

Looking Beyond Employee Self-Service

Global Trends in Communications

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Employers and human resource executives around the globe face the increasingly complex challenge of aligning employees with new strategies. Many of today's most successful organizations are considering technology-based communication techniques and tools to help recruit, engage, and motivate key talent. New communication technologies—Intranets, email, blogs, and podcasts—facilitate the instantaneous and economical delivery of more and better information. However, many organizations are discovering that, used indiscriminately, these channels can get in the way, adding large volumes of information that obscure and undermine key messages.

Companies must strategically deploy and manage technology-based communications to ensure their effectiveness. Treating these channels like any other deliverable not only damages the communications process, but also overlooks their enormous potential to influence employees' understanding, attitudes, behaviours, and commitment. This fact is particularly true when focusing on compensation, pensions, and benefits.

Getting employees involved

It is not easy to isolate and manage the personal, social, and business factors that determine any single employee's response to organizational change. On a macro level, willingness to engage actively in the change process is achieved through the alignment of three key factors: shared vision, line of sight, and rewards.

Shared vision

Employees need to understand the organizational objectives behind a change—as well as the who, what, when, where and how of the change. Likewise, the organization's leaders should understand what employees expect and how receptive they are to the proposed change.

Line of sight

Employees need to understand their role in the change process, including what is expected of them, and realize the impact that their personal actions will have on the outcome.

Rewards

Employees must get what they expect for fulfilling their roles.

To be engaged in the process, employees need to know the why behind organizational change and the role they are to play in the implementation. Then, they need to witness the results played out in accordance with their personal expectations.

Gauging employee interest

Advances in communication technology for employee reward programs have simplified the process of engaging employees.

Seeking formal employee feedback is nothing new. However, today's sophisticated electronic tools allow us to capture and analyze employee data quickly—at a fraction of what it cost in the past.

Web-based surveys and/or the use of electronic polling tools during employee focus groups can give an organization much of the qualitative and quantitative data needed to:

- Gauge employee support for proposed changes
- Test understanding (and acceptance) of key issues and concepts
- Pinpoint barriers or challenges that could undermine success
- Identify preferred communication channels
- Establish a meaningful baseline against which attitudes, understanding, appreciation, and behaviour can be tracked and measured in the future

Promoting understanding

Web applications help employees understand the scope and value of the revised reward programs and demonstrate how their new "rewards" are linked to the stated organizational objectives. This is particularly true when those rewards are variable (such as bonuses) or self-directed (such as flexible benefits and defined contribution pension plans), and when rewards involve multiple stakeholder groups in geographically diverse locations.



Self-service tools promote employee understanding in ways that paper-based communications cannot. For example, custom web-based modeling and enrollment tools allow employees to:

- Grasp the personal financial impact of the plan changes
- Navigate through an otherwise complex decision-making process
- “Drill” for additional information and submit on-line queries
- Make informed investment, buying, or other decisions based on personal needs, circumstances, and budgets

This hands-on, cognitive process gives employees a fuller understanding of the rewards available to them, as well as a sense of the financial stake they have in the organization.

Delivering personal information

Nothing promotes conceptual change better than personalized information about employee rewards. Online total rewards statements can create compelling and personalized snapshots of the programs and practices that define the new employee-sponsor relationship. These statements give employees a one-stop source for personal information on compensation, benefits, and other workplace programs.

Electronic applications give employers an easy and economical way to:

- Draw and consolidate personal data from multiple sources (including pension and insurance carriers)
- Present that information to employees in a customized, visual format
- Generate more comprehensive reports that can be used to support HR decision-making and program management

By personalizing information delivery, employees can prioritize information based on their immediate needs and interests. Their queries can be answered dynamically, so that the reply to a question about health benefits during a maternity or parental leave, for instance, will include links to other related information surrounding leaves of absence.

Looking ahead

New options on the horizon will allow technology to play an ever-larger role in shaping organizational outcomes. As technology-based communications become more and more the norm, employees will receive growing amounts of corporate information on their iPods*, BlackBerries*, and mobile telephones. The challenge is to use these tools strategically to capture employees’ attention, using compelling information that is relevant to their personal circumstances in support of organizational objectives.

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