PART ONE
Foundations

Introduction to internal communication

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Communication inside organizations, between employees, is internal communication. It's often part of PR due to its link to relationships and it can also be linked to HR, due to the core component being employees.

Communicating with employees is not the same as communicating with other stakeholders. Employees have a different relationship with the organization from customers, they are part of it, and they belong to it.

To define internal communication is challenging. There are hundreds of definitions because the breadth of what it includes is huge. Over the years, there have been several definitions from academics, authors, consultants and those working in-house as an internal communications manager, head of or director of internal communications.

My definition of internal communication is:

> Internal communication includes everything that gets said and shared inside
> of an organization. As a function, its role is to curate, enable and advise on
> best practice for organizations to communicate effectively, efficiently and in an
> engaging way.

The Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC) says:

> At the most basic level, you have to communicate well at the right time so
> employees know what is expected of them and what is happening in the
> organization. At a deeper level, for employees to feel engaged with their
> workplace and give their best, they have to see that their organization cares

about their views and understand how their role contributes towards overall business objectives.

For many people working as an internal communications manager, director or business partner, there is a need to define the role of internal communication inside the organization they work for.

In some organizations there is a whole department for internal communication. In others, it is a bolt-on to the PA for the CEO. It is this variety that makes it increasingly challenging for internal communicators to make headway in elevating its role to the strategic function it can be. It is also what contributes to different expectations from different leadership teams, which make it hard to identify the right skills, structure and outcomes needed for the function.

The IoIC outlines five reasons why internal communication is important today:

1 **Economic climate** – lifelong job security is now a rarity, and so the former social contract of unquestioning loyalty (from the employee) for job security (from the employer) has been broken. This means organizations have to work harder on relationships with their people.

2 **Importance of delivering great customer experience** – organizations have realized that a disconnect can quickly occur between the promises of promotional activity and what is actually experienced by customers if employees are not clear about what they are supposed to be doing or completely behind it.

3 **More democratic/consultative** – organizations have become less hierarchical and bureaucratic. People do not just want to be told things – they expect involvement and dialogue.

4 **New technology** – the ways in which communication takes place, and the forms that are now accepted and expected, cannot be 'controlled' in the same way as previous methods could.

5 **Frequent change** – organizations have to keep modifying how they operate to remain competitive. It is more challenging to keep employees motivated and moving in the right direction in these circumstances.

With these five points to consider, it's easy to see why internal communication needs more focus from leadership to help organizations thrive. The factors outlined here are only being accelerated in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its link to customer experience and employee experience is closer than ever, and it was also vital to the introduction of technology in the pandemic-accelerated organizational change as workforces around the world were locked down in their homes.

In times of crisis the need for good internal communication is often a focus. The sometimes under-resourced function is now the one that is needed most to help keep the organization going, as people need access to information and technology to do their jobs effectively.

It's too early to identify the long-term impact of Covid-19 on internal communication but there is hope in the community that the understanding of the need for human connection at work will change things. There is now a recognition that flexibility in the workplace is key for society today, and that work can be done anywhere you have a computer. The world of work will be changed forever, and the internal communication function is central to that being a success.

Professional bodies

As we look at organizations, there is a need to look at how internal communication compares to other functions. For years there have been conversations around the need for internal communication to have a seat at the board table, and how it deserves more recognition by business leaders than it currently receives.

To provide a comparison, looking at the link between functions in organizations and professional bodies can give some indication where the issues lie for those in internal communication.

HR (human resources) as we know it today used to be called the personnel function. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) started in 1913 as the Welfare Workers' Association (WWA). They were granted a Royal Charter in 2000 and are now simply known as the professional body for HR and people development.

The finance function – often the core of an organization – had a similar time frame as a Chartered body. The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) was founded in 1919.

The final body to mention is the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), which was founded in 1911.

You can see the time it has taken for these professions to become more standard and more recognized. When we look at the professional bodies linked to internal communication, and more broadly PR, then you can see that the role of communication in business had not been seen as a professional practice until 1938 at the earliest. There is an assumption here that the formation of a professional body signals a change for that profession; even without that assumption we can see that the role of internal communication inside organizations might not have the same weight as some of these other functions, simply because it has not had time to develop the recognition it needs.

- The Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC) was created in 1949 and was then known as the British Association of Industrial Editors (BAIE). In 1995 it rebranded to CIB: Communicators in Business and in 2010 it became the IoIC that we know today.
- The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) was originally known as the Institute for Public Relations when it was founded in 1948. It was awarded Chartered status in 2005.
- The Public Relations Consultants Association was founded in 1969. It changed its name in 2016 to become the Public Relations and Communications Association.
- The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) was originally known as the American Association of Industrial Editors (AAIE), which was founded in 1938. In 1970 IABC was formed as we know it today, following a merger between AAIE and the International Council of Industrial Editors (ICIE). Corporate Communicators Canada merged with IABC in 1974, expanding its membership.

Figure 1.1 IoIC profession map 2020
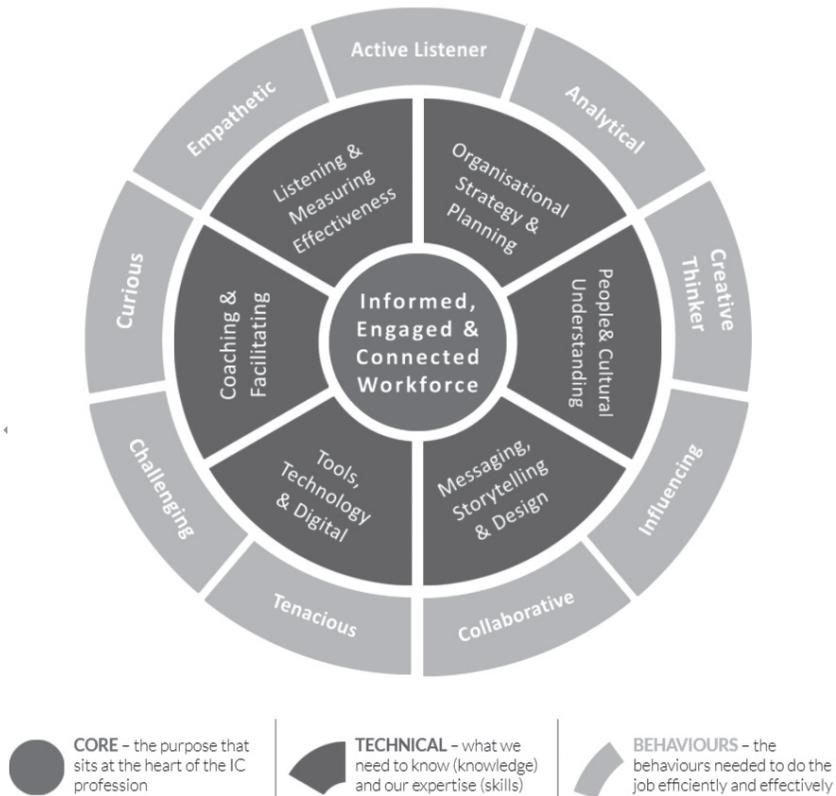
This links to investment not only in the function by organization leaders, but also in the skills of the internal communicator. The skills needed to be successful in internal communication have adapted over the years, and in 2020 The Institute of Internal Communication updated its profession map to reflect the behaviours and skills needed today (Figure 1.1).

The list of behaviours here could apply to many functions inside organizations but the importance of empathy, listening and tenacity should not be underestimated for the internal communicator. These are core skills when it comes to relationship building, and for internal communication to succeed in influencing, there have to be these 'human' skills at the core.

Eight golden rules

In 2014 the eight golden rules from Fitzpatrick and Valskov were outlined in their book *Internal Communications: A manual for practitioners*. These rules are still very relevant for the communication professional and function today, and you can see the link between people, organizations and communication even then (Figure 1.2).

These rules may seem simple but combining them to support organizations is the art of internal communication. The currency of PR and communication is in ethics, leadership and strategy, and communication with employees requires all three.

Rule 2 is one that many internal communication functions struggle with today. The importance of business acumen for those working in communications has been on the skills list for many years. The Chartered Institute of Public Relations State of the Profession survey shows that it has been a skills gap since 2017. The reasons for business acumen not being addressed seem to link to time and the focus on tasks to complete, rather than taking time to explore some of the fundamental aspects of business – business as a whole and the way the organization works. These rules were written in 2014 – the skills gaps have remained through to 2017 and beyond. It would great to see business acumen off the list in future as communicators take the time to understand organizations, the financials that are so important to success and the way things work. This is why these golden rules remain very relevant and very true today. They may be seven years old but the rules of the internal communication game are still the same.

The challenges for internal communication have continued for decades. It has to be influential to be effective, and it has to impact on the people who work for the organization and the way the organization operates. If it doesn't, it's not having any business impact.

Figure 1.2 Eight golden rules

Rule 1 • It's about results and outcomes, not activity – ask the question 'what do we want people to do?'

Rule 2 • It's about the business – there has to be a link to the needs of the business. Without it, we are not adding any value

Rule 3 • We don't drive with our eyes shut – know your audience. You cannot do that from behind a desk either!

Rule 4 • People have two ears and one mouth, and so should organizations – listen. Communication is not one-way

Rule 5 • Come with data, leave with respect – gather data and use evidence. It's needed for your own credibility and to enable sound decisions

Rule 6 • Line managers matter – they hold the key to many challenges inside organizations

Rule 7 • There is no silver bullet – technology is not going to solve the communication challenges inside your organization

Rule 8 • What we do matters – internal communicators are in a privileged role and can have huge impact on individual employees' lives

The value and impact of internal communication on organizations

In 2017 the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' (CIPR) internal communication group carried out research into the value and impact of internal communication. They interviewed CEOs to find out exactly what they thought. They said:

- Internal communication is important, but as it doesn't generate profit as a function, it was never going to be placed above the ones that do in terms of value to the organization.
- Culture came up as an area that was impacted by internal communication, as well as engagement – in some cases internal communication functions were seen as the 'owners' of culture.
- 'Employee engagement' and 'internal communication' are used interchangeably by internal communicators.
- There is a lack of alignment between internal communication teams and management.
- Internal communication teams are the custodians of translating strategy, company values and priorities.
- There was a strong consensus that measuring increased productivity and improved performance as a result of internal communications was difficult.

Looking at internal communication through the lens of a CEO helps bring some reality to the role. Many departments inside organizations get stuck trying to demonstrate worth and value, internal communicators more so than others, based on the small budgets often allocated to the work.

Determining what value means for the leader in your organization is important. Have the conversation and if you are a leader, ask yourself what value looks like to you. It will be different from person to person. For some it's about managing risk, for others it's about engaging the front line to deliver great customer service. It's a conversation that has to be had for internal communication functions to have any influence inside the organization.

This links to the need to define internal communication inside the organization. The definition of it should come from conversations with leadership and discussions about how it supports the organizational objectives. This has to be the starting point for any function to ensure that the focus is in the right place and the output is effective.

Communication theory – underpinning internal communication

The practice of internal communication is grounded in communication theory. For many, the academic side of communication is unknown, but you can become qualified, chartered and complete a master's in internal communication – much as you can for other professions that operate in organizations today.

The theory is important because influential communication is not just about opinion. When there is research and academic study to support it, leaders find it easier to understand why things should be done a certain way and what the impact of improved internal communication would be for their organization. I completed my qualification in internal communication when I was told my opinion was not enough in the boardroom. While this felt unjust at the time, completing the qualification meant I could test my own knowledge against theory and have the weight of academia behind me.

Having a qualification helps you position a business case better, bring in external peer checks because you have networked with others outside of your organization, and ensure that you have a way of working that looks at stakeholders, models of communication, culture, channels and more.

Foundations

As you go further into this book, you'll read more about organizations and people. Internal communication is the glue that holds an organization together and as such there is a need to understand organizations and people in some depth.

As we explore more about what this means for internal communication, there are some foundations for impactful communication that support the rules we have already covered:

1 **Focus on the audience**: Develop a true understanding of your target audience. This isn't about you, it's about them. What you think works might not be what is right for your audience – you need them to be at the front of your mind at all times. Get to know them: what are the different stakeholder groups in your part of the business? What do they do every day, how do they work?

2 **Set a clear goal**: Always be clear about why you are doing what you are doing. What are you trying to achieve? Do you want them to be informed? Do you want them to do something differently?

3 **Get the tone right**: While studies suggest there is a split between tone, body language and words, this lacks verification. Each component part of communication has a role to play and tone, in a world where email dominates, is something we often miss or assume. Drop the jargon, explain each acronym and be mindful that internally there can be a language understood only by those around you.

4 **Keep it simple**: Studies have found that people think you're less intelligent and less credible if you use long words when shorter words will do. Remember, the power of silence in difficult conversations allows you to keep things simple – don't over-qualify a decision.

5 **Structure to make your point**: Be logical – think about the flow that would make sense to the audience – think about a film/tv series or a supermarket flow. There should be no surprises – remember that structure can take place over a longer period, so telling people there is no pay rise shouldn't come as a complete surprise, as the message should have been signalled throughout the year. Think about the point you're going to make: tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you told them.

6 **Adapt to the medium**: Medium/channel are important – they contribute to the message. You wouldn't text someone to sack them because using that channel makes the message worse. Don't

get stuck in the same channel, eg PowerPoint/meeting. Remember the six foundations – does that channel work for the audience, does it support your goal?

There is a lot of theory that can be explored for communicators, but this book isn't about the academic side of what we do. It's about providing practical advice to help you shift the organization by creating influential and effective communication strategies that have an impact.

The six foundations outlined are enough to help you consider your own style of communication. Focus on your audience, have clear structure and purpose, and that alone will make a difference to the way things work inside the organization.

The role of communication inside organizations is paramount to success. This isn't necessarily new information, but the lack of planning, strategy, or consideration of content and channels is where things can start to fall down.

Communication channels

A communication channel is the mechanism you use to communicate. Outside of internal communication this could be a text message, a letter or an email (to name a few).

There are lots of channels available both inside and outside organizations. The rise of social media, smartphones and apps has meant there has been a shift in how we communicate with employees.

The first formal employee publications can be dated back to 1840 and organizations today continue to use magazines as a channel to communicate with employees. Internal communicators now have a range of tools: from video to printed newsletters, as well as online collaboration platforms (Office 365/SharePoint), podcasts, chatbots – the list goes on.

In the last 15 years alone the shift from print to digital has been exponential as organizations shift to working globally and remotely. This doesn't mean that internal digital communication is the solution to all problems – far from it – nor does it mean that all organizations

are embracing technology and investing in it – they aren't. What it does mean is that the purpose of the communication channel and the skills of the communicator have shifted.

The channels are no longer purely broadcast. Before the introduction of technology, the ability to listen to employees was limited, and due to some management theories, it was actively discouraged. Today in society, organizations aren't able to push messages out to any stakeholder group and walk away. People want conversation, discussion, dialogue. And for employees, they want to be part of decisions and be heard more than any other group.

The audience/employees are now able to participate in creating the content. The need to curate that content and share it to encourage conversation is different from writing up an interview and publishing it in a magazine. The skills needed to create and edit a magazine are not the same as the skills needed to design the architecture for a digital collaboration platform.

As internal communicators, our skills have to adapt in line with the pace of technology and organizational change. Leaders are asking more of internal communicators today – more in terms of their knowledge around which channel to use in a sea of options but also around advice and expertise that ensure that channel is going to engage and influence the audience.

The list of channels can go on and on. Gatehouse, a Gallagher company, list the following channels in their annual State of the Sector research, which provides some helpful context about the options available:

- conferences;
- roadshows;
- town halls;
- informal get-togethers;
- team meetings run by line managers;
- web calls/conference calls;
- lunch and learn;
- employee forums;
- communication champions;
- employee magazines;
- printed newsletters;
- letters;
- desk drops;
- posters;
- flyers;

- brochures;
- mobile messaging;
- video;
- email announcements;
- apps;
- e-newsletters;
- internal social channels;
- digital signage;
- intranet;
- AI;
- blogs;
- extranet;
- podcasts.

The mix of channels used for every organization will be different. Factors like locations, operational model, leadership and culture all play a role in determining the right mix. Advice is usually to have a mix of print, digital and face to face, and to ensure there are channels that bring the voice of the employee into the centre to ensure there is two-way conversation.

You can map the channels in your organization to a channel matrix – it helps to see the mix of what exists, where the gaps might be and also where there might be too many channels – and therefore too much noise – as well.

**Table 1.1**   Example of a channel matrix table

Channel name	Method	Content	Frequency	Audience
eg The Bulletin	PDF document emailed to all colleagues	News from across the business linked to strategy and people news	Monthly	Internal only and all colleagues

Culture and communication

Communication helps to reinforce a company culture. Culture can have many definitions but ultimately, it is the way things get done inside the organization. How you communicate with each other is a tangible way of demonstrating that culture.

The culture will be seen through the channels used, the innovation of those channels (AI vs print), the tone of voice that is used to communicate with employees, the role of the employees in communication across the organization – it all signals the culture.

Figure 1.3   How culture is seen through communication
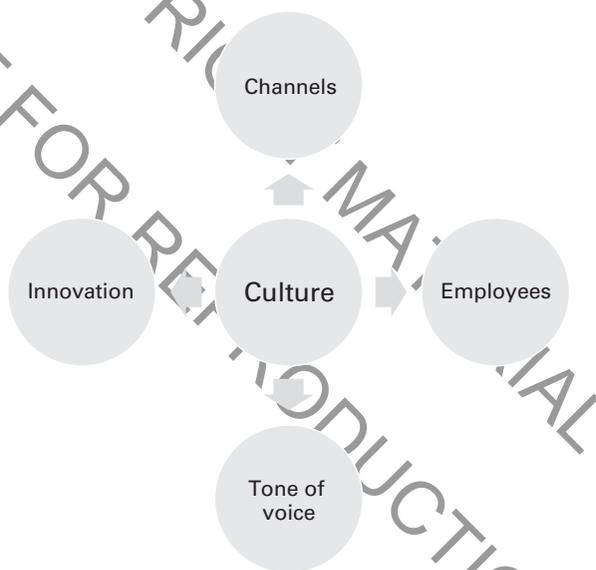
There are building blocks to culture – and as we work through the book, you'll see that culture and communication are constantly entwined. If culture is where the purpose, values and behaviours sit, then articulating those for employees and sharing stories that link to them is communication.

The alignment between behaviours and purpose is an important part of culture. How do things get done and does that match the purpose/values of the organization? The way you structure meetings,

the expectations of timescales for delivery – they all play a role in signalling what it is like to work somewhere.

Culture is also closely linked to the employee experience, which we touched on earlier. How people are treated throughout their life cycle with an organization is demonstrable of the culture. The challenge for organizations today is that organizations are global. Culture therefore is a tricky one, as most organizations have a culture that is made up of 'macro cultures, nations and occupation' according to Edgar Shein.

As culture is built by humans and changed by humans, it's no surprise that things change over time. A global crisis will impact culture, much like a change in leadership or organization-wide changes in technology do – they will all have an impact on how things get done and how people work together.

A crisis like Covid-19 will impact culture. It will impact the rhythm of the organization. When I reference the rhythm of the organization I'm referring to the way it operates. The meetings, the way things get done, the culture, the processes – all of it will have been impacted by Covid-19 because so much of the 'normal' way of work was disrupted. It is a topic that I discussed in detail throughout the crisis because it's important to explore what needs to change longer term, what has worked and what hasn't and what it has shown us about the culture of where we work. In order to get things done during the crisis, things had to change. We saw shortages of products on shelves due to demand and supply challenges as well as a global shift for knowledge workers, now all home-based. Looking at the rhythm of it all is important in order to know what needs to happen next.

As a communicator, these are things you need to explore as you think about how people are connected and how they work together without the confines of an office space. It's an opportunity for us all to explore how the organization's drumbeat really should sound.

Change will always create a shift in the organization, and since the pandemic, we have had to consider new ways to use digital tools, the need to adapt to communicating in a purely virtual world, and the fact that the role of the communicator is now more in the spotlight than ever before.

The communicator looking at their culture needs to listen and explore how people feel. When there is huge change, and moving parts that lead to an inability to craft messaging, focus on how you want people to feel and work back from there.

Stop focusing on what to say and focus on how you want people to feel after they have been listened to. It will help you think differently and focus on the impact you are having.

Focusing on how people feel allows us to move away from a sense of panic and chaos. It allows us to put ourselves in the place of advising leadership. We are focusing their minds on the people and allowing empathy to lead.

Flexible working and a change in the need to be in an office all the time has been a campaign for many years from various groups. We need better technology to allow hybrid teams to engage and communicate, and all of this will impact the culture of the organization.

The culture has to demonstrate why you do what you do, reflect your values and beliefs, and your behaviours must support what you stand for. All of this will shift in times of a global crisis like Covid-19 and there must be time to reflect and adapt as a communication function to support that.

As cultures shift, so does the power. The world of work has shifted from a top-down, autocratic way of working to networked, democratic and bottom-up. The CEO is no longer seen as the expert on what's needed on the front line and the voice of those serving customers can be listened to immediately with the use of technology.

The skills of the communicator to adapt to all of this shouldn't be underestimated. In turn, the value they bring to the organization should also be recognized.

The difference between internal communication and employee engagement

Over the years there has been a lot of discussion around employee engagement, employee experience and internal communication. Traditional communication agencies have rebranded as employee

engagement, and more recently as employee experience specialists, and the link to HR has grown.

Even though there is a difference between these three things, the research from CIPR in 2017 highlights that they are used interchangeably. While the research interviewed CEOs about value it also interviewed internal communication practitioners about the role they play inside organizations.

In the verbatim comments, many of the respondents used a variety of these terms when talking about internal communication. And this is dangerous. It's dangerous because some of these terms are not used by leaders in business and if those working in the profession use different terms for the same thing it will lead to confusion – which won't help the strategic focus internal communicators can and should have.

There are distinct definitions – even if we have to pick just once from the list of internal communication:

Employee engagement: 'A workplace approach designed to ensure that employees are committed to their organization's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organisational success and are able at the same time to enhance their own sense of well-being' (Macleod and Clarke, 2009).

Internal communication: 'Everything that gets said and shared inside of an organization. As a function, its role is to curate, enable, and advise on best practice for organizations to communicate effectively, efficiently and in an engaging way' (Field, 2017).

Employee experience: 'Creating an operating environment that inspires your people to do great things' (Maylett and Wride, 2017) or, according to Jacob Morgan (2016), 'Designing an organization where people want to show up by focusing on the cultural, technological, and physical environments.'

Understandably, the employee experience and engagement definitions focus more on the individual and their well-being than on communication. They are also not just about communication – which is why the three terms need to be distinguished from each other and organizations need to understand the differences.

All three are intrinsically linked, but internal communication also needs to fulfil its basic purpose of communicating with those in the organization before it can embark on the winning of hearts and minds. The winning of hearts and minds is not solely down to communication. There are many factors that contribute – line manager relationships, fair pay, equal opportunities – to name a few.

Employee engagement is a core principle for internal communication and is based on the premise that people who feel so much for an organization and its ambitions will go above and beyond their job description.

Macleod and Clarke's 'Engaging for Success: enhancing performance through employee engagement' report shows strong links to bottom line and productivity when companies dedicate resource to ensure employees are engaged. They claim there are four main enablers to employee engagement:

1 A strong strategic narrative.
2 Engaging managers who focus their people and treat them as individuals.
3 Providing employees with a voice throughout the organization for reinforcing and challenging views.
4 Ensuring there is organizational integrity – the values are implicit, not just wallpaper.

In my experience, these four enablers are not of equal weight. I believe that the way you measure engagement is key to these being linked to productivity and I also believe that you can have some of these and not others and still see 'engagement' inside the organization.

For example, I have experience working in organizations where the narrative was strong – it might not have been particularly purposeful, but everyone knew why they were doing what they were doing. This led to great performance and engagement in terms of delivery and desire to get the job done but all other enablers were missing. In other places, there has been no strategic narrative but a strong sense of providing employees with a voice – this led to a revolving door of employees.

What is important here is that we look at all the aspects around internal communication and employee engagement together. They aren't the same thing but they are linked. The four enablers provide a great framework for organizations to draw from but having all four working in tandem at the same time with a great communication strategy and plan being executed is rare. Don't be set up for failure.

These enablers are a good foundation – but there is more complexity to engagement, and it needs more research into how it is measured, as well as how it links to internal communication, before it can be summarized so quickly. Engagement and communication do go together but the definitions we have explored here show how they are different; it's almost an output as a result of internal communication.

A model for internal communication strategy and planning

This model for creating an influential internal communication strategy and plan has been created to ensure the output is aligned to data. It has been used in every organization I have worked in to set up the communication function. Each step has to be completed; they don't need to follow each other as some can be done together but it's important to work through the whole process.

There are five steps to the model, and it starts with insight. We cannot make decisions about the right way to communicate inside an organization without data. If we try, then the decision is based on assumption and opinion, which is dangerous and easily disputed when it comes to budget setting. Later in the book we will spend time looking at data in detail – how to gather insight and the different tools you can use to 'diagnose' what's going on inside the organization.

The Field Model was created on the back of this model for communication strategy and planning:

Table 1.2   A model for an internal communications plan and strategy

Phase	Overview	Summary
Insight	Look at any existing research into employee engagement/internal communication and also any research with customers or other stakeholders Run surveys that cover employee effectiveness and engagement, communications audits and/or culture trackers Explore the use of focus groups, interviews over the phone to verify and explore the data	• Culture research • Perception internally and externally • Primary or secondary research
Business intelligence	Review all the material that exists that talks about the organization – annual report, case studies, marketing material, etc Look at the flow of communication across the organization to understand how the business works – who needs to talk to who and how you provide the services you do to your customers	• Business process • What does the organization do? • IT infrastructure
Principles	Create a set of guiding principles for the communication function and strategy. This will set out what is needed to resource the activity and whether there needs to be a plan to recruit anyone into the team. The principles should be aligned to the business strategy	• Function objectives • Principles for the organization • Alignment of business strategy and communications strategy
Communication	This is the creation of the communication strategy It should include any development needs for the leadership team or line managers and any workshops that might be needed It will include a content strategy and a channel matrix with a clear plan for the year.	• Channel matrix • Audience mapping • Content strategy • Information matrix

Table 1.2 *continued*

Phase	Overview	Summary
Measurement	The principles agreed enable the measurement as there will be clear objectives for success. The insight phase provides the benchmark so improvements can be made. There should also be a measure against business performance and outcomes	• KPIs for success aligned to principles • Culture of active listening • Agreed to timescales

This strategy and planning model needs to be combined with a look at stakeholders, or audience. For internal communicators there is often complexity in the stakeholders as organizations might employ contractors, freelancers, people who are self-employed, and more. As a result it is important to spend some time mapping the stakeholders of the organization. The best way to do this is to look at who has high or low influence and who has high or low impact. As an example, sometimes the personal assistants to the senior team have a high level of influence in the organization but they don't have a huge impact on decision making. Identifying those people who you need to engage with and who the stakeholders are that you need to consider is an important part for internal communications – especially as relationships internal to the organization are so important.

To group stakeholders you can look at:

- role;
- location;
- demographics, like age;
- department;
- online or deskless.

You can always add more categories, but this is a good starting point for you to think about.

Following the steps will mean that the communication strategy and plan is aligned to the business strategy. This is the only way to ensure the internal communication is influential and that it will have

an impact across the organization. It's easy to create noise inside an organization and set up channels to allow people to communicate with each other. But if this isn't thought through, with choices made based on data and insight, it can be increasingly challenging to measure and get senior buy-in for the long term.

If we go back to the rules we covered at the start of this chapter, you can see how the model reflects some of those principles. The principles or rules for internal communication haven't changed over the years. The tools used to communicate inside organizations has but the foundations have remained fairly constant.

Internal communication is something every organization has. Whether there is someone managing it, looking at it strategically, or there is just a rumour mill doing the work for you, it exists. If you haven't invested in it or explored how it can help you make the organization more efficient, then this chapter should help explain why it is important and how to make a start.

Continuing to ignore the value it can bring will only result in more chaos and more time and money wasted on trying to solve issues that can be fixed with better communication infrastructure and skills.

Where internal communication sits in the organization

In 2020 Gatehouse, a Gallagher Company, published their 11th annual State of the Sector report. This report is an industry look at the trends across the internal communication industry. From barriers to priorities and channels to team size, it covers a lot of ground to help communicators spot trends that will help with conversations and strategies in the year ahead.

For many years there has been a debate about where internal communication should sit inside the organization. Should it report to HR, marketing, the CEO, corporate communications? The list can go on because it is a function that links so much of the organization together.

Does it even matter? As long as the function is working across the whole organization, where it sits in an organizational chart shouldn't

Figure 1.4   Where does internal communication sit inside the organization?

Internal communication sits in HR or PR

Corporate Communications / PR / Corporate Affairs —— HR
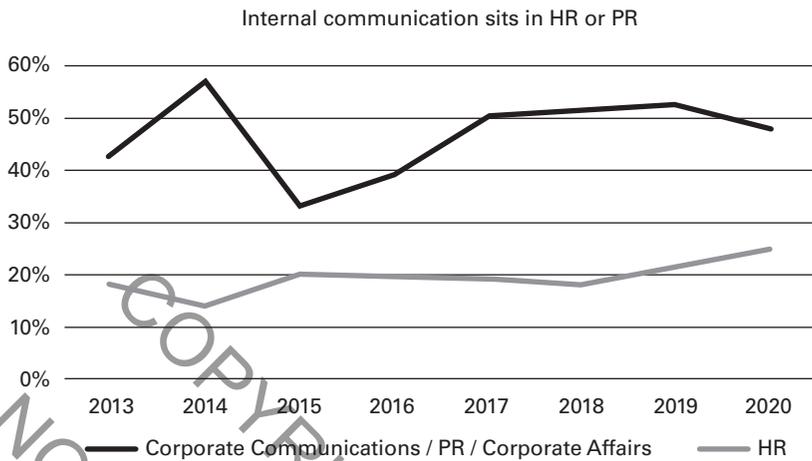
necessarily be a focus, but for many it is. And for many, it is a conversation that champions the function sitting in HR. This makes sense when you consider that the main focus is employees. The role of internal communication is also linked to reputation and that suggests that corporate communications or PR could be a natural home for the internal communication team.

Figure 1.4 shows that for the majority, internal communication sits in the PR/corporate communication/corporate affairs function inside organizations.

While employees are the main focus, with technology and reputation so closely aligned, the home of internal communication should be the corporate communication function. The CIPR definition of PR is 'the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics.' Its publics is important because this isn't the general public. Publics include anyone that has a link to an organization – and one of the most important stakeholders has to be its employees. In addition, when it comes to managing reputation (for which PR is also responsible), the reputation of the organization/brand with employees is more and more important with the pace of society today.

The link to reputation might seem odd but as technology moves at pace, conversations that were once only in the canteen or only

through an internal system can now be found on social media or leaked to the media. Over the years there have been several stories of internal memos from leadership teams shared with the press, and the gap between what you say your brand stands for and the reality of how you treat your employees is now front and centre for any member of the public to see.

Key points in this chapter

1 Internal communication doesn't have one definition. For your organization, define what the function will do and what internal communication is. This is important because it means you are setting the strategy for how internal communication can support the organizational objectives.

2 I define internal communication as everything that gets said and shared inside of an organization. As a function, its role is to curate, enable and advise on best practice for organizations to communicate effectively, efficiently and in an engaging way.

3 The Institute of Internal Communication (IoIC) suggests internal communication is important for organizations because of economic climate, customer experience, more democratic structures, new technology and frequent change.

4 The professional bodies linked to communication weren't founded until around 1938, in comparison to bodies for other core business functions, which started as early as 1911.

5 Rules for internal communication suggested in 2014 are still relevant today – the profession and the fundamental elements of it haven't changed.

6 To ensure the leadership teams can see value and impact of internal communication there has to be alignment of purpose.

7 There are some foundations for impactful communication; focusing on the audience, setting clear goals, getting the tone right, keeping it simple, structure to messaging, adapting to the medium.

8 The channel mix for the organization needs to consider print, online and face to face, and it needs to be two-way. The range of channels on offer can feel overwhelming but use the matrix to map out what exists now, where the gaps are and how to change it to meet the needs of the organization.

9 Culture and how things get done inside the organization are intrinsically linked to communication – communication is how we do it, but the relationship is the output. The relationships and how we work together are culture.

10 A global crisis will impact culture, much like a change in leadership or organization-wide changes in technology do – they will all have an impact on how things get done and how people work together.

11 Employee engagement, internal communication and employee experience are all different – we need to stop using the terms interchangeably, but we do need to recognize how they fit together. Working closely with HR and IT will help ensure that the communication is having impact across the organization.

12 The model to create an internal communication strategy has five phases: insight, business intelligence, principles, communication and measurement. You must start with data to inform the strategy and plan. The model can be used as a step-by-step guide or you can combine the insight and business intelligence phases.

13 Data tells us that internal communication sits in the PR and corporate communication function.

14 Communication can be the cause of chaos. Having channels, tools and a plan in place to ensure communication is open and transparent will help you move out of chaos and into calm.

Quick tips

- Make sure you are clear what the organization's strategy is to ensure that the communication strategy can be measured in line with it.

- Understand the culture you want to achieve to enable you to use the right channels to support it.

- Ensure the leadership team are aligned to a common strategy and message.

- Have a good foundation of channels – the way you communicate with employees is so important and they need to be two-way.

- Invest in line managers' skills around communication – people work for people so the relationship here is key for engagement.

- Take the time to listen to employees and all internal stakeholders so you know what is really happening.

- Use a channel matrix to map out the way you communicate – it helps you to have a clear framework for the organization and avoids ambiguity.

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