). In one of the earliest reviews of internal communication, Redding (1972) offered 10 propositions about employee communication and claimed that communication climate—or how information is shared and communication practiced—was more crucial than communication skills or techniques. In his view, an ideal communication climate reflected trust, widespread participation in decision-making, openness, and candor—all characteristics of a culture for communication.

Culture became a popular concept within companies in the 1980s as they began to globalize. A widely read book, *In Search of Excellence*, claimed that companies with “strong cultures” enjoyed competitive advantages in the rapidly changing economy (Peters & Waterman, 1982). In their study of best practices, Young and Post (1993) identified eight principles of effective communication during change management, including two-way communication, an emphasis on F-T-F interactions, executive leadership behaviors, shared responsibilities for communication, and a clear and compelling communication strategy.

Two decades later, a study of the culture of learning organizations (Joo, 2012) came to similar conclusions: a culture that valorizes continuous learning, dialogue and two-way communication, empowerment, team learning, and strategic leadership facilitates change management. A national survey by the Families and Work Institute (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993) found that an open communication environment was the single most important quality that prospective employees sought in a workplace environment.

Guzley (1992) concluded that employee commitments to work and organization were more likely in organizations with a favorable communication climate. Clear organizational goals and employee participation in the organization (through two-way communication) were significant predictors of commitment. Smidts, van Riel, & Pruyn (2000) found that OI also increases in an open communication climate where employees can speak up, be listened to, and participate. The researchers concluded that *how* an organization communicates internally is more important than *what* is communicated in terms of building identification.

Subsequent research demonstrated that employees were more likely to hold supportive attitudes for the organization's strategy issues when they believe the flow, content, and climate for communications are adequate. Supervisors were found to strongly influence communication climate (van Riel, Berens, & Dijkstra, 2005), and to contribute significantly to OI and employee satisfaction by providing regular feedback, listening well, and modeling organizational values (Van Vuuren, de Jong, & Seydel, 2007).

A series of studies in the past decade by the Hay Group confirms that engaged employees outperform those less engaged; they yield greater returns and increase customer satisfaction. However, organizations must also enable employees to engage, which requires a supportive environment characterized by 1) excellent leaders, 2) a real performance management program, 3) non-bureaucratic systems and processes, 4) an open culture and communication system, and 5) empowered managers and supervisors (Hay Group, 2009, 2010).

A study of 10 best-in-class companies (Burton, Grates, & Learch, 2013) emphasized the importance of culture and structure in employee communication. Factors contributing to success included an organizational structure that connected practitioners with others up, down, and across the chain of command; a shared belief that internal communication produced a positive return; and a communication style and practice that emphasized listening as well as communicating messages.

### **Why Don't More Organizations Act on Research Knowledge?**

Given the extensive research knowledge regarding the qualities and influences of leaders, supervisors, and organizational culture, along with a growing set of best-practice case studies, why don't more organizations act on this knowledge? Why are levels of employee trust, engagement, and performance still low in many organizations? Berger (2011) described four barriers that impede the move from knowledge to action: 1) a managerial legacy of control by top leaders despite the lip service given to empowerment; 2) a focus on tactics at the expense of strategy; 3) a wealth of talk and cascades of information but little real action; and 4) a failure of leaders to model desired changes or elevate their own communication performance.

Therkelsen (2014) researched and then crowd-sourced a long list of reasons for failed or disappointing results in employee communication. He grouped them into organizational, personal/individual, and systemic categories, and 17 of these reasons are listed below.

*Organizational factors* refer to political, structural and cultural barriers that impede employee communications. They are often linked to the perceptions, beliefs, and practices of top leaders in an organization. Here are some examples:

1. Top leaders place a higher priority on outside constituencies.
2. Top leaders and supervisors are often promoted based on their functional expertise, not real leadership skills and qualities.

3. Top leaders believe their organizations are already doing a good job in employee communication using conventional approaches and exerting control.
4. Top leaders believe that relying on supervisors and middle managers for effective communication removes control from senior management and from public relations.
5. Supervisors are neither viewed nor trained as crucial participants in the employee communication process.
6. Communication objectives and responsibilities for leaders and supervisors are often nonexistent or soft in job descriptions and performance plans—they are not measured or measureable.

*Individual factors* refer largely to the capabilities and qualities of communication practitioners, or those given formal communication roles and responsibilities, e.g., supervisors. Some examples include:

7. Communication leaders are not included in strategic decision-making processes.
8. Communication managers have a professional bias in favor of conventional channels.
9. Professional communicators are unwilling to change their own practices or worldviews about employee communication.
10. Professional communicators lack the skills, knowledge, or motivation to sell the need for effective programs, or measure results.
11. Supervisors feel ill-equipped to lead and communicate because they lack the training, endorsement, support, and content or strategic information to do so.

*Systemic reasons* refer to educational and professional structures, values, and practices that support the communication profession. Examples include:

12. PR education programs focus on hard or technical skills development and don't arm practitioners to sell their ideas to management or understand organizational politics.
13. Professional associations focus on skills development and social networking rather than leadership development.
14. All-way communication and dialogue in organizations demand responsiveness, accountability, and action that many organizations simply can't deliver.
15. Employee communication is not recognized in MBA and other management training programs.
16. Development of so-called *soft skills*—listening, conflict resolution, and change management capabilities—are absent in most educational and professional structures.
17. Professional and educational programs place more attention and value on external constituents than employees or members.

In short, employee communication programs fail for many reasons, most of which are linked to the three foundation stones. Some issues are more easily overcome than others. For example, practitioners can learn how to measure and analyze results through training, or they can contract with specialists to provide these capabilities. On the other hand, changing the world views or practices of leaders and supervisors who aren't convinced of the importance of internal communications, or who are reluctant communicators, is far more difficult. Persuading

organizations to invest substantial resources to equip hundreds or thousands of supervisors with requisite communication skills is another formidable challenge.

Strengthening the foundations is also demanding work given rapid and dynamic changes in the global market. If organizations aren't in a perpetual state of crisis, they are close. Maintaining focus and pace grows ever more difficult. In addition, it's easy to mistake the cosmetics of change for actual change. Two brief case examples from practice illustrate this mistake.

**Case 1:** Surveys in a large manufacturing company revealed that employees' trust in some top executives was very low, less than 20 percent. To deal with this in one division, the top leader rejected the strategic recommendations of his communication and HR directors and insisted they produce a monthly newsletter that would be called "Trust." His reasoning was this: "Surely employees will trust me if I tell them every month why they should trust me." The publication died after the first issue but continues to live on in company folklore.

**Case 2:** Executives in a B-2-B company sought to improve low engagement scores. Overall, the company was a relatively closed culture, executives were focused externally on customers and Wall Street, and internal communication was predominantly one-way and tightly controlled. The communication team first spent time with a consultant to gather ideas about best engagement practices, metrics, strategies and tactics, and so forth, and subsequently developed and implemented its plan.

A year later, the company learned that it had won a national award for creative print materials used in its employee engagement action plan. Top executives were delighted with the award, but the communication leader was puzzled because actual employee engagement scores in the company had modestly declined. How could that be? Cosmetics. Only two things had changed in the company: 1) the volume of information cascaded to employees, and 2) the visual appearance of the print communications. The foundations remained the same—the culture was still closed, and leaders and supervisors were still communicating and behaving in their traditional, largely controlling ways. The external award validated the quality of their print materials; the internal employee engagement scores validated the lack of positive effects.

### **Implications for Practice: A Checklist for Assessing Foundation Stones**

Research regarding the importance of the three foundation stones is consistent, compelling, and enduring, and this article suggests that failures or disappointments in employee communication are often due to weak foundations. The relative success of communication initiatives—from engagement to alignment to employee branding—is related to the relative quality of leaders, supervisors, and organizational culture.

The most important implications for employee communication professionals, then, are to: 1) assess the strength and quality of the foundation stones in their organizations, 2) strategically attend the weaknesses or gaps discovered in the audit, and 3) continuously promote ideas and

approaches that enrich the communication culture and improve the communication knowledge and capabilities of the professional team, supervisors, and leaders at all levels.

The following list of 48 checkpoints can be used for a general audit. Based on the literature, each of these points represents a marker or characteristic of the foundation stones. The more characteristics that apply to an organization, the stronger is the communication foundation likely to be, and the richer are the conditions for successful communication. A 1-5 scale can be used to evaluate each characteristic (“1” = doesn’t apply, to “5” = greatly applies). Alternatively, practitioners can simply check off characteristics they believe are accurate reflections of their leaders, supervisors, and culture. The checklist for leaders can apply to the top leader or executive leadership team, or to formal or informal leaders at any level or within any group. The list is simply a starting point for identifying strengths and weaknesses in the foundation, and it should be followed up with more rigorous research and analysis.

### ***Leaders and Employee Communication***

The top leader(s) in my organization:

1. Is visible to employees (members)
2. Is a good listener
3. Is trustworthy
4. Is empathetic and encourages employees to voice opinions and suggestions
5. Understands the importance of two-way communication
6. Involves others in decision-making
7. Walks the talk
8. Models the way in terms of communication behaviors
9. Uses F-T-F communication for change and strategic information
10. Supports communication training for executives and supervisors with necessary resources
11. Considers communication skills important in hiring new executives
12. Provides sufficient contextual information in change communications
13. Links employee communication outcomes with organizational goals and results
14. Incorporates measurable communication accountabilities in performance management programs for executives

### ***Supervisors and Employee Communication***

Supervisors in my organization:

15. Are available and visible to work unit personnel
16. Are good communicators
17. Are trustworthy
18. Listen and respond to employee concerns
19. Provide regular and specific performance feedback to those in their work units
20. Recognize the contributions of those in their work teams
21. Engage employees in decision-making processes

22. Use F-T-F communication as the primary form of interaction with employees
23. Help employees understand how their jobs align with organizational goals
24. Are trained/equipped with essential communication skills and capabilities
25. Are consistently armed with message points and content for new initiatives or changes
26. Are held accountable for employee communications through measurable performance management objectives
27. Care about individual employees and their welfare
28. Help employees prepare and develop for the future
29. Model the way in terms of communication behaviors

### ***Organizational Culture and Employee Communication***

In my organization:

30. Two-way symmetrical communication is the norm
31. Multiple channels are used to share information and best practices
32. The communication climate is positive
33. Diversity is practiced
34. Gender equality is real
35. Employees feel free to speak up about issues and concerns
36. Employees are empowered to take decisions
37. Employees are fully engaged in their work
38. Leaders are sensitive to employee development needs
39. Information is readily accessible
40. Employees are treated fairly
41. Individual and team achievements are recognized and celebrated
42. Employees share a clear vision of the future and what it takes to get there
43. Employee communications programs are linked to organizational goals or results
44. Social media channels with two-way, interactive features are used to share best practices, promote employee participation, and build organizational identity
45. The effectiveness of employee communication is measured on a regular basis
46. Employees understand how their jobs align with organizational goals
47. The professional communication team is a positive force for change
48. There's a shared belief that internal communication helps drive organizational success

### **Discussion**

Research has long documented the crucial importance of leaders, supervisors, and organizational culture in strategic employee communications. They are the foundations for success. If the foundations are strong, individual and organizational performances are likely to improve and strengthen. On the other hand, little research has been conducted to explain why organizations don't embrace this research knowledge and act on it. This is surprising because there are real payoffs in productivity, engagement, retention, and financial returns, as well as in social relations and cultural richness. The business case seems clear:

- Organizations with engaged and committed employees were 50 percent more productive than those organizations where employees weren't engaged, and employee retention rates were 44% higher in organizations with engaged employees (Izzo & Withers, 2000).
- Significant improvements in communication effectiveness in organizations were linked to a 29.5 percent rise in market value (Watson Wyatt, 2004).
- Companies with highly effective employee communications outperform companies with less effective communications—they produced 20 percent less turnover and 47% percent higher shareholder returns (Watson Wyatt, 2010).

More qualitative research and case analyses can help us understand 1) why organizations fail to act on this research knowledge, 2) and what best practices exist to convince organizational decision makers that attending the foundation stones is priority work. Stubborn employee communication issues such as low trust and engagement levels, or high turnover and absenteeism, are clear symptoms of the long-time crisis of weak foundations for employee communication that may infect all internal communication initiatives and breed disenchantment, disengagement, discord, and departure.

Any general theory of strategic employee communications would likely include leaders, supervisors, and organizational culture as fundamental (and multidimensional) independent variables. Leaders' words and behaviors greatly influence what employees think, feel, communicate, and do. They set the overall communication tone in organizations through their communication style and visibility, which is their first and most basic form of non-verbal communication. Supervisors are the front lines for employee trust, engagement, development, retention, and empowerment. Through their communicative capabilities and behaviors they bear the potential to become powerful personal connections for employees to an organization and achievement of its goals, and to mobilize excitement and engagement among employees. Supervisors can be a positive contagion for change and elevated performance.

Culture is the dynamic, constructed context for work, understanding, and meaning. The words and behaviors of leaders and supervisors, along with the type of communication system, exert powerful influences on culture. Any organization can move toward becoming a culture for communication—a rich environment for growth, learning, and shared values—that valorizes two-way symmetrical communication, an open communication system, and the shared beliefs that work is meaningful, people count and should be treated fairly, and opportunities to grow and advance are part of the job.

Strengthening the foundation for employee communication has perhaps never been more important. Employers increasingly recognize the power of employees as brand advocates and informal spokespersons—now even *employee activists*—in the digital age if they are empowered and armed with the requisite tools and information (Gaines-Ross, 2014). Like workers in the Hawthorne studies 80 years ago, or the Pelz studies 60 years ago, employees today are more likely to improve their work engagement and productivity if they feel informed, involved, empowered, and valued.

Moreover, recent research suggests that work-place qualities and values such as trust, work-life balance, strong team orientation, community commitment, and self-development are even more important to the Millennial generation, which is rapidly taking over the workplace (Alsop, 2008; Burton, 2013). So it's time to move from knowing to doing. It's time to attend to the foundations of employee communication in order to better meet employees' needs and improve individual performance, thereby elevating the organization to new levels of achievement. What part of this don't we understand?

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