ATS

What are Successful Communications & WHY is this Important to Your Successful Outcomes?

Effective Communication Brings Success! (Successful Organizational Communications #1)
How does effective communication bring success in a company, organization, and people?

Successful organizational communications bring success in many ways, from the company vision and mission accomplished, growth seen, greater compliance, Standard Operating Procedures followed, enjoyment in the workplace, and financial objectives met.

Before we can understand successful communication, we must understand what communication is. Webster's defines communication as: the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs; a document or message imparting news, views, and information; a sending of messages and orders; activity by one that changes the behavior of another.

Some of the questions we will address are:
- What are some of the impacts of the lack of communication in an organization?
- Why do employees not communicate in the workplace?
- How do employees within an organization communicate?
- How does an organization implement an effective communication plan? Where must this plan start?
- Does your organization grasp the importance of effective communications skills?
- Is organizational leadership committed to making communication happen?
- Why do some organizations not adapt communication policies?
- What are the benefits of an effective communication plan?

Our company, ATS has had the opportunity to help many organizations change their entire workplace environment, from upper management to line staff, implement successful communication plans, and continue with their plan. The end results of successful communications in these organizations have included some or all the following:
- Fear based management replaced with an open, reciprocal environment.
- The vision and mission understood, ownership by staff, and realization of team impact.
- Budget ownership and accountability.
- Standard Operating Procedure's adherence.
- Ideas and solutions shared and implemented.
- Greater cohesiveness amongst departments and inter-departmental staff.
- Manager's leading by example in what they do, instead of what they say.
- Employees feel more valued and a part of something greater than just coming to work.

- Employee retention percentages reduced.
- Organizational structure changed with more efficiency.
- Reduced costs.
- More financial incentives.
- Employee awards programs.
- New goods and services emergence.
- Greater customer / client services.
- Empowerment of staff to work with each customer.
- Attract talent for future positions.
- Company sales, team, and client growth.
- Listening becomes more important.

Communications are Critical! (Successful Organizational Communications #2)
Communications are Critical

Communication is critical in any organization to become a world class company. Without communications, it is not about the team (staff / employees). It is not just about management giving direction and orders but leading with their example of what they want others to do. Management must know how to communicate, create an atmosphere for staff to communicate, be able to teach communication, and have a communication plan that is used, works, and is continued with. As Geraldine Kilbride says, "Communication is the 'lifeblood' of every organization. People in organizations typically spend over 75% of their time in an interpersonal situation; thus, it is no surprise to find that at the root of many organizational problems is poor communication."

Communication is easier understood in the business environment when viewed as being a personal process that involves the reception and transfer of information. Communication is a two-way process of giving and receiving – understanding what has been communicated and the transfer of information from you to others. "Communication is a basic human activity" and "enables us to connect with each other" (Pihulyk, 2003, Michael Langley, 2006).A successful business must have good interpersonal, organizational, and external levels of communication (Geraldine Kilbride, The Importance of Effective Communication to the Success of Any Organization).

Another way to review communication, what it is about, and what it means in our society is *listed below (*Michael Langley, 2006, references these sources)*:*
- It is the method of transporting information and ideas between two or more people (Cole, 2001).

- It is not just the flow of information between people but also a process of "creating, shaping and maintaining relationships and enacting shared values, common culture, agreed goals, and means for their achievement" (Clegg, 2005).
- It is critical in all aspects of life, in business and personal relations.

Without communication "our whole way of life would crumble" (Pihulyk, 2003, Michael Langley, 2006).

Being an Effective Communicator! (Successful Organizational Communications #3)
How do we know we are an effective communicator?
Michael Langley, referencing Lapin (2004), outlines that an effective communicator is measured by "how well the listener is heard". What this means is how the person who is listening understands, responds, and acts within the timeframe requested (Shetcliffe, 2004, Michael Langley, as referenced by Michael Langley). Employees need to be able to provide feedback within an organization for the communication to be successful, thus the success of what is being communicated.

Mark Twain sums up communication nicely, **"The difference between a good word and the right word is the same as the difference between a lightning bug and lightning."** (Dean Brenner, Marni Lane)

What is the real value of communication in an organization?
Communication, by far, has a greater impact than any other skill in any organization. Several realities take place with effective communication, such as (As Dean Brenner, Marni Lane, Geraldine Kilbride, Rob Jackson, and ATS):
- Shorter meetings, more productive time, and greater internal efficiencies take place.
- Goods and services time to market takes less time.
- Brand identity and promise are ensured and consistently represented to the marketplace.
- The sales and business development team can speak more persuasively with clients because they understand what the organizational message is.
- Fostering stronger, more successful organizational teams, with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Greater effectiveness with the mission, vision, and goals.
- People stay in the picture (employees are the most asset of an organization).
- More involvement takes place (employees go above and beyond what is required by their specific position, think more outside of the box, and more feedback takes place).

- Employee commitment increase.
- Greater relationships between: Management and staff; Management and subordinates and colleagues; and People within the organization and outside of the organization.
- People understand the need for change.
- Change Management understood by the leaders in the organization.
- The resistance to change reduces.
- Employee morale improves.
- Problem solving skills improve.
- Productivity grows.
- Reduced costs and increased efficiencies!

Supportive Communications! (Successful Organizational Communications #4)
Why does an employee bring greater success to an organization as an individual when communications are supported and part of the corporate methodologies and environment?
For an individual to realize personal success in their goals and needs, employment from an organization that communicates is key. If the organization offers them the ability to accomplish this, they will be motivated to bring value to the business (Princeton University, Michael Langley). There are two types of motivators: Intrinsic and Extrinsic. Intrinsic motivators encompass areas such as, job satisfaction, a family friendly workplace, flexible hours, appreciation, and being a part of the team (acceptance). Intrinsic motivates employees at work. "Effective communication in an organization contributes to individual success by satisfying the intrinsic needs of the individual" (Michael Langley).

Some organizations view communications as a waste of time or say they communicate, but do not. What are the effects of the lack of communication in an organization?
First off, the bottom-line reason that an organization does not have communications or is not behind communication is they do not recognize the importance and effectiveness of communications. As the Latimer Group points out, companies and organizations exist on one of three levels:

- **Some companies do not walk the talk, even though they claim to understand the importance.** These organizations embrace certain aspects of effective communication, but not the entire company communications plan. They may acquire the necessary tools (plan, ideas, Standard Operating Procedures, meetings, etc.), but do not have the skills to pursue the plan and make the plan work for their organization. The organization might even spend the dollars to bring the message forth to their employees, customers, and vendors, but are not ready to execute the live message that is the necessary fundamental to communication success – to walk the talk. They lack the commitment or

discipline to put their words into action (Beacon IV, 4, *If I had a Hammer,* July 2006, as referenced by the Latimer Group).

- **Some companies make effective communication a critical competency because they understand the importance.** These organizations do all the correct things: Ensure the correct and coherent message; Acquire the tools and skills for effective communications at all levels; and Focus on training initiatives that help provide a strong message and the skills to deliver that message.

- **Some companies ignore the benefits of effective communication altogether because they are not willing or do not understand.** They don't value it and don't do anything to develop the correct skills. They fail to see how effective communication applies to their organization or how it can improve productivity and results.

Because communications are not a widget and something that can be seen, touched, and utilized in the physical realm, many do not take the time to realize that this intangible tool called communication is an absolute necessity in life – in any organization, company, team, and management structure. When the leaders and upper management of an organization take the time to learn, apply, and follow through with their communication game plan, the results are amazing. This act and continued act of a communication game plan brings about clear direction, organizational vision, and more efficient work teams. This brings communications down to all levels that bring forth more productive work groups, decisions made quicker and effectively, less wasted time, and more cohesive relationships.

The bottom line about an effective and implemented communication plan is reduced costs and greater efficiencies (ATS).

Leadership and Planned Communications! (Successful Organizational Communications #5) Does your organization grasp the importance of effective communications skills and is leadership committed to making this happen?

With globalization, margins reduced, competition increase, and the lack of resources, an organization has a competitive advantage in being able to be lean in all areas. This all comes down to who your organization employs which all starts with what the leadership has set for the organizational environment. This includes being able to develop the right skills to implement what the organization sells. In our global business world today, it is the ideas, intellectual property, and relationships that all drive this. Without effective communications from the top down, there is waste, lack of competition, and misuse of talent. (Dean Brenner, Marni Lane)

How is a communication plan developed?

According to data from the 2005 Change Management Best Practice Report, "**effective communication ranks third** in the top change management contributors to success."

To start and follow through with a communication plan, organizational leadership must be behind starting the plan and following through with the plan. There is a significant amount of work that will take place, especially with organizations that have had no communication and no communication plan. The elements of creating a successful communication plan include (Prosci and ATS):

- Senders.
- Key messages.
- Timing.
- Delivery Channels.
- Follow through.
- Measurements of these elements.
- Regular evaluation of the communication plan.

What is the Process?

- Audience identification (teams, managers, staff, vendors, and partners).
- Timing and key messages identification (meeting times, follow through meetings, and metrics and measurement of the timing and key messages to ensure follow through).
- Determine content packaging, delivery method, frequency, and sender.
- Create and share the communications plan to the leadership of the organization.
- Ensure leadership understanding of this communications plan.
- Upon support and understanding of this plan by the leadership, identify a few key people who will manager and ensure the plan moves through the organization.
- These few key people will then ensure that there is follow up to the plan with measurement for effectiveness, continued change to the plan for success, and communication of this plan to the leadership, managers, departmental, inter-departmental, vendors, partners, and whomever else is involved in the plan (Prosci and ATS).

One of the key elements of the communications plan is meetings. Some organizations have no meetings, some have meetings, but they are not reciprocal (employees to management and management to employees), and others have meetings but do not follow up with the tasks provided to ensure projects, tasks, and areas are completed. It is important to gauge these meetings (because they are a form of the communications plan, whether by conference call, in

person, via email, etc.). A simple way of ensuring input, feedback, measurement of results, and deadlines met is the meeting template below (notice the topics for explanation, ATS):

- Meeting Date:
- Those in Attendance:
- Discussion Topics:
- Task Name:
- Date Task Given:
- Date Task Due:
- Responsibility:
- Status of Task / Completion:
- Notes / Ideas:

The communication plan includes an output table that identifies communications and the tracking of these communications for success measurement. This provides a way to see where there will be communication breakage in the organization (Prosci and ATS).

- Audience:
- Timing (Phase of Project, Task, Meeting, Area):
- Message Content:
- Delivery Method:
- Sender:
- Date and Time:
- Improvement Areas:

Keep in mind that an organization cannot just start communicating and following the plan with communicating. The plan must be measured, thus the table for output and the table for meetings, for identification of weak areas to improve the communication flow.

As the communications plan is created and implemented, there are some areas that need to be considered and addressed with all staff (Prosci, ATS):

- What do you want the employees to know about the communication plan and the reasons behind the change in the organization now and going forward?
- When do your employees, vendors, partners, and subcontractors/consultants need to know this information?
- How, when, and with what way do you want to deliver the message?
- Who should deliver the message to your employees?

- When will the meetings take place, how often, and how will these meetings be measured for performance?
- What opportunity will the employees be given for feedback and in what way so that there is an understanding that this communication plan is not one way, but both ways?
- How will the leadership bring continual action to the communication plan so that employees do not think this is just another change that will fizzle away?

Once the leadership has ensured their commitment, the communication plan has been developed, the leadership has bought off on the new plan, and it is ready to be delivered. The next step is the implementation phase, which will be a continual phase, because communication is continual. With implementation, the communication plan will continue to change as the organization changes from the leadership, line staff, vendors, and markets. The communication plan will need to be measured for performance, meaning all the organization will need to continually provide feedback by COMMUNICATING.

Why NOT Communicate?! (Successful Organizational Communications #6)
As we have reviewed the benefits, why would an organization not want to communicate or hesitant to communicate in certain forms?
One of the reasons is litigation risk. Sun Microsystems was concerned about this when they wanted to set up a blog about IBM not doing enough to make the two companies product line compatible. Some of the litigation risks, as Howard Rice outlines, are:
- **Discovery** (companies can be sanctioned during discovery for failure to produce archived blog content).
- **Employment Issues** (companies that terminate employees for posting inappropriate content to corporate blogs may be sued for wrongful termination).
- **Forward-Looking Statements** (failure to include appropriate cautionary language accompanying a forward-looking statement on a reporting company's blog could cause the statement to fall outside the statutory safe harbor for such statements).
- **Gun-Jumping** (while a company is in registration, statements made on a company blog "hyping" the company could be deemed a prohibited offer of the company's securities).
- **Infringement of Intellectual Property** (posts that include a third party's intellectual property, such as copyrighted material or trademarks).
- **Privacy Torts and Defamation** (defames or invades the privacy of third parties).
- **Securities Fraud** (material misstatements made on a company blog could expose a publicly traded company to liability for securities fraud).

- **Selective Disclosure (**disclosure of material nonpublic information on a publicly traded company's blog could be deemed a prohibited selective disclosure under federal securities laws).
- **Trade Libel** (false or misleading statements made on a corporate blog about the goods or services of a competitor that cause or are likely to cause the competitor harm).
- **Trade Secrets** (inadvertent disclosure of company trade secrets on a company blog can destroy the "secret" status of such information).
- **User Privacy** (companies that collect personal information from individuals who visit or post comments to the blog may be required to comply with state, federal and foreign privacy regulations). (Howard Rice)

As you can see, just from a litigation standpoint, some forms of communications can be an exceedingly difficult task in certain companies and situations. That is why each company must make it very concise and clear what their communications plan is and will be.

As Joseph Falgiani points out, if a company creates "bad" company documents for their communication policy and procedures, the company can be held liable legally. Companies need defined and enforced document retention, a work force that is educated, that creates a safe communications program. This is another reason why some companies do not pursue a communications plan, because they are afraid of being held liable and/or accountable (Joseph Falgiani).

Some of the areas to be aware of to overcome this fear, liability, and risk in a communication plan, as outlined by Joseph Falgiani is:
- When possible, use alternatives to written communications.
- Avoid commenting on potential liability.
- Bad comments must be dealt with immediately.
- Limit dissemination of all writings to those who need to know.
- With any pending litigation, never create documented comments.
- Utilize a strict document retention program.
- Every written area may be used as an adversarial litigation.
- Ensure accuracy in every written communication.
- Realize that communication can be construed to mean something else (be noticeably clear).
- Choose words with great care when dealing with sensitive / risky subjects. (Joseph Falgiani)

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Other areas why companies do not embrace communications in their organization are:
- Fear based management style.
- Organizational leaders do not want employees to think on their own.
- Micro-Management.
- Closed management environment.
- Desire of leaders to have no accountability (do as I say, but not as I do).
- Do not believe in the benefits of communication.
- Have had terrible experiences with communications that occurred before in the organization.
- The leaders do not have any communication skills and do not want to learn.
- Organizational dysfunction.
- Financial stress that creates a closed off setting (not meeting payable and even on the verge of bankruptcy – panic stricken); (ATS).

Where Can Great Communications Lead?! (Successful Organizational Communications #7)
A Communication Plan is a Must
There are more benefits to the creation, implementation, and follow through of a communications plan than not having one. The biggest area where a communication plan can be hurtful to an organization is not having a direct, clear, and legal communications plan. The next area is the lack of organizational leaders supporting the plan.

If an organization has a clear plan, the support, and follows through continually with the communications plan, the many benefits that take place far outweigh an organization not having one. Some of these continual benefits are improved employee retention, greater ideas, a work environment where staff enjoy coming to work, less people missing work, reduced costs, same message being communicated to all involved with the organization, quicker goods and services to market, potential new areas of goods and services, greater efficiencies with time management and organization skills, accountability, greater ownership from employees, and many other areas.

What does all this mean?
A direct, clear, and legal communication plan works very effectively when organization leaders and management stand behind this plan through creation, implementation, and continual follow through. The results and benefits are greater by far than not having one.

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What are You Doing to Communicate for Greater Outcomes?
How Can We Serve You?

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