Using Communications Channels

Introduction

Knowledge management is often an umbrella label for a series of activities (perhaps grouped into themes) aimed at improving the way an organisation shares and applies knowledge to better serve the needs of its clients.

A knowledge management strategy provides the vision, channels, skills and tools for mobilising knowledge across an organisation. It should be managed as a change initiative.

By adopting a knowledge management approach, an organisation will be changing or transforming information and knowledge management practices to achieve organisational objectives.

Effective internal communications are essential for managing or implementing change.

Why have a communication strategy?

How much the strategy costs, how it will be delivered, and by whom will all have been considered and planned. The communication strategy is a cornerstone of the knowledge management strategy. It ensures that the key messages of the strategy are correctly communicated, raising awareness and understanding and helps embed the knowledge management tools and techniques into the organisation.

The communications plan is a fundamental part of the strategy and has the objective of changing attitudes and behaviour among key groups on a day-to-day basis.

As part of the strategy discreet communications are tasked with:

- Raising awareness of change where and when appropriate among the relevant audiences
- Imparting knowledge and understanding of new ways of working, processes, systems, roles, responsibilities etc
- Moving individuals to act in the ways which we have identified above by providing tangible examples of knowledge management in action and appropriate carrots and sticks

These carrots and sticks might include:

- Incentives and rewards for positive behaviours are being developed
- Knowledge management competencies linked into appraisal objectives
- Senior level staff expected to lead by example
- Peer challenge will be encouraged – behaviour breeds behaviour

How do you design a communication strategy?

Information and knowledge will have different meaning and value to individuals and therefore different parts of the knowledge management strategy will affect different people at different times. Communications should aim to provide timely information in appropriate ways.

When implementing a complex and ongoing strategy it is important to avoid "initiative overload". Individuals may become frustrated by constant and potentially conflicting communications.

There are two approaches to communication; the 'big bang' branded approach and the 'stealth' approach. The former creates high visibility and impact and often includes 'branding' of the knowledge management strategy, but it is a higher risk approach as failures will be as well documented and visible as successes. The latter focuses on individual deliverables and how they can be used. It is a lower risk communication strategy but the impact gained by 'branding' the strategy will be lost and deliverables may not be linked to the overall strategy. Both strategies have merit and organisational preferences will influence the choice

What is in the communication strategy?

The communication strategy should contain different approaches, which can be applied depending on the message, the audience and the outcome required.

An action plan for each area of the strategy, as well as for the overall programme management can be used for communicating with the various stakeholder groups.

An example of an action plan template is shown below. If the knowledge management strategy is broken into themes or projects, a communications strategy should be prepared for each area.

The action plan should include:

- Key Activities
- Action 'owner'

- Key messages
- Purpose of message

- Communication triggers
- Communication channel

- Intended outcome
- Timescale

How can you measure the effectiveness of communication?

When implementing a knowledge management strategy, it is important to assess the impact of the different deliverables or themes.

This can be done in the form of staff surveys, through consultation procedures, workshops and so on.

Criteria to measure effectiveness should look at:

- Awareness - Levels of awareness of both the knowledge management programme (when branded and/or communicated as such) and product/outputs of the programme
- Understanding - Survey and feedback evidence to gauge extent to which knowledge management is understood and applied
- Conviction - Attitudes, beliefs and values
- Action/repeat action - Positive action, behaviour, evidence

The knowledge management strategy should aim to move individuals from awareness to action, and the communications strategy should support this aim.

Example of communication strategy template

AUDIENCE	SUBJECT/ MESSAGE	TRIGGER?	WHEN?	HOW?	PURPOSE?	WHO BY?	FEEDBACK
Executive Director	Status reports Decision needed	Reporting cycle, Team Meetings, Ad hoc request	As required	Management Team briefing One to one meetings	To update or gain agreement	Project manager	Project Sponsor and Team minutes
Management Team	Status reports Decision needed Initiatives affecting linkages/interfaces	Team meetings Ad hoc request	As required	Management Team briefing email, Intranet, One to one meetings	To update or gain agreement	Project manager	Project Sponsor and Team minutes
Directorate Management Teams	Status reports Initiatives affecting linkages/interfaces	Team meetings Information needs	As required	Directorate Management Team briefing, email, Intranet, One to one meetings	To update or gain agreement	Project manager	Project Sponsor or Leader and Team minutes
Project Sponsor	Status reports Decision needed Direction/guidance	Project controls Information needs Exceptions to plan	As required As required As required	Exception reports, briefings, email, Intranet, Quickplace, One to one meetings	To update, gain agreement or advice, obtain decision	Project manager	Project leader
Project Team	Status reports Project reports Work programmes	Monthly meetings Project control Exceptions	Monthly As required As required	Reports, Team meetings, Intranet, Quickplace, email	To update, plan, report, evaluate or progress	Project team	Through team meetings, One to one meetings, email, reports, Quickplace
Critical friends group	Consultation and advice	Scheduled meetings	As required	Project Leader briefing	To update or consult	Project manager	Project Leader
All Staff	Status reports Consultation	Staff Briefing event Consultation needs	Ongoing	Updates in Staff newsletter, Intranet pages	To update or consult	Project manager	Through workshops, team meetings, email, consultation papers and Intranet