

PARESH CHAUDHRY'S VIEWS ON STRATEGIC INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The global talent crisis of 'The Disengaged Employee' is all pervasive and more than half the global workforce is symptomatic. According to a Deloitte Research study - *Its 2008, Do You Know Where Your Talent Is?*

- 80 per cent of British workers lack commitment in their jobs
 - Cost: USD 64 billion
- Only 12 per cent of workers in France are engaged in their work
 - Cost: Euro 100 billion
- Only 17 per cent of workforce in Singapore actively disengaged in their work
 - Cost: USD 6 billion

So all organizations are seeking solutions to increase engagement. But what is it that employees need? The top three responses in a Conference Board study on what employees expect from their employers were:

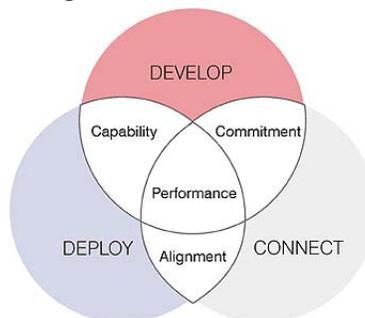
1. Interesting, challenging work
2. Open two way communication
3. Opportunities for growth and development

Interestingly, money ranks a distant eighth, although experience shows that money becomes most important when it is inadequate.

The Traditional Talent Management Model



The New Talent Management Model



Connect is the magic word of the new talent management...

The difference between the traditional and the new age talent management is that while earlier the focus was on recruiting, developing and retaining, the new age talent management calls for the above and also engaging the employee on a daily basis. There is a special focus on connecting with the employee.

What is the role of corporate communications in engaging employees? First let me outline the various misconceptions about the role of Corporate Communications, such as:

It is important to dispel the wrong notions about Corporate Communications..

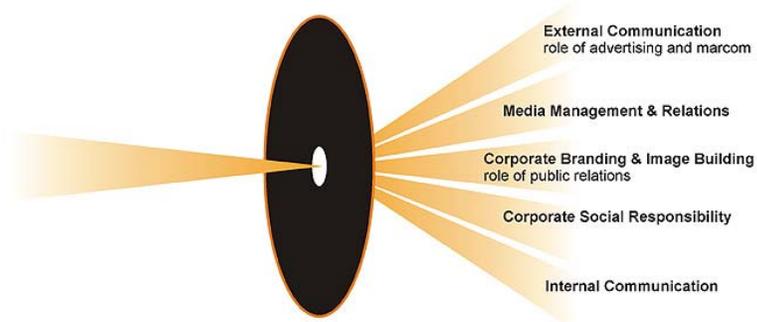
- It is corporate gloss – a team who provides good packaging to corporate developments
- A microphone for the senior management
- A top down monologue with feeding of news / messages
- A gateway for 'information', always in the know of what's happening
- A division that has no 'real job' except 'reporting' on other people's jobs

It is imperative that we dispel such notions or rather bust myths surrounding the role of Corporate Communications. We need to not just be good speakers but also transform into good listeners. It is not true that 'putting it in words' conveys the message, soliciting feedback is critical too; that providing information is communication, the tone of the news matters too. One must view communications as not just a media vehicle but also a flow or a process by itself.

Internal communication forms a part of Corporate Communication's core responsibility...

It would be incorrect to term internal communication as an HR function. It is very much a core responsibility of the Corporate Communication function as it ensures an effective understanding of the company's strategies, policies, processes and procedures by engaging, involving and disseminating consistent key messages. Corporate Communications actively supports all key internal events and disseminates information to employees on real time. It is top priority for Corporate Communications to ensure that employees are the first to get information on all major announcements, company results and any other breakthrough news of relevance. It ensures alignment with company values by providing consistent messages and helps nurture the organisation's culture.

The Multifaceted Role of Corporate Communications



Evolution of Internal Communications

From	To
Employees as an afterthought	Employees as priority stakeholder group
Ad hoc activities	Integrated strategy
Silo activities	Alignment with external strategy
No clear accountability	Dedicated function
Dominance of tools and channels	Focus on change management outcome
One way information distribution	Dialogue and engagement
Anecdotal monitoring	Sophisticated measurement management of Key Performance Indicators linked to remuneration at risk

Global trends in communication reflect the changes caused by technology and the new tools and challenges it has thrown up...

Global trends in communications indicate how technology has made a huge difference to the life of the communicator. According to a White Paper by Avaya Inc., 86 per cent of the employees remain accessible even after office hours and 76 per cent regularly retrieve emails during 'time off'. 61% work extra one – five hours due to geography extenders such as voice mail, email and VPNs.

There are many options available today for internal communications vehicles. One can choose from e-mail, sms, intranet, newsletter (print and electronic), webcasts, multimedia conferences, video updates, breakfast clubs, open houses, enterprise portals and traditional face-to-face meetings amongst others.

There is an increasing shift towards Corporate Communications partnering with HR for internal communications. There is now a collaborative effort as opposed to an exclusive ownership, a robust coordination versus turf wars and a realisation that they provide complementary strengths as against challenging rivals.

For example, in the recent past, Unilever outsourced its entire administration to Accenture, making it the biggest ever outsourcing deal of the industry. This decision was to impact employees across 183 countries. HR informed Corporate Communication about the development and shared the fact that they had agreed to let Accenture drive the communication on the issue since they were considered experts at 'outsourcing'. However, Unilever's Corporate Communication stressed on the need for it to be a part of the communication process. A task force was created to work on the

communication issues of the entire deal, whereby employees were informed of the deal, ahead of the public announcement. The reasons behind the decision were communicated, which created a degree of comfort and employees understood that the step was to increase efficiency and with no malafide intentions.

Report to, communicate with and engage with, are the emerging trends of internal communications of Fortune 500 companies...

Examples from Fortune 500 companies show that the trends in internal communications are changing. In the emerging trends the tone of communications is now reporting and key corporate messages are delivered to staff, awareness of corporate objectives is created, performances are communicated and above all areas to do better are discussed – ‘we want to inform you’. The approach is that of partnership where key objectives are communicated but feedback is also taken – ‘this is the way we are going, come with us’. Values are shared and employees are asked to help live them in order to be a sustainable organisation. Engagement with employees is considered vital and a credible feedback loop is put in place – ‘stay with us’.

Thus, internal communication is a management tool to achieve high employee engagement which in turn leads to high retention, lower turnover, better quality recruitment and being an employer of choice.

There are winds of change blowing in HLL too. While in the past, internal communication was not a priority for HLL, with consistent efforts its importance is being realised. Management is accepting the fact that while HLL is a goliath, the business scenario has undergone a radical change and the trust and respect that HLL commanded amongst its employees, has been lost to an extent and there needs to be a concerted effort to win it back.

A well informed and motivated employee is a company's best brand ambassador...

The effort is to make every employee a brand manager by

- Driving passion and loyalty
- Information flow
- Sensitise, influence and inspire
- Align with corporate values
- Motivate and drive commitment
- Innovative Communication Tools
- One message

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Are newsletters redundant?

Paresh said that if the newsletter is not working at all, it is best to do away with it. In HLL’s case, their newsletter ‘Hamara’ was completely revamped in terms of look and content to make it more exciting.

Reaching shopfloors is not an easy task as there are language barriers and budget constraints. In such a scenario, even a creatively done single page flier will add value to the factory worker’s morale.

If an employee finds the magazine worthwhile to take home and show to his family, the effort is worth it.

Does the concept of 'Family Days' still exist?

Paresh said that the 'Family Day' has taken new roles as the older version has been done to death. However, for shop floor workers, it is still very much a celebration. A worker's family buys new clothes and looks forward to the day, just like a festival.

Cecil of TVS confirmed that the 'Family Day' is an annual practice in TVS.

COMMENTS ON NEW AGE TEAM BUILDING EFFORTS

RCI commented that certain companies have started encouraging taking spouses to offsite to encourage team building.

Paresh shared that HLL's soap brand, Lifebouy, invited the children of its employees to showcase the entire process of soap-making. This created great excitement and instilled a sense of pride that 'My Father Makes Lifebuoy'.

CK Birla Group said that in its newly opened head office building, Birla Towers, there is a common dining hall where all employees, managers and directors dine together. Even the guests of the chairman are often hosted at this area, creating a sense of team spirit that is unparalleled.

(Excerpted from the presentation made by Paresh Chaudhry, Communication Leader– South Asia, Unilever & Head – Corporate Communications, HLL Ltd., at PR Pundit's workshop, held in Bangalore on July 20, 2006)