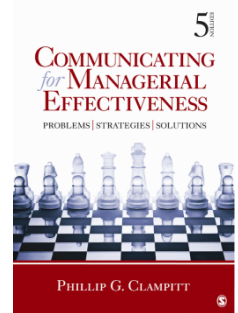


Chapter 11: Building a World-Class Communication System

Chapter Summary

A world-class communication system starts with executives and managers who are skillful at cultivating an energizing culture, selecting and using the appropriate communication technologies, and properly managing information and knowledge, to name a few of the critical requirements. But, there are other essential elements to have in place: assessment tools, a communication strategy and a plan for implementation.



World-class communication systems use a process-oriented view of communication effectiveness. It starts with assessment, which then leads to the development of a communication strategy, and culminates in action. The process continues by returning to an assessment of the results, which highlights the continually evolving nature of the communication strategy.

The assessment describes the existing communication system and reveals employee misconceptions and reactions to current initiatives. The communication audit and Pulse are two tools that can gauge the general health of the organization's communication system.

Effective strategies emerge from a careful assessment and thoughtful inquiry. To craft a communication strategy, managers need to select a sequence of communication goals that links to the organizational goals and underscore a few key themes or messages.

Several guidelines that help to successfully implement a communication strategy include using repetition and redundancy, utilizing opinion leaders and attacking "discussion-terminating retorts."

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

- describe the components of a communication audit and the Pulse Process
- define a communication strategy and discuss the critical concepts of the definition
- describe how to craft a communication strategy
- describe different types of communication goals

- identify the various message approaches and arrange them on a continuum based on the amount of information shared with employees
- describe the characteristics of an effective communication strategy
- identify guidelines that help to successfully implement a communication strategy

Outline

- I. Assess
 - A. Communication audits
 1. Determine who should conduct the assessment
 2. Select the proper methods(s) or tool(s)
 3. Ensure all employees that their comments will remain confidential
 4. Garner top management's full support of the assessment
 5. Carefully interpret your findings
 - B. Pulse Process
- II. Strategize
 - A. What is a communication strategy?
 1. Strategy involves a macro-level orientation that can be distinguished from tactical concerns
 2. Strategy involves implicit or explicit choices resulting in trade-offs
 3. Strategy involves goal setting
 4. Strategy involves anticipating others' reactions
 5. Strategy naturally serves as the basis for action

- B. How do you craft a communication strategy?
 - 1. Select a coordinated set of communication goals that links to the organizational goals
 - 2. Underscore and explore a few key themes or messages
 - 3. Align the core messages, the communicator roles, and channels with the communication goals
- C. What makes a communication strategy effective?
 - 1. Does the communication strategy advance organization goals?
 - 2. Does the strategy legitimize certain issues and de-legitimize others?
 - 3. Does the strategy shape an appropriate organizational memory?
 - 4. Does the strategy provide employees with a proper point of identity?
 - 5. Does the strategy help make sense of the confusing and ambiguous?
 - 6. Does the strategy evolve?

III. Implement

- A. Use repetition and redundancy
- B. Identify and use opinion leaders
- C. Identify and attack “discussion-terminating retorts”

IV. Assess-Strategize-Implement in Action

V. Conclusion

Case 11.1: Developing a Strategic Communication Plan

Purpose:

Learn how to analyze assessment data and develop a strategic plan.

Situation:

The new CEO of an automotive parts manufacturing firm, Suzanne Edwards, recently read the company's monthly communication Pulse Report (see next page). The comments and responses are fairly typical of other reports she has received in her first six months on the job. The firm has over 1,000 employees and she has devoted most of her time to "righting the financial ship." Her background in finance made her ideally suited for this task. Now she has asked you into her spartan quarters to develop a communication strategy to address the concerns in the Pulse Reports. She was candid with you, revealing, "I'm far more comfortable with Six Sigma initiatives than I am with any of the HR alchemy. I need your help to keep the crew on this ship pointed in the right direction."

Your objectives:

1. Provide an analysis of the Pulse data.
2. Develop a strategy that fits with Ms. Edwards's style.
3. Suggest some sample tactics that she could use to implement the strategy.

Pulse Report

April

Rating is on a "1–5" scale; 1 representing "strongly disagree", 5 representing "strongly agree";

Questions arranged in order of most agreement to least agreement for the current month's reading

Question	Cumulative Norm	Current Reading	SD (1)	D	U	A	SA (5)
I know how I contribute to the Plant's growth.	4.5	4.0		39%	14%	24%	23%
My co-workers and I are focused on controlling costs.	4.2	3.8		46%	18%	9%	27%
Safety is a high priority in my department.	3.8	3.7	9%	41%	9%	29%	12%
I have an important role in the Plant's success.	3.1	3.5	17%	23%	34%	8%	18%
We continue to meet customer needs while controlling costs.	3.1	2.9	20%	24%	30%	14%	12%
My immediate supervisor provides routine updates on Plant issues.	3.0	2.8	18%	30%	30%	11%	11%
The Plant is moving in the right direction.	2.9	2.6		59%	32%	9%	

I understand where the Plant is headed in the next quarter.	2.7	2.4	4%	52%	22%	22%	
I understand how major decisions are made in the Plant.	2.4	2.2	28%	22%	36%	9%	5%
N (Number of Respondents)	1746 (of 3882)	22 (of 44)					
Response Rate	44%	50%					

If you could ask the plant manager one question, what would it be?

- What new products are on the horizon?
- There is a significant amount of work being done to keep the plant operating at its current high level for our existing products. Given this, it seems there should be a little less emphasis on getting all the transformation training done this year. Sure the training is important, but let's be smart as we prioritize activities. Comments?
- The key to our competitiveness in the future will be totally engaged employees. Employees always looking for improvement opportunities and a way to reduce waste. It is employees utilizing their time wisely every day. This is a different mentality than punching a clock and putting in your time. Some of our people really do utilize their time effectively. My question is, do you think the union membership (in general) truly understands the urgency of this? Do they understand coming into the plant and working on whatever needs attention, safely of course. It has to be significantly different in the future than it is today.
- We have trained a large number of people to do our job because of flex issues. People who have done the job for nearly 2 years are still having occasional problems with parts of the job, and they trained for over a month at the beginning. Now we are training other flex people on this job so they can help out at times; they are receiving 3 or 4 days of training each. How much help do you think they will be?
- When are we going to get somebody in the maintenance dept who is a person who will work with the people and not for the puppet master that controls him? Do you have to have a graduate degree to get promoted in the maintenance dept (buddy system)?
- Thanks for taking on the challenge of being plant manager at this time of transition.

- I really appreciate the work that is being done to clean up the plant. It is looking nice. To help keep it clean, how do we get people to quit throwing used earplugs, coffee cups, etc., on the floor? They wouldn't do this at home; at least I don't think they would.
- Could you please give me three specific examples of "flexibility" that you would like to see and some explanation of why that shouldn't scare the sh__ out of me?
- Why don't you let the plant employees make some decisions on what new policies to enact instead of management making all the decisions?
- Are we getting any feedback from our customers? Have orders gone up?
- In the past year, I have noticed our products sitting on the loading docks with "HOT" stickers on it due to no availability of outside carrier trailers and/or late due dates. What do you plan on doing about it and how are we compensating our customers for late shipments with over the road carriers and scheduling? Have we thought about our own trucking line (which we already have) to run loads back and forth?
- Why do we pay so much attention to the whiners and not the winners?
- Nothing that is worthy of your time
- What has happened to our employee communication?
- This may not seem that important, but I can't understand why I do not ever receive my pay stub on Thursdays. I get it on Fridays and several times I will get it on Saturday.
- Thanks for a great job in a tough situation!
- You don't see too many cars here on nights and weekends! I know corp and salary stick together but until you look in a mirror and truly be honest with yourself, you will realize that we are indeed too top heavy
- Why is it when new business development gets good ideas the execs throw them out? I don't think they follow through with ideas well enough. When they do, and someone comes up with something, they don't get anything for it. What a knife in the back to those who deserve more than they got. I, for one, am glad I will not be one of those people!
- Do you not hear the frustration in these questions month after month after month? Where do you think this comes from? And how do you think the negativity affects people after this amount of time? It's not fair to keep putting more frosting on. Good people with good attitudes work here, but constant frustration does take its toll on even good people and wear down a person. And please don't suggest looking for another job anymore. We want and appreciate our jobs here. We just want more stability and some security and I don't think that's too much to ask for.

Case 11.2: Developing a Strategic Communication Plan

Purpose:

Learn how to develop a strategic communication plan for a major organizational change.

Situation:

The CEO of this Fortune 500 discount retailer was very punctual for the 15-minute meeting she scheduled with you. You notice on her bookcase an entire shelf devoted to military history. She detects your curiosity and says, "I'm a military history nut. My heroes are Generals Patton and Eisenhower--that's a pretty odd combination but it probably describes my basic sensibilities. But that's not why I called you into my office today." She goes on to explain how the rising costs of health care are cutting into the firm's bottom line, noting that many auto manufacturers now pay more for health care coverage for their employees than they do for steel. This is a problem that every organization is facing but she wants to deal aggressively with it by: 1) significantly increasing the size of the employee's deductible, 2) using health care savings accounts (HSAs) to help employees pay for the deductible, and 3) matching employee contributions to their personal health care savings accounts up to \$200/month.

This is a major change and employee anxiety is likely to be quite high. She has asked you to develop a communication strategy for the rollout of this new plan.

Your objectives:

1. Develop a communication strategy for this change.
2. Create related communication tools (tactics).
3. Suggest an implementation schedule.
4. Provide advice about what to expect when the communications "hit the street."