



Executive Summary of:

BEST-IN-CLASS PRACTICES

IN EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION:

Through the Lens of 10 Global Leaders

April 2013

Advancing the first of three major research topics identified by its Commission on Organizational Communication, the Institute for Public Relations (IPR) in 2012 engaged KRC Research to conduct in-depth interviews with internal communication professionals at leading global organizations to better understand internal communication methods and best-in-class practices.

KRC Research developed a draft Interview Guide following discussions with Commission members, then vetted and adjusted the Guide through additional reviews. The final Guide was used in each of the one-hour telephone interviews that followed. Commission members selected the 10 companies participating in the study – GE, FedEx, Cargill, Petrobras, McDonald's, Toyota, Chevron, IBM, Johnson & Johnson and Navistar – based on the companies' global scope and their perceived effectiveness in internal communication. These 10 companies are often on most-admired or best-places-to-work lists, and they have sustained market leadership positions in the dynamic global market. Their internal communication programs also are often recognized for excellence, as evidenced in awards they receive and the extent to which they are profiled in conference presentations and professional publications, among other forms of recognition. Interview participants included one senior communication officer in each of the 10 companies. The interviews are not only important in their own right, but especially for the guidance they will provide in developing a related quantitative survey during the next phase of work that is now beginning with KRC Research.

Areas our research explored included

- The new agenda for global employee/internal communication;
- Meeting the challenge of protecting, enhancing a global brand and reputation across geographic boundaries and cultures;
- Roles, responsibilities, structure and competencies required for delivering a best-in-class function; and
- Practices, programs and leadership that separate best-in-class organizations from others.

Through this research, KRC Research uncovered the mechanisms, tools, and techniques that world-class companies employ for addressing everyday challenges, as well as looming or real crises. It also learned how companies approach hot topics within internal communication, such as digitization, talent retention, strategic planning, diverse languages, and establishing common knowledge.

Key takeaways included the following:

- Four factors may contribute to the success of best-in-class companies:
 - An organizational structure that connects internal communicators with the rest of the company—up and down the chain of command;

- An innate understanding that strong internal communication will have a positive return for the brand and the company that need not be proven at every juncture;
 - An arsenal of tools and practices for both listening and communicating a message; and
 - A strong commitment to keeping employees across the company informed in a timely fashion, often before stories break in mass media and digital channels.
- 10 best-in-class practices that we believe may set leaders apart from the pack:
 - Acting as a business leader to support their role as internal communicators;
 - Beginning with the expected end stage in mind to help employees understand organizational change and how it will affect their work and the organization;
 - Challenging a new generation of employees to contribute to organizational growth and change;
 - Developing a roadmap for change so that people see a clear, measureable path forward in their journey;
 - Creating an internal stakeholder map that better integrates employees while identifying and highlighting special internal stakeholder requirements;
 - Taking a strategic role with leaders (a seat at *all* tables) and advocating a point of view that will influence business practices, help drive performance and reinforce corporate culture and values;
 - Adopting an “authentic” voice to support greater transparency and to drive dialogue and engagement in the workforce;
 - Utilizing the power of “line-of-sight” managers as communicators;
 - Relentlessly reinforcing message platforms and the path forward through a dedicated content strategy; and
 - Using measurement and key metrics to benchmark strategies and programs, to prove that they are enabling the workforce to achieve key objectives.
 - Additional areas explored included the following:
 - Best-in-class organizations face a host of challenges and recent crises that are not unique to their status as leaders, among them
 - Structural challenges (global companies, multiple brands under one roof, matrixed organizations broad leadership);
 - Workforce challenges (general fast pace of workforce, turf issues, employees not “playing” well with others, internal friction or in-fighting, language and cultural challenges, growing generational differences in the workplace);

- Media challenges (bad press, misinformation);
 - Product challenges (product recalls, shortages, production challenges, distribution problems); and
 - Marketplace challenges (competition).
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- They 're challenged in delivering messages to employees, experience difficulty in cutting through the clutter and regulating the volume of messages to employees, and they struggle with enhancing executive visibility.
 - It's common for internal communicators to sit fairly high on the organizational chart, often reporting in to the leader of corporate communications (vice president, senior vice president or chief, depending on corporate nomenclature) or a similar role.
 - Internal communication leaders often have two to five areas reporting in to them, with some overseeing departments ranging from less than 10 to upwards of 20 professionals.
 - Effective internal communication begins with shared values and viewpoints about both the company at-large and the way to communicate.
 - Our communicators say it's as much about effective listening as it is communicating, and they work to develop robust, formal and informal "listening posts" to guide and calibrate their efforts.
 - Harnessing social media, either for internal purposes or external communications purposes, remains a significant challenge for many.

As we move forward in the coming weeks, our Commission will work with KRC Research to test our key findings with employee communication leaders globally during the quantitative phase of our work to help us further develop key themes and to confirm practices and trends.

We invite your feedback and questions. And as you seek information and resources to help you in this area, we would encourage you to visit our Organizational Communication Resource Center <http://www.instituteforpr.org/orgcomm/>.