

How-to Guide

Develop an Internal Communications Strategy and Plan

A well-considered internal communications strategy and plan will help employees to feel more connected to your company, its programmes, goals and the decisions your leadership team makes. It can also help to create a shared understanding of the direction your company is moving towards and how you will get there.

Furthermore, when your internal communication strategy and plan is designed to encourage transparent two-way communication it can help your company build and strengthen trust, grow engagement and create a great employee experience while importantly delivering improved operational results.

Is there a difference between an internal communication strategy and an internal communication plan?

Definitely, yes! A strategy helps us define what we want to do and achieve through internal communication at a high level, while a plan outlines the practical and detailed steps we will take to bring the strategy to life over a specific timeframe. The strategy provides the guidelines and context in which you build your communication plan.

Simply put, the strategy sets the direction for our plan. Our plan, which includes tactics, will make our strategy happen.

The key elements of an internal communication strategy are:

1. Communication objectives: What you aim to achieve through communication.
2. Audiences: Who you need to communicate with.
3. Key messages: What you want to communicate.
4. Channels: The tools you will use to communicate.
5. Measurement: How you will measure your progress in meeting your objectives.

An internal communication plan outlines the communication activities, tools and tactics you will undertake to communicate with your audiences against a calendar.

This how-to guide offers you a step-by-step approach and a practical template (Appendix A) to help you develop your internal communication strategy and plan:

STEP 1: CONDUCT A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The purpose of the situational analysis is to set the context for your strategy and outline the problem statement you are looking to solve.

During this first step, you will outline what is currently happening in your business and the factors that are driving the need for communication. Is your organisation going through change, are you struggling with low employee engagement or morale, are you launching new initiatives or products, do you want to strengthen understanding around your business strategy?

If you have research or analysis available that explains the context, include relevant highlights in your situational analysis.

You should also include an overview of what is currently being done to meet the communication needs and whether those activities are successful or not.

STEP 2: SET YOUR COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

The next step in the process is to identify the communication objectives. What do you need to do or achieve to meet the needs of the problem statement you have outlined in the situational analysis?

Start by looking at your company's overall strategy and *business objectives* and identify what role internal communication should play in supporting these. By ensuring that your communication strategy and plan are aligned to your company strategy and goals, your communication efforts will contribute towards the company's success.

Next, consider whether there are specific *employee engagement objectives* that your internal communication should support.

Finally, consider which specific communication objectives you should include.

The Think-Feel-Do model is another useful framework to consider in setting and articulating communication objectives. In using the Think-Feel-Do model, you ask the question, "what do I want employees to think, feel or do as a result of communication" and use the answers to help formulate objectives that are clear on the shift or change you would like to achieve.

Building on good goal-setting practice, always make sure that you identify the key results attached to each of your objectives and make sure that these are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

STEP 3: IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCES

In this step, you will focus on answering the question, who are we communicating with? And how can I segment my audiences into groups who have similar communication needs?

Identifying and grouping your target audiences into segments that share similar communication needs or expectations will help you to deliver more targeted, relevant and impactful communication.

There is no silver bullet or one-size-fits-all approach in communication. The secret to great communication lies in recognising and planning to meet the different needs that individuals have.

There are many ways in which you can segment your audiences. For example, you could segment your audiences according to:

- *Demographics*
- *Organisational hierarchy* such as executive/ senior leaders, middle management, junior management, blue-collar.
- *Functions* such as finance, human resources, marketing, sales, supply chain, operations, etc.
- *Workplace or location* such as office employees, operation employees, mobile employees or branch and retail employees.
- *Employment relationship* such as permanent employees, contract workers, seasonal workers, associates, casual labour.

Once you've identified and grouped your audiences take a moment to reflect on each group's specific communication needs.

STEP 4: DEFINE YOUR MESSAGES

Now that you've set your strategic communication objectives and identified your audiences, it is time to define the key messages that support achieving your objectives and which will be meaningful and relevant to your key audiences.

In its simplest form, a message is the exchange of information using words. In communication strategy, messages have a specific and important role to play and can be defined as a distinct unit of communication – a bit-sized summary that explains the what, why and how of something in a way that explains the value it holds for a stakeholder.

The characteristics of effective key messages are:

1. Tailored to be meaningful to the target audience.
2. Clear, concise and credible.
3. Compelling and focused on inspiring an outcome.
4. Provides the right level of information.
5. Uses simple and easy-to-understand language.
6. Memorable.

In assessing your messages, refer to the Think-Feel-Do model and test whether the messages you have crafted are clear and will help you drive the right outcomes. In using the Think-Feel-Do model, you ask the question, "what do I want employees to think, feel or do as a result of communication" and use the answers to help you test whether a message will help you realise the shift or change you would like to achieve.

STEP 5: SELECT YOUR COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

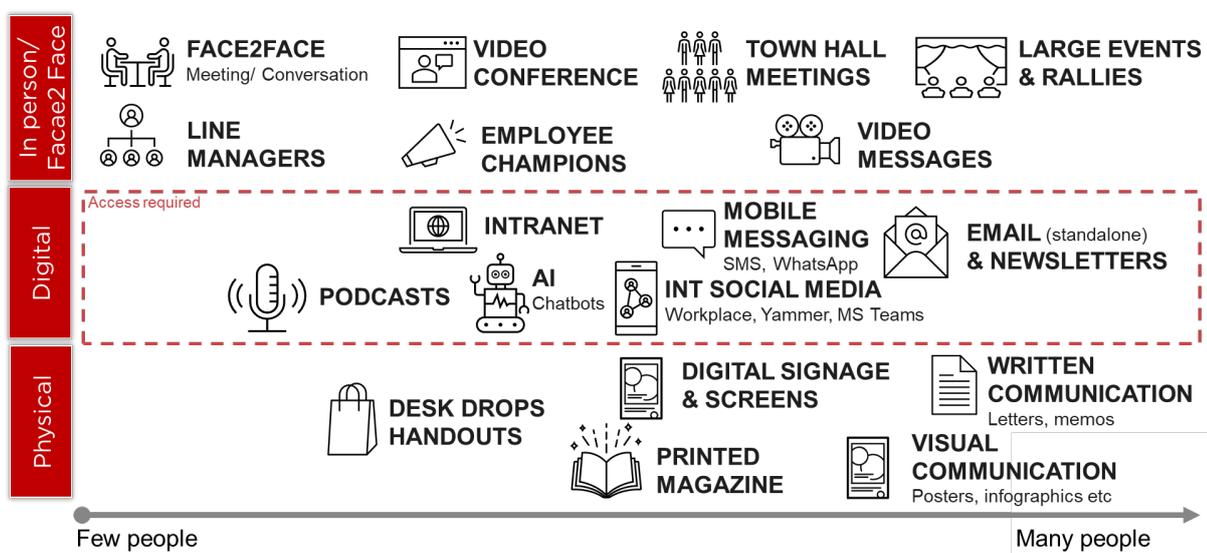
Channels are what we use to communicate with audiences. There are many different channels available to us but selecting the right channels to communicate your messages to your audiences is as important as developing the right messages.

Having the right set of communication channels in place will give you a strong foundation to build effective and impactful internal communication off.

But choosing which channels to use can prove tricky, especially when there is an increasing number of options available. Here are a few pointers to keep in mind:

1. **Take an employee-centric approach.** Working with the target audiences you identified in step 3, list the communication needs and preferences for each group and how their work environment could impact on communication. Running a communication survey or focus groups can help you find the real answers to these questions. Once you understand the employee needs and preferences, revisit your business and communication objectives and identify the channels that will best support both your objectives and employees' communication.
2. **When it comes to communication channels, there is no silver bullet.** Each organisation and each employee are different. Because of these differences, the channels you select will all have strengths and shortcomings. That is why you must include different channels and tools in your mix and use a combination of channels to complement each other for more effective internal communication.
3. **Identify the role each channel will play** and make sure that the role is best suited to a channel's particular strengths. Don't forget to include channels that support two-way communication.
4. **Don't forget to think about the whole-world experience you are creating.** Our communication experiences at work are not only defined by the engagements with the formal tools and channels we use. Think carefully about the kind of in-person experiences, physical workplace experiences and environmental media that can help to reinforce or contradict your communication messages.
5. **Finally, remember to identify a set of measures** that will help you to determine whether your communication channels are helping you to achieve your objectives and resonating with your employees. Use measurement information to help you make decisions on where you may need to make adjustments. And don't forget that thoughtful experimentation, backed-up by good measurement, can be extremely useful in helping you refine and improve communication efforts.

Use the Internal Audience and Channel Matrix template (appendix B) to guide you through this process.



STEP 6: MEASURE

Keeping track of how well you are delivering on your objectives is as important as setting good objectives upfront. Measurement is a cornerstone of successful communication planning and execution.

In developing the measurement approach that will support your strategy there are two key matters to consider: How often you will review your objectives and what are the key performance indicators (KPIs) you will review.

In developing your measurement approach, start by outlining your measurement routines and frequency.

The ideal approach should include items you review on an ongoing basis (these are often analytics-based supported by technology), at regular intervals (eg. quarterly reviews) and in-depth reviews over a longer timeframe (eg annual reviews).

Keeping a regular eye on key performance indicators will help identify when you need to make adjustments or course corrections.

Once you have outlined your measurement routine, remember to who will be involved and how often these reviews will take place.

TIP: Schedule the review meetings upfront in your calendar and invite participants to ensure you prioritise this important step.

Next, you need to identify the key performance indicators (KPIs) that will help you determine how successful you are in achieving your objectives.

Start by listing your objectives and include strategic, channel and implementation objectives. Remember to refer to the overall objectives you set during step 2 and the channel metrics you identified during step 5 of the process.

Next identify the key performance indicators for each objective as well as the mechanism you will use to measure the KPI (analytics, surveys, business results etc) and remember to include employee feedback.

DEVELOP YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN

Now that you have defined your internal communication strategy, it is time to develop your internal communication plan.

Reminder: The strategy helps us define what we want to do and achieve through internal communication at a high level, while the plan outlines the communication activities, tools and tactics you will undertake to communicate with your audiences against a calendar.

What are tactics? Tactics are actions that you will take to make your strategy real. Tactics have clear timelines, resources and measures for success.

To develop your internal communications plan, use the template in appendix C.

As you start building your internal communication plan, here are a few common mistakes to avoid:

1. **Not establishing a routine** – infrequent or stop-start communication is bad for employee engagement and could leave people feeling isolated and uncertain.
2. **Too much information or irrelevant information** – take care to not overload employees. Make sure you plan clear messages, use the best channels for the message and develop communication that meets your employees' needs.
3. **Using one-way communication only** – employee voice or two-way communication is an important contributor in growing employee engagement.
4. **Not using the right channel for the job** -
5. **Not measuring your communication** – Use measurement information to help you make decisions on where you may need to adjust, or course correct.

Appendix A

TEMPLATE:

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGY & PLAN

Use this template in conjunction with the How-to Guide: Develop an Internal Communication Strategy and Plan.

Situational Analysis

[In this section, give an overview of what is happening in your business and the factors that are driving the need for communication, outline what is currently being done to meet the communication need and whether the activities are successful or not]

Communication Objectives

Objective	What should audiences think/feel/do as a result	Key results

Audiences

Audience	Description/ characteristics	Communication preferences	Communication needs

Communication Messages

Message	Objective	Audience	Think-Feel-Do

Communication Channels

Channel	Description	Channel role	Audiences served	KPIs

Measurement

[In this section, outline your review plan by identifying the types of reviews, what will be covered in each, who will be involved and how often these reviews will take place]

TIP: Schedule the review meetings upfront in your calendar and invite participants to ensure you prioritise this important step.

Review type	What will be reviewed?	Who will be involved?	How often?
<i>Ongoing</i>			
<i>Quarterly review</i>			
<i>Annual review</i>			

[In this section, list your objectives and remember to include strategic, channel and implementation objectives. Next identify the key performance indicators for each objective and the mechanism you will use to collect data and measure the KPIs (analytics, surveys, etc). Remember to include employee feedback. Finally, identify the frequency of measurement for each objective.]

Objective	Key performance indicators	How will we measure the KPIs?	Frequency

Template

Internal Audience and Channel Matrix

Channels are what we use to communicate with audiences. There are many different channels available to us but selecting the right channels to communicate your messages to your audiences is as important as developing the right messages.

Use the Internal Audience and Channel Matrix template to help you think through your audiences' communication needs as you select a set of communication channels to support your internal communication.

If you don't already have an internal communication strategy in place, consider using the How-to Guide: Develop an Internal Communication Strategy and Plan.

Audience	Description/ characteristics	Communication preferences	Communication needs	Channel (incl. description)	Channel pros/ cons	Complementary channel

