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# Rethinking Internal Communications by Rajneesh Chowdhury

🕒 25th June 2014    📁 Opinion    🗨️ 4 minute read

We are witnessing a continual transformation in the way organisations are being shaped by an ever dynamic and evolving workforce – employee expectations seen as never before, highly informed and networked professionals, and Gen-Y demanding a new character for work itself.



This transformation demands a shift in mindset and focus for communications professionals if they want to be relevant in this environment. Internal

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communications is an area that not only needs a refocus, but also a rethink.

In the current eco-system, extraordinary content is being generated by employees themselves. Control over content is probably moving away from communications professionals to employees. With employee blogs, social media platforms, LinkedIn, and employment experience sharing portals like Glassdoor and Jobeehive, today's workforce does not have to look for content outside itself.

The traditional role of an internal communications professional to create and disseminate content is gradually changing to be that of a mindful facilitator of what is being created by people and how this in turn is shaping the organisations character. It is in this light that Mike Grafham from [Yammer](https://yammer.com/) (<https://yammer.com/>), suggests that the role of an internal communicator needs to change "from creator to curator".

Communications professionals will need an increasingly integrated approach that not only harmonizes communication within the organisational system, but also aligns the same to the strategic vision of the firm.

Consider [Intuit](http://intuit.com/) (<http://intuit.com/>), an American technology firm that has its own facilities to create and broadcast videos through Intuit-TV – a channel that spreads internal messages to its people; this platform also carries the feature of two-way communication where employees can post videos and have interactions. A recent upgrade makes the videos embeddable to any web-page within the company's intranet. This complements the ever evolving presence of the firm in its employee Facebook page.

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In addition, Intuit boasts its own in-house innovation catalyst tool, “Design for Delight”, that facilitates employees to experiment with new ideas. These approaches enable employees at Intuit to realise the firm’s promise as a great place to innovate.

With emerging trends like activity streaming and gamification already penetrating the workplace, the future will probably see the function of internal communications graduate from designing and channeling communication to being facilitators of content and influencers for impact.

Communication strategies can yield desirable results only when they are customised, and to a large extent personalised for the specific context. If modern technology has proven magic for a certain firm, the secret of success for another could have been borrowed from highly “native” approaches.

Often under-leveraged, storytelling has been the most powerful communication tool used by aboriginal tribes to pass on knowledge across generations. In today’s organisations that are separated by geography and connected by networks, powerful and personal employee storytelling can be effectively used to create consistent organisational value systems.

[Kempinski \(http://kempinski.com/\)](http://kempinski.com/), the European luxury hotel group, undertook an exciting initiative to embrace its diverse workforce across continents into its organisational DNA through this approach, where employees of different functions, levels and countries shared experiences of their everyday life and unique anecdotes that enable them to live the Kempinski DNA – a brilliant example where employees were themselves the content creators. A comprehensive exercise using this approach enables geographically diverse and separated teams

approach enables geographically diverse and separated teams to live the Kempinski values through the mutual sharing of stories.

Due to the nature of focus it demands, internal communications needs to be driven by human resources and corporate communications in collaboration. Human resources needs to appreciate what the organisation and its people want, and corporate communications needs to facilitate the same as enabling agents. This needs to be pillared on an alignment with business; there is no cookie-cutter approach.

Designing a robust business-aligned internal communications approach involves comprehensive appreciation of stakeholders, identifying key messages, developing a focused strategy, monitoring emergent patterns and building internal capability. A similar approach aptly demonstrated by Ericsson (<http://ericsson.com/in>) had led to the role of internal communications evolving from a “news flow” to a “supporting leadership” function within the company.

With the new realities faced by organisations, communications professionals will need to rethink. A recent report by Aon Hewitt suggests that globally less than half (49%) of employees think that their company communicates effectively, at times even on the basics. Three important takeaways get highlighted in this note for effective internal communications – integration, customisation and alignment.

If approached intelligently, internal communications can fuel employee engagement, and employee engagement can in turn drive business performance. A rethink on internal communications under the new realities will only redeem the relevance of the function for the future.

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