

## **Measuring the Impact of Employee Communication on Employee Comprehension and Action: A Case Study of a Major International Firm**

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*This study describes the employee communication strategy of a global firm and the research that compares communication output and outcome data from 2004 and 2007. The paper also examines the impact of various employee communication tactics and channels in engendering employee comprehension and action in support of the firm's objectives. Results of a global communication survey indicate that timely, complete, and accurate corporate communication and face-to-face managerial communication can help to secure employee action in favor of company goals. This case study also serves as an example of how corporate communicators can measure and evaluate their employee communication programs.*

Employee communication has several purposes, and motivating employees to action in support of organizational objectives is one important one. Most employee communication functions rely on a multiple audience strategy such as face-to-face managerial communication activities and all-employee channels, including newsletters, magazines, posters, videos and intranets. Some employee communications functions add a formal feedback mechanism to their strategies. However, most of the effort is placed on producing informational material and delivering it—an output-centered model that often has no measurement strategy attached to the plan.

At the subject company, the employee communication function took a different approach. The company defined a body of knowledge—a set of topics that the organization's management deemed most important for its employees to know—and set about to inculcate those topics into its employee communication strategy. The plan sought to improve communication effectiveness to increase both employee awareness and understanding of the body of knowledge and to motivate employees to action in support of this body of knowledge.

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metrics are related to managerial communication, employee communication tactics, and communication channels.

### **Overview of the Subject Company**

In 2003, the company's workforce faced round after round of cut-backs, divestitures and layoffs. Where there were once some 100,000 employees globally, there now were just about 88,000, most of these in manufacturing locations around the world.

The company, which was organized regionally, was doing effectively no global, corporate-wide employee communication. Its intranet was minimally used, and then, only by employees in North America. Intranet news content was limited to repurposing articles from its headquarters print. A subset of this content was also placed in a database and sent by email to fewer than 200 publication editors, HR or PR representatives worldwide.

The company left most of its internal communication strategy and execution to communicators within the regional business units. The internal communication challenge, therefore, was multi-fold—no global vehicles, no global strategy, significant change management needs, a demoralized workforce and no resources solely dedicated to corporate internal communication.

The Communications department hired its first corporate internal communications manager in years in December of 2003. Among the first actions of this manager was to stop publication of the headquarters print newsletter and reallocate the resources to enhancing the intranet, which could boast of only some 4,000 daily visits.

In addition to the implementation of tactical upgrades to the intranet, the Communications department initiated a strategic planning process that included the following elements:

1. Establish, through research, a body of knowledge comprised of:
  - Required actions and activities designed to continuously improve processes and reduce errors
  - Business and industry information to fuel literacy, acumen and knowledge
  - Corporate and business strategies and priorities
  - Information designed to increase personal responsibility for asking questions and giving ideas
2. Communicate via the intranet this body of knowledge.

3. Communicate to company managers and employees information that helps provide context around the inevitable changes that result from its normal course of business.
4. Provide to managers and employees tools, tips and techniques to help them create mutual dialogue and discussion, both for singular events and ongoing needs.
5. Cost-effectively and efficiently measure outcomes of these activities, using surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews. These three outcomes were of significant importance:
  - Action: To what extent do employees see their activities in a wider context? How willing are employees to take action in support of company objectives?
  - Comprehension: What elements of the body of knowledge are employees able to discuss?
  - Managerial Communication: To what extent do employees observe their managers as communicating effectively?

To provide a baseline of the three communication outcomes of action, comprehension and managerial communication, the company's Communications department implemented a survey via email to employees in 2004. Omission of employees who did not have e-mail was intentional, reflecting the need to contain costs. The baseline survey revealed deficits in awareness and understanding of many of the company's business strategies. Less than half of the respondents said they were at least somewhat well-informed about many elements within the body of knowledge. Further, less than one-third agreed or strongly agreed that they were kept informed about the reasons behind company decisions; less than half agreed that the information the company sent them was accurate and straightforward. Indeed, some 38% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Armed with this data, the Communications department put extra effort behind communicating the body of knowledge. Though direct appeal, Communications enlisted communicators around the world to embrace the body of knowledge, either through news stories they submitted for the corporate intranet or included in their own local print vehicles. Communications hosted a renaming contest for the intranet with employees. The employee-generated new name debuted in June 2004 followed shortly thereafter by a new intranet-based Poll. This daily poll, displayed on the home page, focused four days per week on serious business topics carved from the body of knowledge. In February 2005, a daily news E-mail debuted, with subscriber count rising to 10,500. Additional enhancements were made throughout the years.

There were noticeable improvements in communication outputs for Communications. Intranet home page views rose from 23,000-25,000 per day to

36,000-40,000 in 2007. Total pages viewed on the intranet had climbed from 3.6 million per month in 2003 to more than 10 million per month.

Although the improvement in communication outputs was encouraging, the Communications department recognized the need to compare the outcomes of managerial communication, employee comprehension and action in 2007 to those of 2004. Did scores on these measures improve in parallel to the output? If so, which tactics were most effective in affecting these potential changes?

## **Review of the Literature**

As the Internet has grown into a mass communication channel, its cousin, the intranet, has also risen in importance as a channel for employee communication. Murgolo-Poore, Pitt and Ewing (2002) cite Ford Motor Company and Cisco Systems claims that intranets let people communicate and collaborate more effectively, and observe that “Undoubtedly, intranets have the potential to become powerful mechanisms for management in organizations that are increasingly fragmented and global” (p. 114). From focus group research Murgolo-Poore et al. inductively generated a 15-question intranet effectiveness checklist, of which most questions center on transformation of collaboration among employees.

Later survey research with 1,800 firms by Murgolo-Poore, Pitt, Berthon and Prendegast (2003) demonstrates that effective intranets are better equipped to disseminate information, in particular corporate intelligence. Boeing’s ability to make available vital information at employee desktops via the intranet resulted in better creativity, speed and collaboration (Murgolo-Poore et al., 2003). Murgolo-Poore also refer to Glaxo Wellcome Canada as a company that now “knows what it knows and doesn’t know and minimizes rework” thanks to its embrace of the intranet (p. 173).

Emphasizing organizational strategy via the intranet has been cited as an important employee communication goal. Sinickas (2006, February) used results from communication audits conducted with profit organizations and nonprofits to observe that understanding of business strategy in organizations is generally weak. According to Sinickas’ research, among organizations where such understanding is strong, access to an intranet yields higher scores on strategic information. Managers’ and supervisors’ verbal explanations of organizational strategy remain the most important predictor of employee comprehension of strategy. Most interestingly, managerial explanation of organizational strategy is most useful if placed in the context of a respective business unit or geography. In another white paper, Sinickas (2006, December) outlines ways to measure and evaluate managerial communication.

Survey research with 21 large organizations by Sinickas (2005) indicates that organization should not rely solely on electronic sources of information. According to Sinickas’ research, employees prefer a combination of electronic sources, including e-mails, e-newsletters, and intranets, in addition to face-to-face sources of information.

Sinickas (2006, June) also cautions against a “cascade” briefing process in which managers brief employees to impart knowledge. Sinickas’ research indicates the importance of measuring how much of the information is actually retained by people. Using a number of sources may help prevent the inevitable loss of information that travels through employee layers.

Global consulting firm BlessingWhite (2007) researched employee engagement and concluded that, “strategy isn’t getting very far out of the boardroom” – though they note that there is progress (p.2). However, a small proportion of their 714 survey respondents (19%) “believe that their organization’s strategy is well communicated, and everyone’s work priorities support that strategy” (p. 2). BlessingWhite’s recommendations include treating such organizational alignment as “the secret ingredient in engagement and retention.” (p. 4)

If communicating strategy has been identified as important, what specific elements need to be included via an intranet? In terms of identifying appropriate content, intranet consultant Ward (2007, p. 10) emphasizes the importance of automating processes on the intranet, particularly providing employee contact information and as a mechanism for gathering sales leads and improvement ideas. Further, Ward declares, “Content is king,” (2006, p. 44) and outlines timeliness, relevancy, cogency and good usability as characteristics of effective content. He also describes subject matter of particular interest to employees, based on his work as an intranet consultant and research from Hewitt, the HR consulting firm. Company goals, financial results, products/services, competition and industry trends make the list, as does the traditional action item of how employees can help the company reach its goals (Ward, 2006, p. 46).

Many case studies and research document the impact of effective employee communication. The Corporate Executive Council (2005) is explicit in connecting communication effectiveness and employee engagement, saying: “A company’s ability to communicate—specifically, to lay out a vision of its strategy and direction that is clearly understood by its employees and linked to their day to day lives—is important not because communicators assert that it is, but because employees cite it as the most important driver of their commitment to the firm.” (p. v) The CEC goes on to say that companies with more engaged employees are likely to outperform their peers. Moreover, according to the research by the CEC, of the ten top levers of intent to stay, internal communication is the highest, but two other levers are of note: employee understanding of connection between his/her work and organizational strategy, and clear organizational goals.

Case studies conducted by Collins (n.d.), Critelli (2007), Nicholson (2003), and Witt (2006) explain and document the effectiveness of employee communication programs in their organizations. In her case study of General Motors, Collins provides a process model that delineates employee communication goals as fourfold: to provide information, to garner understanding, to foster commitment and ultimately to secure

actions from employees to support General Motors' goals. Critteli, CEO of Pitney Bowes, articulates how his senior employee communication director measures the impact of employee communication via reach, engagement and comprehension metrics. Critteli further emphasizes the importance of using measurement to make immediate adjustments to communication strategy and tactics. Nicholson's case study of Sears, Roebuck and Company and Witt's case study of Rockwell Automation both elucidate how measurement of employee communication helps garner respect from the C suite and to better direct future employee communication programs.

In summary, research suggests the importance of intranets and managerial face-to-face communication in conveying organizational strategy to employees. Increased understanding of strategy has been shown to be related to increased engagement, collaboration among employees and employee action. Less conclusive in the research, however, are the specifics of these relationships. For example, which features of effective managerial communication are most important to fostering employee comprehension and action? Which features of effective electronic communication are most important? Scant attention has also centered on examining which combination of sources of information is most useful to enabling employee comprehension. These are some gaps this study addresses.

As explained earlier, the subject company faced difficult challenges in 2004, when a new employee communication strategy was launched with the specific goal of enhancing employee comprehension of business strategy and goals and action on behalf of the body of knowledge. In 2007, the company sought to measure and evaluate whether there were improvements in these metrics as well as what factors might have accounted for potential increases. More specifically, this case study seeks to answer the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ1: Did the outcome metrics of managerial communication, employee comprehension and action improve from 2004 to 2007?

Hypothesis 2: Effective employee communication will be positively related to employee comprehension of goals and strategy and to action in support of the body of knowledge.

RQ2: Which attributes of employee communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of goals and strategy?

Hypothesis 3: Effective managerial communication will be positively related to employee comprehension of goals and strategy and to action in support of the body of knowledge.

RQ3: Which attributes of managerial communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of goals and strategy?

RQ4: Which sources of information are most predictive of employee comprehension of goals and strategy?

**Method**

*Data Collection*

The Communications department disseminated an electronic survey to approximately 30,000 employees in 2007. Only employees with access to email received the survey, again reflective of the desires of management to limit cost. The email cover letter contained links to an externally hosted survey instrument in 10 languages. A total of 2,828 employees responded, for a response rate of 9.2 percent. This survey was substantively the same as the one conducted in 2004.

Respondents to the survey were employed in these regions around the world: Asia (9.7%), Europe & Africa (11.6%), South America (13.6%), North America (45.1%) and other (.7%). Table one describes the various business units where employees worked.

Table 1: *Frequencies and Percentages for Regional Business/Functions of Respondents*

Regional Business/Function	Frequencies and (Percentages)
Asia	193 (7)
Corporate Functions	326 (12)
Europe & Africa	557 (20)
South America	316 (11)
North America	766 (27)
R&D	258 (9)
Other	412 (15)

*Measurement*

Thirty-six questions were designed to measure one of four concepts: (a) employee communication effectiveness, (b) managerial communication, (c) employee comprehension and (d) employee action in support of company goals. Employee communication effectiveness measured the extent to which employees view the communication efforts from the corporate Communications department and their regional business management as being effective. Managerial communication questions measured the extent to which employees observe their managers as communicating effectively. Employee comprehension questions measured the extent to which employees are well informed about the material the company expects them to know. And, finally, employee action measured the extent to which employees actually changed work behavior to align with the goals and strategy outlined by the company.

These 36 questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale with “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” serving as anchors, except as otherwise noted.

Exploratory factor analysis of the 36 items with a varimax rotation yielded three factors, not four, that accounted for 61.82% of the variance. The one missing factor was employee action in support of company goals. Cronbach Alphas for the three factors were investigated and found to be reliable for the 11 items underlying employee communication effectiveness (.94), the 11 items constituting management communication (.95), and the 10 items measuring employee comprehension (.92). Accordingly, the respective items were added to create three indexes.

Employee preferred sources of information was measured by asking employees to rate each source according to how valuable it was to them. Employees were asked to rate 10 sources of information, including people, newsletters, email, intranet, news media and the grapevine. Source of information questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale with “very valuable” and “not at all valuable” serving as anchors. Questionnaire items and mean scores for all 2004 and 2007 data are provided in Table 2.

Table 2: *Means for Survey Items from 2004, 2007, and Percent of Change*

<u>Employee Communication Effectiveness</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>% Change</u>
I am kept informed about major changes occurring within the company.	3.67	3.44	6.69%
Information is shared in a timely manner from the company.	3.45	3.30	4.55%
I am kept informed about reasons behind company decisions.	3.03	2.89	4.84%
The information I receive from the company is accurate.	3.71	3.28	13.11%
The information I receive from the company is complete.	3.37	NA	
I am kept informed about major changes occurring within my business/function.	3.63	3.47	4.61%
Information is shared in a timely manner from my business/function.	3.48	3.39	2.65%
I am kept informed about reasons behind business/function decisions.	3.26	3.15	3.49%
The information I receive from my business/function is accurate.	3.73	3.41	9.38%
The information I receive from my business/function is complete.	3.48	NA	
My business/function does a good job of communicating information to all employees.	3.46	3.33	3.90%
<u>Employee Comprehension</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>% Change</u>
The strategies in general.	3.43	3.12	9.94%
Continuous improvement tools and strategies	3.48	3.43	1.46%
The company's products and services.	3.70	3.62	2.21%
The company's competitors.	3.36	3.15	6.67%
The actions the company is taking to succeed.	3.51	3.37	4.15%
The corporate financial goals.	3.33	3.17	5.05%
How the corporate goals relate to my regional business goals.	3.36	3.25	3.38%

How the regional business goals relate to my departmental goals.	3.48	3.41	2.05%
How the departmental goals relate to my individual goals.	3.59	3.52	1.99%
How the company’s activities fit into corporate, business and individual goals	3.38	NA	

<u>Managerial Communication</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>% Change</u>
Meets with our team regularly.	3.93	3.81	3.15%
Conducts an annual performance appraisal with me.	4.07	3.92	3.83%
Helps me set goals for my annual performance plan.	3.75	NA	
Shares business information with me.	3.79	3.78	0.26%
Listens to me.	4.00	3.93	1.78%
Values my opinions.	3.94	3.84	2.60%
Recognizes me when I do well.	3.88	3.77	2.92%
Helps me understand how my performance contributes to the company’s success.	4.00	3.62	10.50%
Explains the reasons behind decisions.	3.66	3.60	1.67%
Regularly discusses my personal development plan.	3.24	3.15	2.86%
Is positive about the company’s prospects for the future.	3.86	3.73	3.49%

<u>Employee Action</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>% Change</u>
I have the information I need to do my job effectively.	3.73	3.28	13.72%
Based on the communication I receive, I know what my specific contribution to our business needs to be.	3.68	3.56	3.37%
As a result of communication from my business or function, I have changed my work activities.	3.38	3.27	3.36%
I am well informed about the company’s expectations of me as an associate.	3.68	3.65	0.82%

<u>Sources of Information</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>% Change</u>
My immediate supervisor	4.24	4.07	4.18%
My immediate supervisor’s manager	3.88	3.78	2.65%
Business leaders	3.71	3.68	0.82%
Corporate senior management	3.61	3.51	2.85%
The corporate intranet	3.81	3.72	2.42%
Regional, business or country intranets	3.43	NA	
Regional, business or country newsletters	3.50	3.72	-5.91%
Daily News e-mail	3.50	NA	
News media	3.61	3.42	5.56%
Peers/Grapevine	3.54	3.71	-4.58%

**Results**

Research question one asked whether the metrics of managerial communication, employee comprehension and employee action improved at the company from 2004 to 2007. As indicated by Table 2, every question representative of these concepts showed improvement from 2004. A few improvements are particularly noteworthy. Employee comprehension about the company’s business strategy increased 9.94%, the perception of accuracy of communication from the corporate Communications department increased 13.1%, managerial communication helping employees to understand how their performance contributes to company success increased 10.5%, and employee action regarding “I have the information I need to do my job effectively” increased 13.72%.

Hypothesis two posited that effective employee communication would be positively related to employee comprehension of company goals and strategy and to action in support of this body of comprehension. Table 3 provides a correlation matrix among the indexes of employee communication effectiveness, employee comprehension, managerial communication, and the individual items underlying employee action in support of company knowledge. As indicated by Table 3, there is a positive strong relationship between employee communication effectiveness and employee comprehension ( $r = .722, p = .000$ ). There are also moderate, positive relationships between all items measuring employee action and effective employee communication. Hypothesis two is supported.

Table 3: *Intercorrelations Among Employee Action Items, Employee Communication Effectiveness, Employee Comprehension and Managerial Communication*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. I have the information I need to do my job effectively.		.67	.36	.48	.60*	.54*	.49*
2. Based on the communication I receive, I know what my specific contribution to our business needs to be.			.47	.54	.64*	.63*	.50*
3. As a result of communication from my business or function, I have changed my work activities.				.42	.59*	.53*	.45*
4. I am well informed about the company’s expectations of me as an associate.					.58*	.66*	.59*
5. Employee Communication Effectiveness						.72*	.61*
6. Employee Comprehension							.59*
7. Managerial Communication							

\* p < .01

Research question two investigated which attributes of employee communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of company goals and strategy. Multiple regression analysis was run, with the employee comprehension index serving as the dependent variable and the individual items underlying effective employee communication serving as the independent variables. As indicated in Table 4, five indicators explain approximately 53% of the variance of employee comprehension when considered collectively. The attribute, “I am kept informed about the reasons behind company decisions” emerged as the most important predictor (p. 264). It is also important to note how many of the communications from businesses / functions—not the corporate Communications department per se—are significant indicators of employee comprehension.

Table 4: Regression Analyses with Employee Comprehension as the Dependent Variable

Variables	$\beta$	Significance
Communication Effectiveness Items as the Independent Variables $R^2 = .526$ ; $F = 625$ ; $p = .000$		
I am kept informed about the reasons behind company decisions.	0.264	0
My business /function does a good job of communicating information to all employees.	0.18	0
The information I receive from my business /function is complete.	0.173	0
I am kept informed about major changes occurring within my business /function.	0.159	0
I am kept informed about major changes within the company.	0.109	0
Managerial Effectiveness Items as the Independent Variables $R^2 = .40$ ; $F = 470$ ; $p = .000$		
Helps me understand how my performance contributes to the company's success.	0.244	0
Is positive about the company's prospects for the future.	0.198	0
Shares business information with me.	0.173	0
Regularly discusses my personal development plan.	0.116	0
Source of Information as the Independent Variables $R^2 = .363$ ; $F = 268$ ; $p = .000$		
Business leaders	0.2	0
Regional, business or country newsletters	0.13	0
Immediate supervisor	0.19	0
Corporate senior management	0.176	0
Daily News e-mail	0.08	0
Company intranet	0.07	0

According to hypothesis three, managerial communication would be positively related to employee comprehension of company goals and strategy and to action in support of this body of comprehension. As reported in Table 3, there is a statistically significant, positive strong relationship between managerial communication and employee comprehension ( $r = .59$ ). There are also moderate, positive relationships between all items indicative of employee action and managerial communication. Hypothesis three is supported.

Research question three investigated which attributes of employee communication are most predictive of employee comprehension of company goals and strategy. As indicated by the results of regression analysis in Table 4, four variables explain approximately 40% of the variance of employee comprehension. The variable “my supervisor helps me understand how my performance contributes to company success,” is the most important and “my supervisor is positive about the company’s prospects for the future” is the second most important when all items are considered collectively.

Research question four examined which sources of information were most predictive of employee comprehension (the dependent variable). The correlation matrix in Table 5 indicates the relationship between the various sources and employee comprehension. All relationships are statistically significant except for peers/grapevine. All relationships are positive, ranging from weak to moderate. The strongest relationships exist between employee comprehension and sources of information that are face-to-face such as immediate supervisor ( $r = .387$ ), immediate supervisor’s manager ( $r = .443$ ), business leader ( $r = .509$ ), and corporate senior management ( $r = .493$ ). The relationship between employee comprehension and the intranet is positive, but weak ( $r = .31$ ). The results of the regression analysis indicate that five sources listed above explain approximately 36% of the variance of employee comprehension when considered collectively. Business leaders (.20), immediate supervisor (.190), and corporate senior management (.176) are the most important sources that contribute to employees’ comprehension about company-related information. The news e-mail (.08) and the intranet itself (.07) have a nominal, but positive, impact on employee comprehension.

Table 5: *Correlations Among Employee Comprehension and Perceived Value of Information Sources*

Source of Information	<i>r</i>
My immediate supervisor	.387*
My immediate supervisor's manager	.443*
Business leader	.509*
Corporate senior management	.493*
The company intranet	.317*
Regional, business or country intranet	.384*
Regional, business or country newsletters	.418*
Daily news e-mail	.322*
News media	.303*
Peers/grapevine	0.021

\*  $p < .01$

## Discussion

This case study is significant because it demonstrates the usefulness of using both output and outcome metrics to evaluate an employee communication program. As other case studies (Collins, n.d., Critelli 2007, Nicholson, 2003, and Witt, 2006) have demonstrated, public relations professionals can not rely on anecdotes or output metrics (ex: Web site hits, reach, etc.) to evaluate efforts. Benchmarking quantifiable outcomes enables public relations professionals to better direct future initiatives and to demonstrate the value of their work. For the company's corporate Communications department, these data provided the opportunity to support funding decisions both at the corporate and business unit levels. Summary data were provided to the company's executive management team, which then asked for cross-tabulations for their respective areas of responsibility. The results informed the company's communication planning processes at the corporate level for 2008, but more importantly, helped the corporate information technology function in its efforts to build infrastructure

improvements. Because of the increase in use and perception of value of the intranet, the company launched a project to enhance collaboration tools, using the intranet as a platform. The demonstrated improvement also drove projects to add sites to the intranet, as well as updates to several others.

As indicated by the descriptive data presented in this study, company scores on every question related to communication effectiveness, employee comprehension and action and managerial communication increased. The metrics for managerial communication were particularly high, mostly around 3.80 on the Likert scale that ranged from one to five. The positive scores on these items indicate that company managers are doing the things they should do with respect to communication—holding meetings, listening, setting goals and offering recognition to employees.

The mean scores for employee communication effectiveness, comprehension and action averaged around 3.5. Although there is room for improvement, the company's Communications management was particularly pleased to learn that employee comprehension of company strategy company strategies increased nearly 10% from 2004 to 2007. This illustrated that the content improvement in the intranet about communicating company strategy was working.

The survey revealed one area that warrants future attention from Communications: helping employees understand the reasons behind company decisions. This communication item was the most important predictor of employee comprehension. Because the mean score for this item was only 3.03, the company's Communication department plans to focus more content on describing reasons behind decisions in future efforts.

Even though this was a case study of only one organization, there are important findings that have relevance for other organizations, particularly large, global companies. First, the results of this study indicate the strong relationship between effective employee communication and employee comprehension ( $r = .72$ ). Intuitively, this relationship makes sense: timely, relevant, complete and accurate communication is positively related to employee understanding of corporate strategy and goals. This study has helped to validate this, and employee communication professionals might be encouraged to know that such tactical steps can move the needle on outcomes. The research also validates the normative positive relationship between effective managerial communication and employee comprehension ( $r = .61$ ). As past research has suggested (Sinickas, 2006, February and December), managerial communication is a strong indicator of employee comprehension of strategy. The data here reinforce this relationship.

The research here also helps us to better understand which elements of communication and managerial communication are most useful in yielding employee comprehension. The regression analysis indicates that the most important communication items emanate from business units and functions, not corporate

Communications. The importance of contextualized communication makes sense, and reinforces prior research with employees who said that organizational strategy information is most useful when placed in the context of their respective unit (Sinickas, February 2006). Public relations professionals responsible for global communication strategy need to work closely with respective communicators in disseminating relevant content to employees.

Helping employees understand how their performance contributes to an organization's success may be one of the most important things management can do to yield better employee comprehension of corporate strategy and goals. According to the results of this study, managers should also remain positive and share important business information with employees to increase comprehension.

Also encouraging in this study are the positive, moderate relationships between employee communication, employee comprehension, and managerial communication and employee action in support of company goals. Encouraging employees to act in alignment of company goals is one of the most important objectives of employee communication strategy. This study indicates that sound tactical efforts and strong face-to-face communication can help to secure employee action.

The last significant finding of this research relates to understanding employees' preferred source of information. In line with prior research (Sinickas, 2005, 2006, February), the descriptive data indicate that employees most prefer communication from immediate supervisors and managers. Electronic sources of communication— intranet, emails—were also rated fairly high by employees. Somewhat surprisingly, employees rated the news media moderately high, 3.61, as a preferred source of information about the company. This finding may be explained due to the coordinated internal and external communication efforts initiated by the Communications department from 2004 to 2007. These efforts led to little, if any, disconnect between internal and external sources. Rarely was information disseminated to the external media without first posting it on the intranet to reach employee audiences.

The sources that collectively explain 36% of the variance of employee comprehension of strategy include a combination of face-to-face communication and electronic sources. This finding also reinforces the research of Sinickas (2005) that suggests employees' preference for a combination of sources for their information needs.

One shortcoming of this study is that the research was conducted with employees of only one corporation. The low response to the survey is another shortcoming. Future research should test some of the relationships identified here with other types and sizes of organizations. Communicators might seek to link the communication metrics of employee comprehension and action with business data. Communicators might also consider implementing shorter, less time-consuming benchmarking surveys to shorten the time between assessments so employee

communications initiatives can be redirected sooner if necessary. Critelli, CEO of Pitney-Bowes, (2007) outlined his ideal employee communication measurement program: one that included one or two survey questions to test reach, comprehension and engagement for instant feedback and immediate adjustment. Critelli's model underscores current efforts among public relations professionals to measure and evaluate their activities in pragmatic ways to mesh with business strategy. This company's measurement and evaluation efforts represent one way to do that.

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