

Communications: The Spine vs. The Megaphone

Why communicating more is never a
viable strategy



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Most organizations don't have a communications problem. They have a strategy problem that shows up as a communications problem.

If your messaging disappeared tomorrow, would anyone notice the absence or relish in the silence? In an environment defined by change fatigue, information overload, and competing priorities, "communicating more" is rarely the fix. What separates high-trust, high-alignment organizations from the rest is not volume. It's a communications strategy with structure: a spine.

This article introduces a practical framework for building enterprise communications that drives behavior change, sustains alignment, and strengthens trust, especially when everything else is shifting.

The Megaphone Challenge

A megaphone does one thing well: it increases volume. In many organizations, that volume is mistaken for effectiveness, especially when leaders feel pressure to prove momentum, generate engagement, or calm uncertainty.

The problem is that amplification isn't the same as clarity. A megaphone doesn't filter, prioritize, or connect. It simply broadcasts and in an enterprise setting, broadcasting often looks like:

- **Posting everywhere, all the time:** using every available channel whether or not it fits the message.
- **Celebrating too early:** overpromoting initiatives before they're ready, stable, or credible.
- **Writing long and loud:** messages high on enthusiasm but short on context, trade-offs, and implications.
- **Communicating at people:** treating team members and stakeholders as recipients, not participants.
- **Using frequency as a substitute for strategy:** confusing activity with outcomes.

The megaphone is usually a symptom of something deeper: weak or unclear strategy trying to compensate with noise. And the cost is real. When people can't find the signal through the static, they stop looking. They disengage. They fill gaps with rumor, assumption, and resistance. It's no surprise leaders wonder why alignment is so hard to achieve. (Think: shoulders shrugging and blame language quietly brewing.)

Insight: Noise doesn't just fail to inform; it can actively erode trust. When communications feel performative or repetitive, audiences start treating it as optional.

What a Spine Actually Does

A spine is sturdy, structured, and disciplined. It doesn't contort to every trend or react to every moment. It holds the body upright so movement, fast or slow, stays coordinated and purposeful. It flexes through proactive planning, not reactive spasms.

An enterprise communications strategy built like a spine does the same thing. It creates a stable architecture that helps leaders and teams move from noise to signal and from activity to outcomes. In practice, a "spine" produces three essential qualities:

- **Coherence:** every message connects back to a central narrative, so communications feels cumulative instead of random.
- **Credibility:** audiences trust what they hear because it's consistent, accurate, and grounded in reality (including what's hard to say).
- **Direction:** people understand not only what's happening, but why it matters and what's expected of them next.

This is the difference between communications that informs and aligns and communications that clutters and confuses. A spine doesn't eliminate complexity. It makes complexity navigable.

The Architecture of a Communications Strategy That Works

Strong communications isn't a pile of messages. It's a system of deliberate choices. The most effective strategies are built from the inside out; starting with outcomes, then designing the communications required to achieve them.

1) Define objectives before drafting messages

Before a single announcement is written, the strategy should answer one question: *What behavior, belief, or decision do we want to influence?*

This outcomes-first approach flips the default thinking from "What do we want to say?" to "What do we need to achieve?" It separates communications that documents activity from communications that drives results.

2) Know your functional lanes

Enterprise communications isn't one thing. It operates across distinct functional bands—each with its own audience, cadence, and purpose. Confusing the lanes is one of the fastest ways to create overload and misalignment.

Lane	Primary purpose
Internal communications	Engage team members, reinforce culture, and sustain alignment.
Operational communications	Enable execution—translate process into “what I need to do differently.”
Executive communications	Build leadership visibility, credibility, and a consistent voice.
External communications	Shape brand, reputation, and stakeholder trust.
IT / change communications	Make systems, upgrades, and disruptions understandable and navigable.

What belongs in an all-hands memo doesn't belong in a press release. What resonates with a frontline team won't land the same way in a board update. Strategy respects context.

3) Connect audience, message, and proof

Before anything goes out, pressure-test it with three questions:

1. **Who is the audience?** It is typically not “everyone”; it's usually specific people with specific needs, constraints, and questions.
2. **What is the message?** Tight, clear, and focused on explanation over promotion.
3. **What is the proof (the “why”)?** The rationale, evidence, and link to what the audience already cares about.

Without all three, you're broadcasting. With all three, you're communicating.

4) Anchor everything to a central narrative

The strongest enterprise communications strategies extend from an organizing truth: the strategic plan, a transformation roadmap, a project governance charter, or a clearly articulated purpose. Every message, at every level, should be traceable back to that narrative. That traceability is what prevents fragmentation and the “left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing” experience.

5) Distinguish need-to-know from nice-to-know

Need-to-know information enables action: what someone must understand to do their job, make a decision, or navigate a change. Nice-to-know adds context but only after need-to-know is satisfied.

When organizations invert this (leading with context and burying the action), they force audiences to work too hard to find relevance. Clear prioritization is a trust-building move: it signals respect for people's time and attention.

6) Align actions to communications (non-negotiable)

This is where strategies collapse most often: the message says one thing and the organization's do another. Leaders talk about transparency while withholding information. Organizations promote team members-first values while making abrupt decisions that remove programs people deem as culturally welcoming.

Credibility isn't built in the words. It's built in the alignment between what is said and what is done. A communications strategy can't live in isolation, it must reflect operational decisions, leadership behavior, and culture accurately and consistently.

What This Looks Like in Practice

When communications strategy is built with a spine, you can see it, not just in cleaner messages, it's visible through measurable outcomes and smoother execution. Here are common signals that the strategy is working:

- **Behavior change:** people don't just receive information; they act on it because expectations are clear and achievable.
- **Leadership confidence:** executives and people leaders communicate with clarity and conviction because they're supported by shared narrative, talking points, and decision logic.
- **Brand strength:** internal and external audiences experience a consistent, credible voice across channels and moments.
- **Repeatable playbooks:** the strategy doesn't live in one person's head; it's documented, transferable, and durable through turnover and reorgs.
- **Ambassador networks:** change moves through trusted voices at every level, not just top-down broadcasting.
- **Measurable alignment:** you can track whether communications is moving the needle on outcomes that matter (adoption, comprehension, confidence, action).

Practical check-in: If communications success is measured mainly by opens, clicks, and attendance, you're measuring reach. Add measures that reflect strategy: understanding, decision quality, adoption, and follow-through.

The Bottom Line

A megaphone makes you louder. A spine makes you stronger.

In a world where attention is scarce and trust is fragile, the organizations that win on communications aren't the ones talking the most. They're the ones saying the right things, to the right people, at the right time, connected to something larger than the moment.

Consistency. Clarity. Timeliness. Alignment. These aren't buzzwords. They're the vertebrae of a communications strategy that holds up under pressure.

Reflection: When your organization communicates, does it rely on volume or on strategy? If your messages went quiet for a week, would people miss the signal, or feel relief from the noise?

If the honest answer points toward the megaphone, start small: define the outcome, name the audience, clarify the proof, and tie the message back to the central narrative. Over time, that discipline becomes the spine, one that strengthens trust, sustains alignment, and helps change actually stick.