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TASK FORCE FINDINGS: EMERGING STANDARDS FOR MEASURING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

INTERNATIONAL PR RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2016

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION MEASUREMENT STANDARDS PROJECT

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SITUATION

Internal communication practitioners are under increasing pressure to measure results of their efforts effectively. Measurement that is occurring now tends to be output-focused, echoing a similar situation in external communications. Our external communications colleagues, however, have the Barcelona Principles and emerging standards as a guide for measuring traditional and social media. Before the onset of this project, no similar effort was under way for internal communications.

BACKGROUND

Many IC professionals have differing opinions about what constitutes effective measurement. One main impulse has been to focus on employee engagement and another on tactical best practices. The desire has been to stay with what the IC professional directly controls rather than a more “business results” focus. This is despite excellent work by Towers Watson and many other practitioner-led research practices, and academic research, which supports the concept that effective internal communication presents a competitive advantage. This is backed up by similar research in the human resources and organizational development fields that reaches similar conclusions. Balancing the two main impulses, digesting and synthesizing the various research threads and reaching consensus on a set of recommendations for standards of IC measurement is the singular challenge of this project.



QUESTION

How can IC create a set of measurement standards that respects the academic and practitioner research while offering a strong set of recommendations that IC professionals can implement?



SOLUTION

The Institute for Public Relations and the Commission on Research, Measurement and Evaluation, joined together to create an international task force to promulgate the development of IC standards. Ten professionals and academics came together to establish the most common and important communication outcomes, define them via both academic and practitioner sources, and establish how to measure each.

This yearlong effort culminates in a presentation and discussion at the PRSA International Conference, and the presentation of a white paper at the International PR Research Conference in 2016.

INITIAL FINDINGS

Measure preference and use of communication channels.

As with baseline awareness in the external communication world, employees must choose to embrace communication channels and consume the information being transmitted through those vehicles. Here, such concepts as “awareness,” “understanding,” “knowledge levels,” and “retention” are important to measure. Measurement of these channels can provide crucial information to practitioners and help them forge better, more strategic communication plans.

But IC measurement must move further and deeper:

Measure engagement in the context of behavior and attitudes.

Employee engagement has become a buzzword, and unless it results in differential performance it is just a nice-to-have. So we must define what motivates differential performance measures in any organization by researching such concepts as “attitude,” “advocacy,” “empowerment,” “collaboration,” “teamwork,” “discretionary effort,” “trust,” “satisfaction,” “transparency,” and “procedural justice”—all factors that can have impact on actual performance.

Then, *Evaluate outcomes that result from differential performance.*

Knowing what employees think, perceive, and feel, and how those indicators influence what they do can help us evaluate how those behaviors impact outcomes such as “productivity,” “innovation,” “continuous improvement,” “reputation” (internal and external), and “organizational authenticity.”



NEXT STEPS

Next will be testing of these three tiered levels along with individual concepts that comprise their definitions—first with a Delphi Panel (where senior-level professionals are interviewed to get feedback about assumptions and paths forward).

Eventually, a broad survey of the IC profession will be conducted to further synthesize findings and sharpen recommendations before publishing the final standards and seeking industry adoption.

A final step will be to create definitive measurement standards around each individual concept that makes up each tier (such as optimal question wording and standards for outcomes that all IC professionals can draw from and measure their organization against).

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