

A quick read about..

improving your internal brand

A few tips on communicating with your customers within the organisation

“We’re always cleaning up their mess; why didn’t we get involved earlier” | “They’ve gone out and employed their own HR consultant” | “Don’t they read our website, they’ve breached the policy” | “I keep having to tell them that Finance does this, not us” | “They’re always coming to us with the solution – why don’t they involve us earlier” | “Why do they always go over our head; don’t they understand”

[www. workingwords.co.nz](http://www.workingwords.co.nz)

Internal corporate centre services share some common brand issues...

- Audit
- Accounting & Finance
- Credit
- Corporate Communications
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- Operations
- Procurement
- Properties
- Risk

... the list goes on

Internal corporate services inherently suffer from issues around their internal brand. Internal stakeholders will typically find issue with some combination of the following...

- 1. Your dual service – governance focus:** it's easy for compliance messages to make your service messages look trite!
- 2. An unclear 'value proposition':** if your customers (& you!) are unclear about what you do, and how you do it, confusion results and you have service perception issues.
- 3. An immature engagement/service model:** typically your customers will not experience seamless services across your multiple 'touch points'.
- 4. Your people don't understand the business:** the problem with specialist professions is they rarely recruit generalists into their ranks; corporate centre teams are famous for their narrow focus and lack of wider business acumen.
- 5. How you communicate:** you are infamous for talking in a language that no one else finds relevant and to a level of detail that bores.

And the problem is aggravated by the fact that...

- **You have a virtual or total monopoly:** it can make you complacent and no matter how good you are, you engage like you have a captive audience.
- **You are considered a cost-centre status within the organisation:** your clients in the 'business' won't see you as an equal
- **People's preconceptions:** people new to the organisation bring their own brand perceptions of you.
- **The 'never a prophet in your own land' phenomena** – rightly or wrongly it is always presumed that better advice can be obtained outside the organisation.

Improving your internal brand isn't just about communication

Improving your internal brand isn't just about improving your communication. People's perceptions are largely formed through how you go about doing what you do.

Many of the tools used by organisations to improve their external brand can be used inside the organisation in terms of internal branding. For example, many of the innovation areas within the Doblin* model are applicable to improving your operation and in turn can influence your internal brand...

Opportunities* to improve your internal 'brand'...

Process

How you directly add value to the central activity of the organisation

Offering

How well you deliver the basics to the internal customer
How well the 'pieces' are integrated and easy to access

Delivery

How you get your services out to the organisation
How you make your 'captive-market' feel like customers

How you communicate

Now let's focus on how you communicate....

Being able to articulate a clear value proposition is essential for everyone – your own team and your clients

There's no point improving your communication if you and your team are unclear about your value proposition: what you're there to do and how you go about doing it.

As a start, you could workshop your value proposition with your team. Here's a basic approach:

1. Define the benefits that your internal customer gets by using your service or advice. Include your value-add to the CEO/Board also.
2. Put on your customer's shoes: describe your 'value proposition' in terms of delivering what they really want and value – “what's in it for them?” [Optional: have one group focus on Q1 and another on Q2]
3. Have the team map out how you currently engage with your customers and the communications 'channels' you use.
4. Get the team to think about how you currently engage with your customers:
 - Does the actual value proposition experienced by the client differ, negatively or positively, to the one communication?
 - Are there opportunities to improve either the experience or how you communicate during that interaction?

For example: if you have a 'help desk' how helpful is it? What could you communicate about this service that would set more realistic expectations and improve the perceived experience?

Even better – involve your internal customers!

Think about the three main reasons you communicate

The majority of shared services communication is typically online, email and phone based. Services such as HR and IT will also have a significant amount of engagement via face:face and the likes of internal call centres.

Areas managing key internal processes will also be communicating to educate, using the likes of workshops and training courses to bring people up to speed. Typically you are communicating...

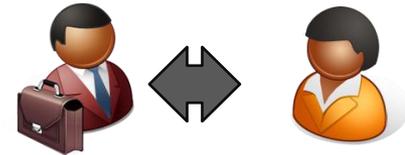
1. To Inform and Instruct

- Primarily one to many
- Generally via email, intranet, and direct mail



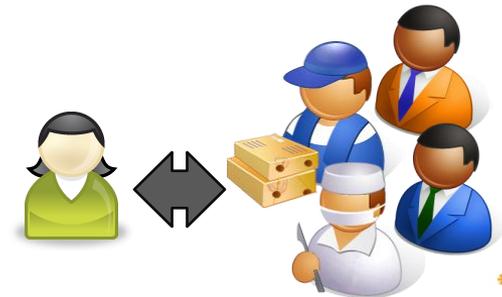
2. To Engage

- Primarily tailored face:face interactions and presentations
- Often via phone / internal call centres



3. To Educate

- Primarily internal 'campaigns' with a workshop component for line managers to run
- Growing use of e-learning



Recognise that all organisations are 'attention markets' that you compete within!

The organisation is an 'attention market'. If you don't get the appropriate attention of your audience(s) there's an increased chance of the communication being ignored.

Some points about this attention market...

- Information providers and consumers – either needing attention or giving it
- We do not give proportional weight to our communications
- People do not efficiently 'consume' their attention – they don't always give appropriate time to the important communications
- People are 'attention poor' – they deal with this by figuring out what they can ignore. Research shows that anything from 30% – 70% of communication within organisations can be ignored

To get the right attention you need to develop creative, but pragmatic, ways of communicating.

*Inspiration:
The Attention Economy;
Davenport/Beck*

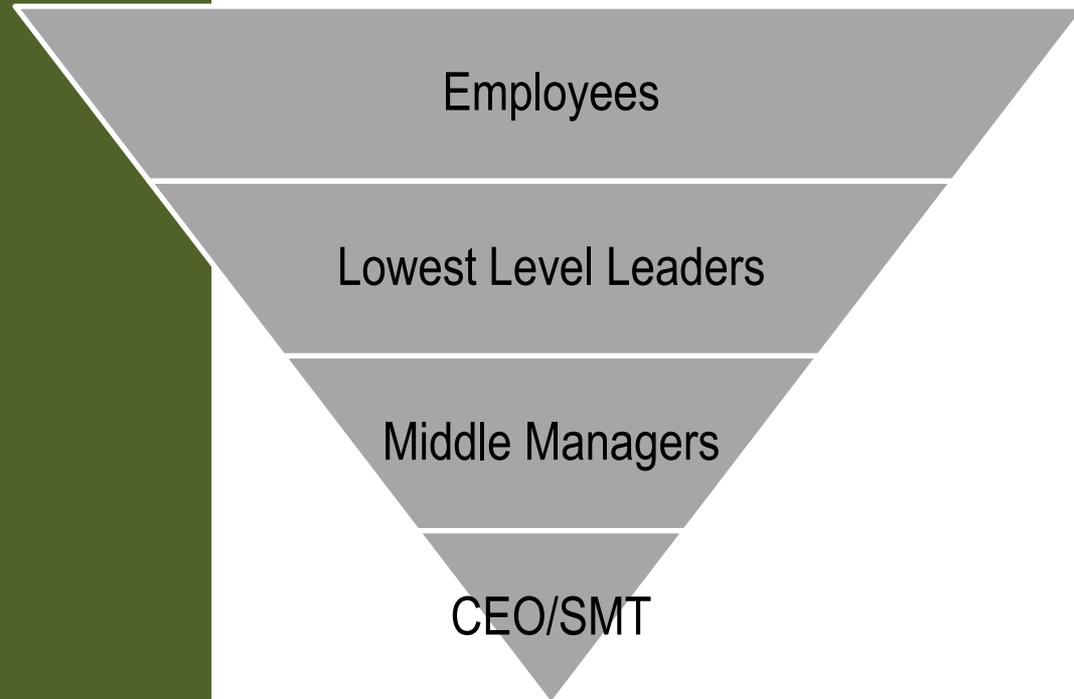
Ensure you flip the pyramid when you plan!

Most communication within an organisation happens at the bottom of the pyramid between staff and Lowest Level Leaders.

Often it's unscripted because the focus has gone into supporting the CEO and the senior management teams to communicate.

Research shows time and time again that staff prefer to hear about major change from their direct 'trusted' leader and look to these roles to tailor the information for local relevance.

Make sure your communications planning appropriately focuses on this area.



Take the time to develop the right messages

To communicate effectively you should first analyse **who** the audiences are, **what** you want to achieve, **what** messages, and **how** best to deliver them for the best outcome.

The planning wheel...



Make your messages persuasive

Persuasion is a form of social influence. It is the process of guiding people toward the adoption of an idea, attitude, or action by rational and symbolic (though not always logical) means. It is strategy of problem-solving relying on "appeals" rather than force.

Wikipedia

You also need to be persuasive. Generally, there are three key aspects to creating persuasive communication:

1. Keeping it audience-centric: communicating the 'what's in it for me'; showing the 'line of sight' between the employee and the subject that you're communicating

2. Using the right words: using plain English; using 'you' as much as possible; keeping out the management speak and clichés – sounding authentic. Avoiding the terms 'staff', 'employee', and that great one: 'FTE'!

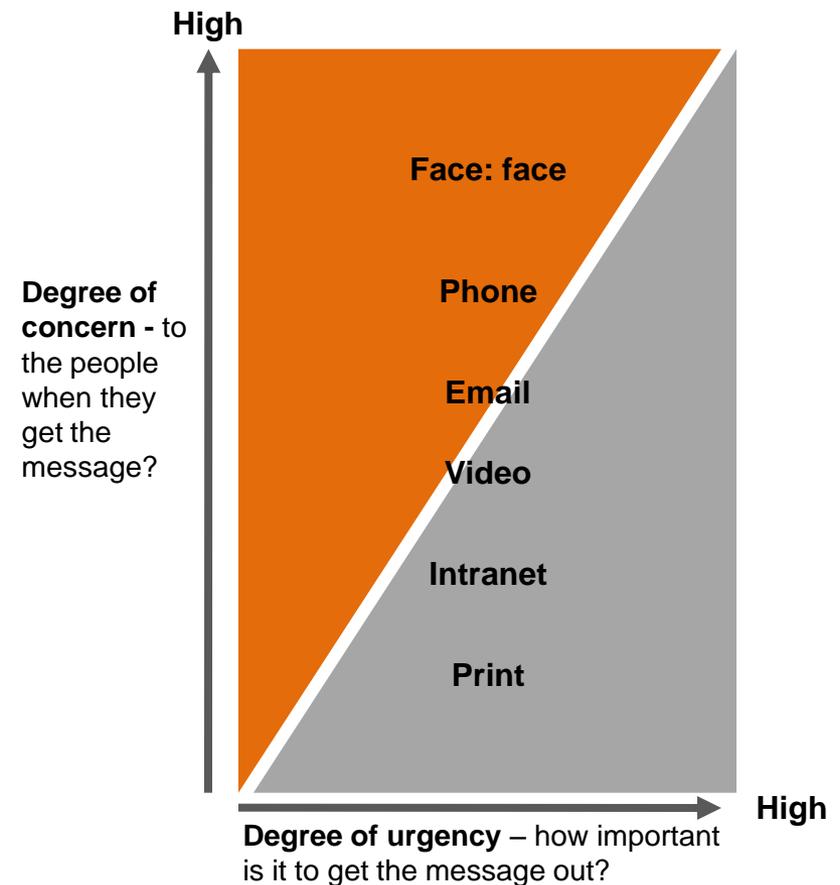
3. Removing the barriers to persuasion: good navigation and flow; keeping it conversational and engaging; keeping it short – giving people the option to drill down for further detail

4. Keep out the dross: people don't want to hear about how busy you are and how much you know. It really isn't about you!

Choose the right channels

Now, how do you communicate? More often than not you are communicating change. It comes down to considering two factors in balance: how concerned will people be about the content of the message(s) and how urgent is it to get the message out there.

The Concern Scale...



Measure for understanding

This is the hard bit... but it's incredibly easy to do!

There's a saying that effective communication has an effect. When you communicate you need to regularly measure for understanding. If you keep your head in the sand then you're just going to get your arse bitten!

We know from recent IABC research that although communicators recognise the importance of measuring the effectiveness of their communication programmes, they seldom carry out any formal post implementation research and rely mostly on informal measures.

A number of options exist to quickly and cheaply measure the effectiveness of your communication...

To measure...	Measurement
General understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Random survey• Deep Dive (Phone audit)• Volume of Q&A's
Road shows / Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exit 'vote'• Random survey• Deep Dive (Phone audit)• Feedback received
Team briefings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Random survey• Deep Dive• Feedback received
Electronic Intranet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 'Your Thoughts' – email feedback• Engagement Survey, Deep Dive• Traffic/Readership analysis

Working Words...

Keeping things simple!

Working Words understands the shared-services, operations and corporate services world . Founding Director Paul Rayner is a communicator with a difference...

- Three years working with Booz Allen Hamilton to establish operations centres and shared services for a major bank
- Seven years managing an operations centre, Human Resources units , and an IT business unit.
- Six years providing communications advice to an eclectic range of shared services functions in both public & private sector – IT, Human Resources, Risk, Finance, Audit, specialist public sector units. This includes helping outsourced service providers communicate within their client organisations.

A bit about the author: Paul Rayner

Director/Principal Consultant

Starting out in business process reengineering, Paul's spent the last twenty five years weaving his way through an eclectic range of corporate functions: change management, operations management, strategic planning, human resources, information technology, and communications.

Paul's senior management experience includes time as BNZ's Head of HR Services and as General Manager Organisational Development for SOE @Work Insurance. Paul has also consulted at London Business School in the area of human resources.

Paul's strategic change background is extensive, including several years working alongside recognised international strategy gurus - consultants Booz Allen Hamilton & Corporate Value Associates. Paul has worked on ,and led ,strategic projects for the likes of National Australia Bank, BNZ, Westpac, Volunteer Wellington, and Inland Revenue. This includes whole-of-organisation strategies and functional area strategies such as IT, Human Resources, Distribution, Operations, Communications, Risk, and Change Management.

Since 2002 Paul has specialised in providing organisational communications advice and services to a range of government, SOE, and private sector clients.

His eclectic background combined with his communication skills offers clients a unique skill set. Paul is an accredited member of the Human Resources Institute of New Zealand (**MHRINZ**) and a local board member of the International Association of Business Communicators.

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