

Internal Communication - Exploring the 5Ws and H in developing a people centred approach

By [Laricia Smit](#)

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Internal communication is the process through which organisations share information, build commitment and manage change. Internal communication can include oral, group interaction, one-on-one, visual and electronic media. Every organisation is unique and its communication will depend on who is communicated with, about what, why, where, when and how.

A basic role of internal communication is to provide information to employees on their responsibilities and performances. If the employee understands what is expected of him, he would know how he could contribute to the success of the organisation.

Any organisation needs a well-planned internal communication programme to ensure the upward and downward flow of information. This can be achieved by using a variety of media including visual, electronic and print media.

Print media is the most commonly used method and the choice of the content, whether a staff memo or an elaborate newsletter, would depend on the urgency of the matter addressed and the target audience. Newsletters are the simplest and fastest method to getting the message across in an organisation. This can contain organisational information, personal views, and staff related issues.

Bulletin boards are also effective and can reach employees immediately. Whether it is put up in the tea room or on the shop floor the information is conveyed instantly and briefly.

With the change of technology and accessibility to electronic media, organisations are using electronic notice boards, the intranet, voice mail facilities and teleconferencing more frequently. However, if the internal communication programme does not allow for upward communication from employees to top management, the cause will be lost.

Management needs to listen to what employees have to say. This allows them to keep in touch with employee concerns and will also contribute to the development and shared understanding of the organisation's objectives and goals.

It has been found that if top management supports upward communication and are willing to act on employee suggestions, the morale of the organisation is very positive. Positive morale in return is a major contributor to good employee performance.

Organisations can keep contact with their employees by conducting regular team briefings, put suggestion schemes in

place, run focus groups or hand out broad based opinion surveys.

The grapevine deserves mentioning. This could be one of the most effective internal communication tools. Where there is a communication gap, rumours will quickly fill it.

A fairly new tool of the communication programme is *management by walking around*. This is a visit by the CEO or top management to the workplace, engaging in unplanned conversations with employees and increasing top management's visibility. This method builds trust amongst management and the employees and provides opportunities for information exchange.

Several factors contribute to an effective internal communication programme. According to Ward, who will also be the lecturer on this workshop, management must ensure that they are familiar with the following information to ensure that a climate of fairness, openness and confidence is reached:

Top management must:

- have a clear understanding of the target audiences
- have a commitment to direct and honest communication to employees
- clearly define goals and expectations to the workforce
- always be willing to listen to employees
- be consistent
- be involved and supportive towards employees

Internal communication has grown into a major area of specialisation that requires skills and elements essential to external communication planning. The challenges are formidable, but so are the opportunities. If strategically planned and effectively executed the internal communication programme of an organisation can provide employees with information needed to build positive attitudes, increase productivity and contribute to the bottom-line of the organisation.

For more information on the PRISA Internal Communication residential workshop please contact Manala Botolo on (011) 726 7356 or .

ABOUT LARICIA SMIT

Laricia Smit PRP is the public relations officer for the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) responsible for the public relations programme and media relations campaign as well as the planning and development of continuing professional development workshops. She has been with the Institute since 1995.

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