Current Research Trends and Insights in Internal Communication

Internal Social Media
Change Communication
Leadership Communication

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The Inevitable Trend: Social Media as a Strategic Communication Tool

Uniqueness of social media
User-generated content, two-way, interactive, relational, communal, empowering, engaging, personal...

An unprecedented platform
For internal and external stakeholder engagement

+2 billion people worldwide are users of social media
# Internal Social Media

## Two Types of Organizations’ Internal Use of Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENERAL SOCIAL MEDIA</th>
<th>ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Used in/out of the workplace to talk about employer-related issues</td>
<td>Enterprise social media designed and only open to employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.</td>
<td>E.g., Yammer, Facebook at Work.</td>
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</table>
Employees’ Use of Social Media Regarding the Workplace

**Benefits**
(Opgenhafen & Claeys, 2017)
- Employee ambassadorship
- Indicate openness and trust
- Foster dialogic relationships

**Concerns**
(Opgenhafen & Claeys, 2017)
- Leak intellectual property
- Criticize management
- Articulate dissatisfaction
- Distraction from work
- Lost productivity
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Monitoring</th>
<th>Policies</th>
<th>Training</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social media monitoring: “two-edged sword”</td>
<td>Develop social media policies to indicate clearly what information is appropriate to share</td>
<td>Specific training courses and ambassadorship programs to encourage employees to share corporate messages</td>
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What Should Organizations Do? (cont’d)

**Empowering**
Empower a stable of employee advocates (e.g., the digital natives)

**Content**
Make content relevant and easy for employees to share

**Rewarding**
Reward employee voices (e.g., recognition, point system; link social media advocacy to an incentive system of employee referrals)
Internal/Enterprise Social Media

Buettner, 2015

Access
It is restricted to members of this company.

Connectivity
It offers the members of the company the possibility to connect with other members of the company.

Personalization
It offers the members of the company the possibility to set up a personal profile.

These sites may include the following tools: social networks, wikis, forums, people tagging, file sharing, user profiles, blogs, microblogs, activity feeds, group support, tagging, tag clouds, RSS feeds, photo and file repositories, discussion threads and more.
The Effectiveness of Internal Social Media
Organizations’ Perspective

Use of Internal Social Media

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee Engagement</strong></td>
<td>(Haddud et al, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace Productivity</strong></td>
<td>(Bennett, et al. 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee-Organization Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived Transparency and Authenticity</strong></td>
<td>(Men &amp; Hung, 2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information/Knowledge Sharing</strong></td>
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Foster a participative and open culture
The Effectiveness of Internal Social Media
Employees’ Perspective

Communication
Foster conversations

Collaboration
Promote collaboration among employees

Visibility
Make employees’ interests and expertise visible to others

Connection
Connection among like-minded employees
The Effectiveness of Internal Social Media
Employees’ Perspective (cont’d)

Community
Build community

Identity
Construct organizational identity (Madsen, 2016)

Empowerment
Empower employees by offering a venue to voice ideas, thoughts, and opinions
The Effectiveness of Internal Social Media
Leaders’ Perspective

- Deepen leaders’ connections with employees
- Blurred communication hierarchies and shortened power distance (Men & Bowen, 2017)
- Personalization of top leaders
- Thought leadership building
- Listening

Richard Branson
Virgin

Bill Gates
Microsoft

Arianna Huffington
The Huffington Post (now owned by AOL)
Challenges of the Organization’s Internal Use of Social Media

- Lack of participation
- Employee self-censorship (why?) (Madsen & Verhoeven, 2016)
- Employee resistance to change
- Diverse tools and platforms and not one-size-fits-all
- Realistic concerns of the absence of technology in non-networked organizational settings

- Providing low quality post/comments
- Harming personal reputation (e.g., if no one supports their opinion, the first to like a controversial post, show ignorance)
- Violating unwritten norms and rules
- Comments and reactions from other coworkers and managers
How to Overcome These Barriers?

Communicate
Communicate the benefits of internal social media to employees

Listen
Listen to employees to identify barriers in using/adopting internal social media in each unit

Promote
Promote an open and participative communication climate

Training
Provide training to familiarize employees with internal social media and operational procedures

Recognize
Recognize role models and reward active participants

Support
Management support to make employees feel trusted and empowered to depend on their self-judgment to post
Moving Forward: New Opportunities and Challenges with Emerging Technologies
Directions for Future Research

- Application of **emerging technologies** (e.g., virtual reality) in internal communications (e.g., onboarding, safety communication, change communication).

- Use of **internal social media in specific areas** such as change communication, crisis communication, etc.

- **Motivations in employees’ use** of internal social media.

- **Explanation** of why/how internal social media works for **employee outcomes**.

- **Measurement** of internal social media usage.

- Best practices.
Closing Remarks

1. No one best communication channel that works across circumstances and through various contexts.

2. Social media cannot replace interpersonal/face-to-face channels!

3. All technologies are “hard” assets that require the support of “soft” assets, such as the communication worldview and culture, before it can yield value. Means not the ends!
The Key to Success: Embracing Change

Business Environment

Increases in technology, globalization & consumer awareness have contributed to a dynamic and ever-changing business environment (Sison, 2017)

Willingness to commit to and implement change can be major indicators of short and long-term success (Men & Bowen, 2016)

Lack of effective communication

It is often reported as a contributor to unsuccessful change initiatives. (Barrett, 2002; Elving, 2005; Lewis, 2002, Sison, 2017)

Strategic Communication can activate resistance or acceptance & is critical to the change lifecycle (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017)
Preparing for Change

Planning the change

Organizations who plan for change are better able to adapt and communicate changes as they happen and are better positioned to accommodate change (Bimber, Flanagin & Stohl, 2012; Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2013)

Nimble organizational functions make accommodating change a simpler proposition

- Technologies
- Values
- Processes
- Teams
Strategic Change

Organizations & their stakeholders face many types of change
(Broom & Sha, 2013; Kim & Krishna, 2017; Laskin, 2012)

Market change
New product offerings

Leadership change
New CEO

Organizational change
New rules or culture
The change continuum (de Mello Freire, 2017; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017)

Regular changes take place routinely, as part of daily organizational life.

Non-routine changes such as relocation, mergers & acquisitions and leadership changes are less frequent and make a bigger impact.
The Impact of Change & Communication

Do we fear change?

Research shows that inconsistencies in our work life can lead to uncertainty and negative emotions such as fear, stress and frustration (Luo & Jiang, 2014).

Continuous communication (Gergs & Trinczek, 2008; Kim & Krishna, 2017)

- Provides information
- Provides stability
- Establishes a foundation of trust which serves to reduce anxieties and fear
The Stages of Change

Discovery → Denial → Resistance → Acceptance

Overcoming Resistance

Resistance
Research shows resistance is one of the biggest obstacles communicators face in communicating change (Bull & Brown, 2012; Sha, 2017).

Communication & Attitude
Open and transparent communication help build trust and positive attitudes toward change (Abitbol & Lee, 2016; Neill & Hua, 2017).

Develop specific communications that address:
- Reason for the change
- Possible outcomes of the change
- Possible benefits of the change
Involving employees early, often, and continuously throughout the process of change encourages a sense of ownership and empowerment over results (Men & Bowen, 2016)

**Visionary communication is key**
(Johansson & Heide, 2008; Martinelli & Erzikova, 2017)

<table>
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<th>Language that tells a story</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Planned meaningful content</td>
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<td>Clear and easy-to-understand information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connects employees’ day-to-day work to organization’s mission</td>
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</table>
Communication Strategies

Specific communication strategies signal employee involvement, validate concerns and inspire trust:

**Transparent & open communication**
It says “You’re in the loop, and we want your input.”
(Abitbol & Lee, 2016; Neill & Hua, 2017)

**Listening & upward communication**
It says “You are heard, your concerns are valid, and important.”
(Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2017)

**Leader involvement**
It says “We are partners in change and I want to help manage the impact.”
(Ulmer et al., 2013)
What Should Organizations Do?: Tactics

Change Messages

The effectiveness of change messages can be reinforced through specific channels (Clampitt, 2001; Clayton, 2015).

Communication Tactics

Specific communication tactics and channels reduce uncertainty, increase understanding and foster acceptance:

**Face-to-face communication**

It says “We are all in this together.” (Men & Bowen, 2016; Sprecher, & Hampton, 2017)

**Digital Communication**

It says “You are a part of shaping the future.” (Clayton, 2015)

**Source Information**

It says “What this means for us.” (Kim & Krishna, 2017)
Closing Remarks

1. Willingness to engage in change and the extent to which an organization communicates about change can be indicators of overall success in today’s business environment.

2. Change communication serves multiple roles in change management (i.e., reduce uncertainty, overcome resistance, increase participation).

3. Change communication should facilitate change through multiple strategies (i.e., openness, transparency, leadership involvement) and channels (i.e., face-to-face, digital).
Leadership

“There are as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define this concept” (Stogdill, 1974).

Recognizing leadership

Leadership is exercised when thoughts expressed in talk or action are recognized by others as capable of progressing tasks or problems which are important to them” (Robinson, 2001).

Social Influence

Leadership is a process of social influence that is planned and unplanned, formal and informal, and defined as much by the leader as the follower (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016).
Leadership as Social Influence

Systems Perspective on Communication
(Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017)

Environment
Senior-Leadership Communication

**Importance**
Senior-leadership communication plays a critical role in shaping an organization’s image, and influences trust in leadership, confidence in the organization, and performance (Men, 2015).

**Role model**
Senior corporate leaders are expected to not only convey vision and values but also act as role models (Bowen, 2015).

**Organizational success**
Critical role of senior leaders’ strategic vision communication in attaining organizational success. Potential to motivate employees and improve their work lives (Mayfield et al., 2015).
Leaders may use different styles to effectively communicate with different people on different topics and at different times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Styles</th>
<th>Assertive leadership</th>
<th>Responsive leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are divided into two broad categories</td>
<td>Focuses on the task dimension (i.e., dominant, forceful, aggressive, competitive)</td>
<td>Focuses on the relational dimension (i.e., good listener, empathetic, compassionate, warm)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Electronic Platforms

Electronic platforms, such as streaming media, blogs, and social networking sites, have become popular among CEOs (Men, 2015).

Social CEOs

Social CEOs are more likely to be perceived as responsive communicators by employees (Men, 2015).

Social Media’ features

The interactive, empowering, and relational features of social media can bring CEOs to life.
In 2016, 60% of Fortune 500 CEOs had no social media presence. LinkedIn remains the first channel CEOs adopt.
Nearly one-half of Millennials (47%) believe CEOs have a responsibility to speak up about issues that are important to society, far outpacing the sentiments of Gen Xers and Boomers (28% each).

44% of Millennials say they would be more loyal to their organization if their own CEO took a public position on a hotly debated current issue (only 16% of Gen Xers and 18% of Boomers would be more loyal).
## Closing Remarks

1. Leadership communication strategy should be systematic.

2. “Cannot Not Communicate”.

3. Followers play an instrumental role in making leadership work.
Thank you

We appreciate your questions, thoughts and feedback!

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