Internal Communication

What is Internal Communication?

Internal communication is broadly defined as the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within organizations.

Internal communication consists of three basic components:
- Hierarchical communication: 'top-down or bottom-up communication among the successive layers' (p.3).
- Mass media communication (formal): Information dissemination initiated by the organizational communication department through official mass media to the internal public.
- Social networks (informal): Informal networking and communication where information flows horizontally between employees.

Five major perspectives that have influenced the practices and research of internal communication
- Scientific Management Perspective
- Human Relations (humanistic) Perspective
- HR Management Perspective
- Systems Theory Perspective
- Organizational Culture Perspective

The significance

- Coordinate organizational activities
- Facilitates Organizational Culture and Values
- Enhances Employee Engagement: Inclusive, transparent, and participatory internal communication significantly contributes to employee engagement. In addition, high levels of employee engagement can improve job performance, enhance employee retention, increase customer satisfaction, and boost profitability, thereby facilitating organizational success.
(Men & Bowen, 2016)

Internal Publics in Organizations

An essential prerequisite for effective internal communication within an organization is a deep understanding of its internal publics, which are distinct from external stakeholders. Internal publics primarily refer to employees within the organization, but they can include any group or individual that engages with and influences the internal dynamics of the organization.

Not all employees are alike. The successful internal communication should be segmented based on the characteristics and roles of the internal publics. Men & Bowen (2016) summarized the segmentation of internal employees based on several aspects：

Hierarchical Structure
- Frontline Workers - Line Managers - Middle-Level Management - Top Management and Executives.

Horizontal Approach
- Demographic Factors, Psychographic Factors, Behavioral Traits and etc.

The strategic segmentation of internal publics ensures that communication is relevant and engaging, addressing the specific needs and preferences of different groups within the organization, ultimately promoting effective internal communication.

(Men & Bowen, 2016)

The Evolving Role of Employees in Organizational Success

Roles of Employees

- Key resources driving organizational success
- Brand ambassadors/representatives
- Boundary spanners bridging the organization and external world
- Internal beneficiaries impacted by corporate policies/culture

  Traditionally advertising focused on brand ambassadors, PR on boundary spanners, and management on key resources. But these roles are blurring in the digital age.

Why Employees are Becoming More Important

- Social media gives employees platforms to anonymously share positive/negative views about their company.
- The Covid-19 pandemic reshaped workplace policies, highlighting employee wellbeing.
- Younger Millennial/Generation Z employees seek greater purpose and Corporate Social Responsibility alignment, and they expect companies to take a stand on social/political issues.

- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) elevate employee voices on issues such as diversity/inclusion.
- Some employees have become activists, publicly criticising companies they consider unethical.

How to Communicate with Employees

- Leadership and facilitation of employee co-creation in corporate values are key.
- **Authentic leadership** (transparency, honesty, integrity) and **transformational leadership** styles positively impact employees.
- Facilitating employee participation in decisions around issues like CSR increases their satisfaction, engagement and supportive behaviors.
- When consumers perceive good company-employee communication, it elevates their brand perceptions.

Trents,Issues and The Future

May 2024

Current trend news

The 5 Most Important Trends for 2024: Internal Communication

1.Creating trust and security in turbulent times through reliable communication.
2. Know the difference between storytelling and narrative. "Storytelling is the means, narrative is the end."
3. No more change management without communication managers.
4. People experience (PX) becomes even more important to IC (and the overall strategy).
5. Use Artificial Intelligence correctly (and carefully) in IC.

-(Widera，2024)

Issues related to topic

- **Employee Engagement:**
Emphasizing open, transparent, and inclusive communication, build trust, engagement.
- **Evolving Technology:**
Social media and other digital tools rebuild interactive employee engagement,
present challenges: risk avoidance, Info protection.
- **Ethics and Values Communication:**
Emphasizing honesty, transparency, and the consistent communication of core values and corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- **Leadership Communication:**
Encourage approachable, directly to engage with employees, foster a supportive communication climate.
- **Measurement and Evaluation:**
Better measurement and evaluation of communication strategies,
assess impact on employee behavior.

-(Men & Bowen, 2016)

How's IC being used?

"A snapshot of the IC industry highlights that the average ratio of internal communicators to employees within an organisation, is 1 per 500 to 1000. 3 in every 4 internal communicators say their IC strategy is aligned with their business strategy. "
——Elizabeth Mull(2016)

Predictions for the future

- Intranet to Digital.
- Bring Your Own Device' (BYOD) has risen.
- Challenges: Amount of Communication, Employee. Recognition and Employee Engagement.
- More than 2/3 of users are dissatisfied with their current methods.
- Finding new ways to measure the effectiveness of campaigns.

-(Danielle Gibbons,2016)

Alibaba's Internal Communication during Covid

"Communication, Connecting and Commitment"

During the Covid, Alibaba implemented a comprehensive PR strategy that focused on supporting medical services, daily life, SMEs, and society. The company established an emergency working group and executed the "3C" strategy: Communication, Connecting, and Commitment.

Communication
Build in-time and up-to-date communication networks, such as the "Daily News in the Battle" video program, providing information and updates in real-time to show how Alibaba's employees came together to fight the battle. This transparent and timely communication fostered trust and maintained a sense of unity among the workforce.

Connecting
Alibaba collected from various teams in Hubei and from all around the world employees' kind and positive messages. Those messages will be spread among the organization and more specifically to the team in Hubei in the epicentre of the crisis. Initiates online Karaoke sessions in which management will be invited to join and perform with everyone to create shared experiences, fostering a positive work culture and showcasing a flat management system that is symbolized as a campus instead of a company. Jack Ma often was a star on stage doing role play or singing to create the show.

Commitment
Jack Ma spread his video message to cheer the employees, " Only those who can face challenges and enterprises who can overcome difficulties will have a bright future". The communication team invited employees to share their daily vlogs to record their routine while working at home. Also created posters with tips on time management and stress management. Alibaba's leadership demonstrated commitment through inspiring video messages and employee stories while maintaining a positive spirit and engaging employees, further strengthening the company's internal culture and public perception.

## Key Takeways for PR Practitioners

Alignment

The case of Alibaba underscores the importance of aligning corporate value and internal communication in public relations efforts. Consistency in messaging builds credibility and trust among employees.

Leadership

Not only authentic leadership which provides transparency honesty and integrity is needed, transformative leadership is important too while it captivates and energizes followers towards shared aspiration.

Employee Engagement

Engaging employees as advocates and involving top management in internal activities creates a sense of unity and strengthens relationships with external stakeholders.
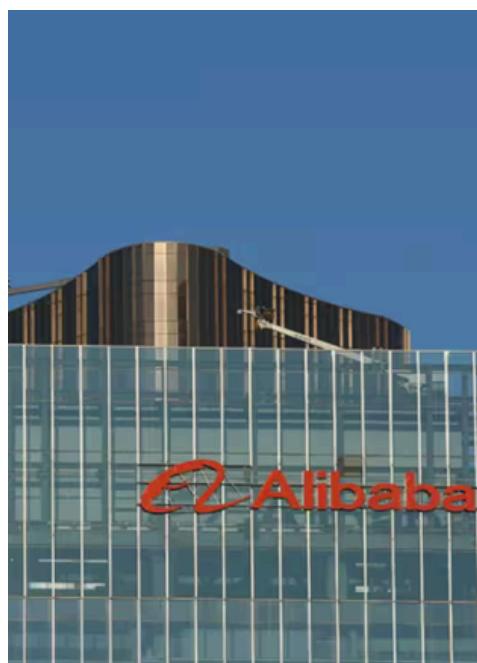
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