

Step-by-Step Checklist for Getting Unstuck in Strategic Communication

I. Diagnose Where You're Stuck (Audit & Understand the Current State):

- ☐ **Audit Current Communication Strategies:** Conduct a thorough review of your existing communication methods to identify gaps, redundancies, or areas of over/under-communication.
- ☐ **Assess Employee Understanding:** Determine if employees grasp the "why" behind projects and activities, or if they are "operating in the dark".
- ☐ **Evaluate Interaction and Connection:** Check if employees regularly interact with the strategy and understand how their daily roles connect to the broader organizational direction.
- ☐ **Uncover Motivation and Feedback Gaps:** Identify if there's a lack of motivation to engage with the strategy or insufficient opportunities for employees to provide feedback.
- ☐ **Gather Employee Insights:** Use surveys or interviews to uncover employee pain points, preferences, and sentiment regarding communication and the strategy.

II. Define Your Path Forward (Clear Goals & Alignment):

- ☐ **Establish Clear, Measurable Goals (SMART):** Define **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART)** objectives at the top level, ensuring they align with the company's mission, vision, and values.
- ☐ **Ensure Leadership Alignment and Commitment:** Build total leadership alignment and commitment around the new strategic direction. Leaders must be prepared to articulate a clear and compelling vision.
- ☐ **Break Down Goals Through Cascading:** Translate overarching company objectives into specific departmental, team, and individual goals, fostering clarity and ownership at each level. Empower employees to set their own goals that contribute to company-wide initiatives to increase trust and productivity.
- ☐ **Link Current Activities to Future Strategy:** Consistently connect what your organization is doing now with its long-term vision. Create and discuss Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets, working backward from five-year targets to current ones.

III. Craft Your Message Effectively (Clarity & Storytelling):

- ☐ **Simplify and Be Concise:** Break down your strategy into digestible chunks. Use clear, concise language and **avoid jargon, industry-specific acronyms, or overly complicated phrasing.**
- ☐ **Leverage Strategic Storytelling:** Weave a strategic narrative (a "before," "now," and "to be" sequence) that connects the company's past, present, and future. Highlight real-world examples to make the strategy relatable and memorable, engaging employees emotionally and inspiring action.

- ☐ **Define Strategic Terms:** Explicitly define key terms within your strategy (e.g., "customer") to ensure everyone shares a common understanding.
- ☐ **Acknowledge and Explain Differences:** Describe how new changes will manifest in behaviours and clearly differentiate the current strategic plan from past ones, especially if previous plans were poorly executed.
- ☐ **Be Transparent About Barriers:** Explain potential barriers that may prevent the organization from achieving its vision and differentiate between "signal and noise" for employees.

IV. Disseminate and Engage (Multi-channel & Two-way Communication):

- ☐ **Call an All-Company Meeting:** Initiate communication with a dedicated all-company meeting focused on the strategic plan, using proactive messaging if information might leak. Review attendee needs and provide conceptual tools.
- ☐ **Employ Diverse Communication Channels ("Seven Times in Seven Ways"):** Do not rely on written communication alone. Use a mix of video, audio, visual, and written methods such as brochures, speeches, newsletters, videos, company websites/intranets, workshops, internal blog posts, social media updates, electronic scoreboards, infographics, walls, screensavers, and internal podcasts.
- ☐ **Provide Handouts (Selectively):** Share only critical information that supports employees in their jobs, avoiding sensitive data or distributing entire book-format plans.
- ☐ **Encourage Two-Way Communication and Feedback Loops:**
 - ☐ **Create defined channels for regular employee feedback**, such as surveys, town hall meetings, suggestion boxes, and Q&A sessions.
 - ☐ **Actively ask employees** what they believe will be different or the same due to the strategy.
 - ☐ **Act on feedback received** and communicate the changes made in response to demonstrate that input is valued.
 - ☐ Regularly communicate the outcomes and actions taken based on feedback.
- ☐ **Connect Employees to the Plan:** Explicitly show employees how their input contributed to the plan and how their daily work directly connects to the overall strategy. Provide "shout-outs" from executive leaders highlighting team or departmental contributions to the strategy.
- ☐ **Include a Clear Call to Action:** Every communication about your strategy should include clear, actionable steps, specifying what employees and stakeholders are expected to do (e.g., adopting new processes, achieving specific metrics, participating in training sessions) to empower ownership.
- ☐ **Consider External Communications:** Develop a comprehensive communication plan that also includes external stakeholders (customers, suppliers, and the public) using channels like press releases, newsletters, and social media updates.

V. Sustain Momentum & Adapt (Continuous & Visible Progress):

- ☐ **Reinforce Communication Regularly:** Avoid the "one and done" mistake. Strategic communication is an ongoing process that requires **regular updates and reinforcement** through various platforms (e.g., weekly departmental meetings, monthly organizational meetings) to keep the strategy top-of-mind.
- ☐ **Implement Continuous Performance Management (CPM):** Move beyond annual reviews to include **ongoing feedback, regular check-ins**, and real-time adjustments to keep everyone aligned. Managers should discuss plan details and implications for work with their direct reports at least weekly.
- ☐ **Make Progress Visible:** Establish **clear metrics and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** that align with strategic goals and guide resource allocation. Share visually attractive dashboards and automated reports to show KPI statuses at a glance, simplifying complex data and making information visible and transparent for everyone.
- ☐ **Ensure Proper Resource Allocation and Support:** Equip teams with the necessary tools (e.g., project management platforms, communication software) and provide adequate training to ensure employees understand how to use resources to support overarching goals.
- ☐ **Motivate and Drive Ownership:** Implement metric-focused incentives (e.g., bonus pay, office celebrations for hitting KPI targets) and drive ownership by assigning individuals to update and report on various elements of the plan. Tie compensation and employee reviews directly back to the success of plan initiatives.
- ☐ **Be Flexible and Open to Feedback:** Leadership should be willing to make adjustments to the strategic plan based on feedback from lower-level employees and changing circumstances. Staying in tune with what is and isn't working properly is crucial.
- ☐ **Address Skeptics Effectively:**
 - ☐ **Complex Chris:** Remind them that the goal of reporting is to provide **clear, relevant, and reliable information** for decision-making. Set simple standards for reports.
 - ☐ **Doubting Deb:** Present information consistently to help her benchmark results. Engage in pre-meeting discussions to walk through metrics she doubts. Consider increasing data transparency if her skepticism stems from a lack of access to sources.
 - ☐ **Forgetful Fred:** Hold him accountable by explaining the critical role of accountability. Consider implementing software that assigns ownership of measures and projects to aid timely completion.
 - ☐ **Siloed Sarah:** Create cross-functional teams and provide real-life examples of how collaboration improved processes or generated new ideas. Use collaboration software to help her see her connection to other work that relates to the strategy.

By following these steps, organizations can prevent common communication and execution failures, build trust, increase engagement, and ultimately achieve their strategic goals.