

Using research to justify your internal communication budgets

 By [Daniel Munslow](#)

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Many organisations are busy developing their annual financial budgets. Now more than ever, companies are asking for tangible return on investment for their communication programmes, and a justification on budgets spent. When presenting their plans to the board, they are being required to show a shift in attitudes and behaviours in the workplace - or impact - as opposed to the production of material, or output.

Employee engagement survey

One of the best ways of demonstrating this level of engagement is through an employee engagement survey. The challenge is twofold: 'over-surveying' and survey fatigue; and asking the right questions - which might give some uncomfortable answers. In reality, these are the best answers, as they are able to give communicators great campaign ideas to shift opinions and behaviours.

This in itself is a great way to secure budgets for specific campaigns that can deliver specific objectives - such as a values alignment campaign, a behaviours campaign, etc.

It is imperative that questions move away from 'do you receive the monthly newsletter on time?', 'do you spend 10 or more minutes reading the intranet each week?', etc., toward questions such as 'Explain your most important customer service measure' and 'Name three of the current priorities for X's strategic direction'.

What the latter two questions show is impact. Today's technology allows for word recognition even for open-ended questions, meaning that these can be used with greater ease.

The above shift assesses two things: (1) level of engagement and understanding of key messages, and (2) alignment between various divisions and people across the company. It doesn't help to confirm that X percentage of people claim to read the internal publications, but the impact is negligible and employees are not retaining or living by the information. Therefore, while we still need to understand the reach of the media being used in-house, we also need to be sure that employees read and understand the messages.

Measurement levels and outcome - practical approach

From a reporting perspective, there are four levels of engagement that communicators can report on:

- **Level One: Create Awareness**

A basic level of engagement that focuses on message distribution and 'getting out there'. This is the realm of the newsletters, intranets and other passive pull material.

- **Level Two: Change Perceptions**

A deeper level of engagement requires the inculcation of a communication culture, where staff are encouraged to think of themselves. Most organisational cultures, being paternalistic, take too much responsibility for developing people. Staff must want to learn.

- **Level Three: Obtain buy-in**

Getting buy-in is not easy. But if the messages are right and staff's perceptions are brought in line with business imperatives, you will likely find a culture change because it asks managers to redefine their roles - they are the key communicators.

- **Level Four: Change attitudes and behaviours**

Level four is about engagement, and this involves culture change. Instead of simply viewing employee ideas as suggestions, their contributions are framed into a meaningful bottom-up leadership approach. They are communicated with intent to display the right behaviours required to deliver a brand promise.

These can only be measured through effective research that is based on a sound methodological construct, suited to an individual organisation.

While most companies have well-established departments to deal with public relations, many are still slow to recognise the true value of effective employee communication. This is a significant challenge, as most research shows a direct correlation between active formal internal communication and business results.

In practical terms - image a bank that makes a brand promise and spends a great deal of money setting a marketing expectation and perception. As a bank is in a service-related industry, the true experience is not in the marketing or the payoff-line, but in the front-line experience. If employees (a) do understand what behaviours they need to demonstrate (i.e. how they do the what) and (b) the employees are not aligned with one another, then you end up with different experiences by the same brand.

Research provides solid proof and empirical evidence of the correct steps that need to be used to correct or support any behaviour in the business - not to mention how much easier it will be to secure project budgets.

ABOUT DANIEL MUNSLOW

Daniel Munslow is the owner and founder of MDC Consulting and former director on the International Association of Business Communicators' International Executive Board. He has 16 years' experience in business communication consulting. He has worked across Africa, as well as in the Middle East, the US, Europe, and AsiaPac.

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