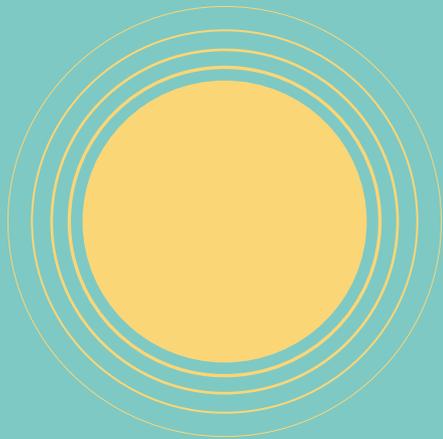
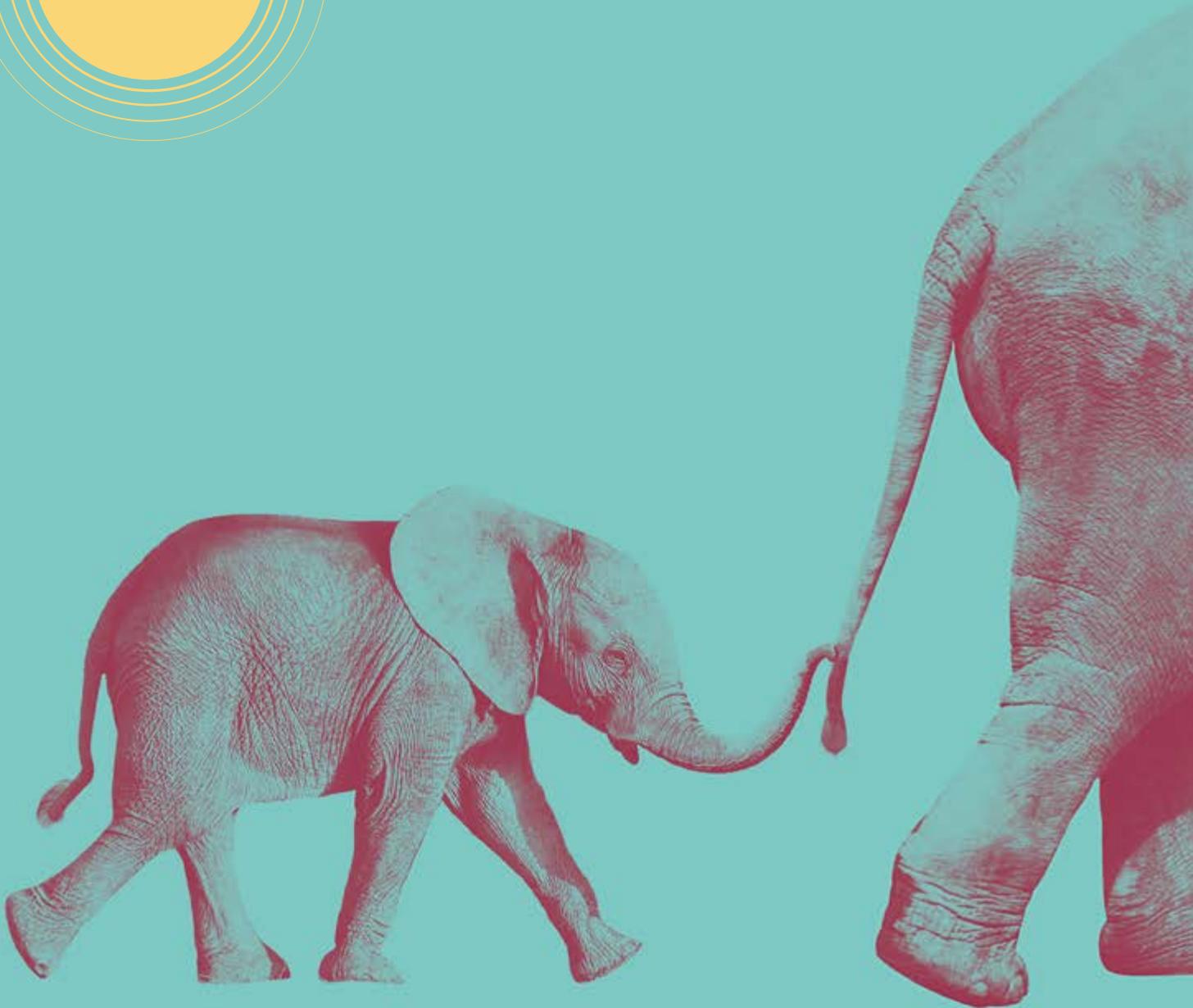


A global report



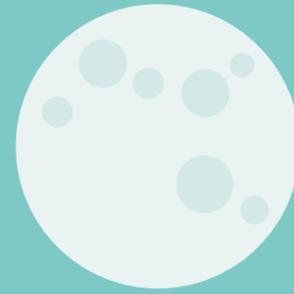
How Internal Communicators can help leaders communicate and engage more effectively



by

h&h





Title: How Internal Communicators can help leaders communicate and engage more effectively

Published by H&H, December 2018

Free download at: handhcomms.co.uk/reportXX

Copyright 2018 H&H Agency Ltd and contributors

This publication is the joint copyright of H&H Agency Ltd and all contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any other form, or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or information storage and retrieval systems, without the express written permission of the publisher and the respective author(s) in question.

In the interests of fairness and respect for our wonderful global community, we've opted to keep local spelling variants throughout this article.

www.handhcomms.co.uk

<u>4</u>	Foreword
<u>6</u>	Introduction
<u>8</u>	Strategy 1: Highlighting the importance of internal communications and employee engagement to organisational success
<u>14</u>	Strategy 2: Encouraging leaders and managers to listen to and act on employee needs
<u>20</u>	Strategy 3: Putting steps in place to increase leadership authenticity
<u>26</u>	Strategy 4: Training and coaching leaders and managers by offering advice, data and tools
<u>36</u>	Strategy 5: Providing support with turning messages into communications that get results
<u>41</u>	Key takeaways



**Michael
Hargreaves**

Marketing
Coordinator

H&H

In the opening of *Engaging for Success*, MacLeod and Clarke's seminal investigation into the impact of employee engagement on organisational results, the then-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills Peter Mandelson wrote, 'The lessons that flow from that evidence can and should shape the way leaders and managers in both the private and public sectors think about the people who work for them'.

It's safe to say his words remain just as, if not more, relevant today as they were when the report was published almost a decade ago. Although the concept of employee engagement had been loosely bandied about prior to its publication, MacLeod and Clarke's revealing and critical research lifted the lid on just how powerful engagement can be when done properly – and highlighted the importance of senior leaders and line managers in making it happen.

Now, 10 years on, and with countless other research papers and quantitative data at our disposal, we're all even more aware of what drives employee engagement than we already were. And one enabler that consistently stands out amongst the engagement crowd – is leadership communication.

IC professionals will know that the history of organisational communication is the history of change. *Engaging for Success* was published – by instruction of the UK government – in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, prompting a reconsidered approach to business productivity with a much greater focus on boosting engagement to help spur on economic recovery.

And more recently, further political and economic turmoil on the world stage – the rise of populism in the UK, US and parts of Continental Europe, the evolution of automation and machine-learning technology, and Britain's vote to leave the European Union – has left employees around the globe feeling uncertain and anxious about the future, requiring senior leaders to step up to the plate and provide reassurance and direction to shore up morale.

How ironic then, that one of the primary constants standing in the way of internal-communications success amidst all this dramatic change, is the one thing that's required to make sense of it all for employees?

In workplaces across the globe, senior leaders and managers are falling short of the mark when it comes to communicating with employees. It's no surprise that the 'frozen middle' – characterised by a lack of line manager communication skills – has been rated as the biggest challenge by industry practitioners for six years straight¹.

And it's even more staggering that only 13% of employees strongly agree that their senior leaders communicate effectively with the rest of the organisation².

This data paints a grim picture of the reality facing IC professionals – shape up your leaders, or watch engagement and productivity grind to a halt.

In the midst of all this doom and gloom though, there is a hope. 'Senior leadership' is now the 3rd-biggest global engagement opportunity³ (up from ranking 7th in 2016). And for a number of years, improving senior leadership communication has been a top priority for internal communicators⁴. Does this perhaps suggest that we, as an industry, have been consistently ahead of the game when it comes to confronting this significant challenge?

There was even more good news last year too, when CIPR Inside's *Making It Count* report revealed that 92% of senior leaders either understand, are on board with or appreciate the importance of internal communication as a strategic business function. And this year's *State of the Sector* report revealed that 96% of practitioners think the line managers in their organisations are very or reasonably visible and approachable.

With the increasing need for senior leaders and line managers to up their communication game, and the coveted seat at the top table now seemingly within the internal communicator's grasp, there's never been a better time to drill down and tackle the issue head-on. So we thought we'd do our bit by uncovering and collating the cream of the industry crop of strategies, tactics and helpful advice from those on the front lines on how you can transform your leaders and managers into truly exceptional communicators.

I hope this report inspires you to play your part in making this happen in your own organisation, and that it serves as a useful and practical guide to help steer you in the right direction – so that you can successfully shape your leaders up for the future.

Michael Hargreaves
Marketing Coordinator
H&H

¹ Gatehouse, *State of the Sector*

² Gallup (2017)

³ Aon Hewitt (2017)

⁴ Gatehouse, *State of the Sector*

How can Internal Communicators help in giving senior leaders and line managers the skills and knowledge to communicate and engage more effectively?



This report is a golden melting pot of insights that brings together the very best in advice, strategies and best practice to help you support and coach your senior leaders and line managers in developing and enhancing their communication skills.

Along the way you'll hear from industry peers based in the UK, Sweden, Argentina, the Netherlands, Canada, Latvia, South Africa, Mexico, Australia, New Zealand, India, America and Spain – giving you a sweeping look into the thoughts and opinions of practitioners in different parts of the world.

To make it easier for you to digest the wealth of leadership communication insights and ideas included in this report, we've grouped the responses by theme, and shaped these into a helpful narrative of key strategies to give you a clear sense of the direction you should take when supporting your senior leaders and managers in becoming expert communicators.

Strategy 1: Highlighting the importance of internal communications and employee engagement to organisational success

Strategy 2: Encouraging leaders and managers to listen to and act on employee needs

Strategy 3: Putting steps in place to increase leadership authenticity

Strategy 4: Training and coaching leaders and managers by offering advice, data and tools

Strategy 5: Providing support with turning messages into communications that get results

Many of the contributions touch on more than one theme, but we've taken care to distinguish them by their main area of focus so it's as simple as possible for you to browse and take in.

So without further ado, we'll hand you over to our expert contributors...

Highlighting the importance of internal communications and employee engagement to organisational success



Ellie Buckingham
Communications Consultant
Lily Rose Writes

To add real value to the business, internal communications should be strategic as well as tactical.

One of the ways internal communicators can help senior leaders and managers to communicate more effectively is to show, and prove, to them that internal comms can actively help the business achieve its strategic goals.

A great way to do this is to give them the company's story, and coach them to share it effectively.

A leader should be able to simply and engagingly explain to their team where the business has been, where it's going, how it's getting there, and how they play a part in it.

Once you've given leaders and managers these tools and skills, they can use them to reinforce messages and explain the "why" to the "what" to engage employees in the organisation's journey – from the tough stuff like change, to the business as usual like financial returns.



Hamida Bhatia
Digital Marketing & Communications Consultant
Google

Build a trusted relationship with your leaders and managers. This will give you the bedrock from which to coach, develop and inspire your leaders to communicate effectively. Great communicators are not born; it's a skill that can be learnt and perfected, and you can help them do that.

Get your managers and leaders as excited and passionate about communications as you are by sharing what good communications looks like. Give feedback to increase their confidence.

Great communicators are not born; it's a skill that can be learnt and perfected."

Provide them with the structures and frameworks to package and personalise messages into relatable stories which they can communicate themselves. Be supportive with their communications planning when they need help.

And finally, be comfortable with some imperfections – it's what makes us human, and gives us an approachable personality when engaging with others.

Encouraging leaders and managers to listen to and act on employee needs



Dr Kevin Ruck
Owner & Director
PR Academy



Advise leaders to be themselves, use less (or no) slides, and adopt an informal communication approach."

My research with employees suggests that senior leaders are not very visible, and rarely communicate with them face-to-face. Employees told me that they want senior leaders to talk to them about plans, progress, change, and priorities, as illustrated by the following point from one particular employee I interviewed: *'to me, communicating things is the core task of leadership teams – and it's their job to make the content of the communication understandable'*.

Employees also told me that they relate better with their leaders when communication is undertaken in a relaxed environment. They were complimentary about times when the communication is more of a conversation with an open question-and-answer format, and less of a formal presentation with slides.

So, the first thing for IC professionals to do is to encourage senior leaders to allocate more time to talking with employees. And then we should advise them to be themselves, use less (or no) slides, and adopt an informal communication approach.



Krishan Lathigra
Head of Internal Communication
Department for Exiting the European Union

More than anything, ensure that your senior leaders understand the mood of employees at any given time. By knowing the reality for those on the front line, they will be able to engage more effectively, and with empathy.



Destined to become the go-to place for many internal communicators looking for inspiration.

Hamida Bhatia

Digital Marketing & Communications Consultant, Google

Packed full of exceptional insights from so many experienced Internal Comms pros - a great read!

Helen Deverell

Director, Helen Deverell Communications



Get your **FREE**
copy today

[Download now](#)