

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement

**A study of Canadian best practices
in employee engagement communication:
practitioner, academic and consultant views
together with a guide for organizations**

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Abstract

The value of effectively engaging employees in the work of their organizations is well recognized in Canada and globally. Managed internal communication with employees has long been viewed as an important contributor to the involvement and productivity of employees and the alignment of employee effort with organizational goals. The use of New Web 2.0 media technologies in the workplace can support innovation in managed communications and engagement with employees. This paper looks at managed employee communications in Canadian organizations -- some operating internationally -- that have been highly rated for employee engagement and appear at or near the top of the list of best employers --small, medium and large -- in Canada. The results provide an insight into what may be considered best practices in employee engagement communications. The study's findings are pertinent for organizations of all sizes both within Canada and beyond. The results demonstrate that employee communication in leading Canadian organizations is becoming much more an ongoing conversation than the top-down or even two-way communication that characterized this field in the past. While many organizations are using new social technologies for internal communications, they have not, as yet, found ideal ways of measuring the results. A practical guide for use by CEOs, senior teams and internal communications managers is one of the paper's outcomes. This study contributes to the currently limited academic field of *employee engagement communications* --

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication including the provision of a definition -- and calls for additional academic study of this topic.

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Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication over the years of his work in Organizational Behaviour and Leadership... then to Bill and our children, Christopher and Caroline Blake, for their wonderful support, understanding --although sometimes stretched to the limit -- and encouragement during the course of my studies.

Introduction

The value of effectively engaging employees in the work of their organizations is well recognized today in Canada and globally. Strategy professor Douglas Reid, of the Queen's University School of Business, suggests "increased employee engagement may offer the sole remaining opportunity for companies seeking a step-function improvement in productivity and competitiveness" (QSB Magazine, 2012). Business leaders and consultants have been interested in the topic of employee engagement since the 1990s, and more recently, it has attracted wider attention in academic circles as well (Welch, 2011, p. 328). Internal or corporate communication with employees as managed by senior teams and internal communications practitioners is viewed as an important contributor to employee engagement. The global consulting firm Towers Watson has found that "firms that communicate effectively with employees are also the best financial performers"(Towers Watson, 2009/2010). Buckley, Monks and Sinnott (1998) noted that relationships with employees are the "life blood" of an organization, and that and that these relationships are "essentially communications processes which include a *content* level as well as a *relationship* level, the latter being how the content level is to be understood within the context of the relationship" (Dachler, 1998, p. 51)(Buckley *et al*, p. 222). In a recent publication focusing on internal

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communications and employee engagement, Welch (2011) noted that the engagement concept should be well understood by those involved in internal communication management so "they can craft strategies and tactics which contribute to building engagement" (Welch, p. 329).

Employees, especially the generation now just entering the workplace, have expectations that communications patterns in the world generally are mirrored within the organization (Meister & Willyerd, 2010, p. 37). Businesses, many of which are becoming larger, more complex and more global, are recognizing that the types of people they need in order to remain competitive are those who thrive in a highly connected world. In their book, *The 2020 Workplace*, talent and organizational development experts Jeanne Meister and Karie Willyerd, note key trends facing today's employers -- all of which place pressure on organizations to re-think they way they communicate and otherwise interact and form relationships with their employees. These include:

- an aging and shrinking workforce and a huge requirement for workers with the complex skills needed in the knowledge economy including problem solving, judgment, listening, data analysis, relationship building and collaborating and communicating with coworkers;
- the increasingly digital workplace and millennials in the workplace who will expect employers to provide they with the same tools to collaborate, brainstorm, and network on the job that they use in their personal lives. (pp. 16-39)

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- the culture of connectivity together with the use of technology to get contributions from others creating a *participation society*;
- corporate social responsibility, which is business-driven and integrated into the social, ethical, and environmental agendas of a growing number of companies.

The McKinsey consulting firm reported on the growing use of Web 2.0 by business in its 2009 Global Survey. While not as great as external use, internal use of such technologies by businesses was significant: 48 per cent were using video sharing; 47 per cent using blogs; 42 per cent using internal social networking; 40 per cent using wikis; and 36 per cent using podcasts. Companies also reported internal use of social media tools such as rating, tagging, peer-to-peer communications and micro-blogging. (McKinsey Quarterly, p. 2) For organizations with the inclination, this trend opens up new means of communicating with employees, through channels that are well suited for two-way and cross-functional and cross-silo dialogue. In addition, and very importantly, it opens the way for strategic relationships and meaningful two-way or multi-directional communications with employees that can lead to effective and sustainable organizational change. As Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) noted, the role of the CEO in initiating successful strategic change is one of sense making and sense giving, something that one could argue is contingent on their ability to communicate. However, they also note that there must be a negotiation of this change with others in the organization and this involves "reciprocal processes of cognition and action, and entail cycles of understanding and influence," (p. 446). An argument can be

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made that this is where having an organizational and communications culture that allows for constructive ongoing dialogue can optimize strategic change efforts. Today, more and more, that involves having an evolved internal communications capacity that includes social connectedness similar to that found in society generally.

As Anthony Bradley and Mark McDonald, of Gartner Inc, an information technology research and advisory company, note in their 2011 book *The Social Organization*, the advent of social media technology for use by employees customers, suppliers and other stakeholders is nothing less than transformational for organizations. It makes way for mass collaboration, allowing all parties to contribute directly in the creation of value. "They can contribute to, review, and comment on any phase of the firm's work" (p. 5). It is clear that there is a significant role for well-managed communication with employees as this capacity for engagement through social media is unleashed. However, as Bradley and McDonald point out, most social media initiatives fail for a whole host of reasons including the view sometimes held by organizations that it does not require management to succeed or that benefits cannot be anticipated or measured (p. 3).

With so much in the current organizational and communications environments in flux, Harvard Business researchers Boris Groysberg and Michael Slind (2012) note that the old 'corporate communication' is giving way to a model they call 'organizational conversation.' "That shift is, for many people, a disorienting process. But it also offers a great leadership opportunity," they assert. This statement from their blog reveals what is happening at the leading edge of employee

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"Our research has shown that more and more leaders — from organizations that range from computer-networking giant Cisco Systems to Hindustan Petroleum, a large India-based oil supplier — are using the power of organizational conversation to drive their company forward. For these leaders, internal communication isn't just an HR function. It's an engine of value that boosts employee engagement and improves strategic alignment. (Groysberg & Slind, p. 1)

Structure of paper

This paper is organized in an academic format but has outcomes designed to be of interest to both academics and practitioners. To situate the research undertaken for this paper in the broader context, the paper begins with a literature review looking first at definitions pertinent to the paper and the importance of the key topics: *organizational communication, internal communication and employee engagement*. It then reviews the internal communication and employee engagement literature, both academic and consultant. Finally, the limited literature on what has been termed *employee engagement communication* is reviewed.

The findings of the qualitative study conducted for this paper -- employee engagement communications practices of top Canadian employers -- are then presented, along with supplemental research conducted with experts in the field of employee engagement and communications from both the academic and consultant worlds. A report is also provided of statistical correlations between specific management communications activities and overall corporate employee engagement, drawn from the results of the 2012 study of Best Small & Medium Employers in Canada conducted by AON Hewitt and the Queen's Centre for Business

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Venturing/Queen's Centre for Enterprise Development, associated with the Queen's
University School of Business in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. In addition to the
standard analysis and findings of an academic paper, this report also provides a
succinct guide for organizations and communications practitioners wishing to
harness the power of employee communications to drive engagement. The paper
concludes with suggestions for future research resulting from the concepts that
came to light.

Research Problem

A review of the literature on organizational communication reveals there has
not been as much focus on communication in support of employee engagement as
could be expected given the attention being paid to engaging employees by
businesses and non-profit organizations alike. In addition, the new social media
technologies available to those charged with communicating professionally have, by
their very nature, opened up considerable scope for enhanced employee
engagement. As yet, there is little academic literature on this topic. Consultants,
while focusing greater effort on communication, have not undertaken thorough
research regarding the ties between communication and engagement. Certainly, no
literature was found on the topic of internal communications in support of
engagement in Canadian businesses and organizations.

It is of critical importance for Canadian businesses and organizations to
harness the skills, abilities and knowledge resident in their employees in order to
remain competitive and effective. Studies show that effective communication with
employees contributes to organizational success and that building relationships

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication with employees is essentially a communications process. Hence, those responsible for managing professional communication within the organization have a major role to play and a key responsibility for organizational success. Business researchers note that the way in which people communicate with each other in organizations is "unmistakably in flux" (Groysberg & Slind, 2012). If professional communicators are not up to the task of adapting to the new communication realities, their employers stand to lose strategic advantage and suffer financially. This study was designed to shed light on how some of the best employers in Canada approach communications to ensure their employees are as engaged as possible. The outcome aims to assist other organizations to model and adapt such approaches to ensure optimal employee engagement communications.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the key internal organizational and communication characteristics of organizations with highly engaged employees?

This question recognizes that, as Grunig (1992) and others have noted, excellence in communication is associated with corporate excellence. It is likely then, that organizations with highly engaged employees and thus considered to be excellent and highly productive, will be found to have excellent communications. Some commentators and researchers (Folz 1985, Poole and McPhee 1983) would also argue that excellent communication makes for an excellent organization. Grunig (1992) noted the *worldview* of organizations with quality communications tended to be open to new ideas and two-way dialogue with stakeholders while those with poor communication tended to be those

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RQ2. What standard communications approaches and channels do these organizations use for their internal communication?

Given the argument that engaged employees are those who are motivated to contribute, feel their contributions are valued and recognized, and are free to engage in a two-way dialogue with management, one would expect to find open, two-way systems of communication within organizations with highly engaged work forces.

RQ3. How do organizations with highly engaged employees handle communications in times of change?

In today's environment, many organizations must learn to adapt and change quickly if they are to survive. Statistics show "that most change initiatives fail to deliver their planned benefits"(Quirke, p. 137). With change becoming virtually a constant, the communication mechanisms in support of change in successful organizations with highly engaged employees should prove to be a model for others.

RQ4. How do best practice organizations measure the effectiveness of their organizational communications?

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Evaluation and measurement of communications efforts is generally recognized as a weakness (Stacks 2002, Watson, 2001, Towers Watson 2009/10) yet if there is no way of knowing if such initiatives have brought about hoped-for change, and no sense of what aspects of communications programs have had the greatest impact, it is impossible to learn from experience and make improvements. Given the success of organizations with highly engaged employees, it should follow that they have found effective ways of measuring communication programs.

RQ5. What are likely to be the best "next" practices in employee engagement communication and how can organizations get ready to take advantage of these advances?

Successful organizations recognized as leaders in employee engagement are likely ahead of the trend in terms of their organizational and communication practices. Their approach to communication and their views with regard to future excellent practices can serve as a guide for others.

Literature review

Definition: Organizational Communication

Managed organizational communication has been an active function within larger businesses and organizations since at least the 1930s (American Association of Industrial Editors (AAIE) records). However, the term *organizational communication* does not have a clear definition and this can result in confusion about the role and potentially hamper the function's effectiveness. In the broadest sense, it can mean any type of communication that goes on within or emanates from

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an organization -- be it a business, non-profit, government organization, association
or other entity. Some, such as Kathrine Baker, see it as the full range of
communication that goes on in any organization spanning micro, meso and macro
levels. Organizational communication can be formal and informal. It can cover the
corporate-wide internal communication managed professionally as in strategic
communications, newsletters and presentations, external communications or can be
communication at the employee work level such as work direction and performance
reviews. Baker noted that "as a new academic discipline, organizational
communication is struggling to develop and convey some sense of coherency across
these many areas." (Baker, 2002, p. 1). James Grunig provides a narrower definition
in his seminal book, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*,
where he notes that the defining feature of organizational communication is that the
communication is *managed* "especially as communication managed for the
organization by communication specialists" and that such communication could be
internal or external (Grunig, 1992, p. 5). Grunig saw organizational communication
and public relations as one and the same. Roy Foltz defined organizational
communication as "the exchange of information, ideas and feelings" noting that
exchange was the key point, with efforts such as transmission of information and the
various means of so doing being used to "promote the exchange process and set the
tone for communication within an organization." He went further and noted that the
primary responsibilities of organizational communication were to support the
objectives and programs of the organization and to meet the needs of the audiences
but that "doing both jobs well or closing the gap between the two becomes the real

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication and constant challenge to organizational communication and organizational communicators" (Folz, 1985, p. 4). This certainly accords with Grunig's view of excellent communications as being two-way and symmetrical minimizing conflict and maximizing cooperation between and organization and its key publics (1992, p. 18). This suggests dialogue and give and take between the organization and its stakeholders and communications thus being more of a *bridging* function than a *buffering* function (2006, p. 175).

Definition: Internal Communication

In the broadest sense *internal communication* may be defined as transactions between individuals and groups at various levels within an organization and in different areas of specialization. These transactions are intended to design --and redesign -- organizations and coordinate day-to-day activities (Dolphin, 2005, p. 171-190). A good system of internal communication provides the "strategic and tactical information resources that all members of the organization need to coordinate activities, provide direction, reduce uncertainty, and do their jobs in an efficient and productive manner" (Kazoleas & Wright, p. 478). Such a system has to be purposely designed to allow information to be moved up, down, and across the organization. This information has to be accessible, on time, and of use to employees" (p. 478). Further internal communications is a dialogic, "dual listening process" that takes place between the organization and its staff members and between staff members (Hopkins, 2006). In essence, high quality, planned and managed internal communication is required to properly align the organization to meet its strategic and tactical needs.

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Other fields of business have also taken an interest in the employee audience in recent years. Marketing academics see this field of study as one that can improve customer focus. Their definition of *internal marketing* is not unlike those for internal communication. They see it as a means to motivate, coordinate and integrate employees across functions in keeping with organizational strategies to "deliver customer satisfaction through a process of creating motivated and customer-oriented employees" (Rafiq & Pervaiz, p. 454).

Definition: Employee Engagement

There is also no clear definition for *employee engagement*. The first person to write about the concept, although calling it *work engagement*, was an ethnographic researcher, William Kahn (1990) (Attridge, 2009), who built his theory based on a study of camp counselors. Although Kahn noted the engagement construct was multi-faceted, his definition was a simple one: "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles" (p. 694). The concept has since been defined more completely by Nelson and Simmons (2003), as "when employees feel positive emotions toward their work, find their work to be personally meaningful, consider their workload to be manageable, and have hope about the future of their work" (Attridge, 2009).

It appears that employee engagement has most often been defined as *emotional and intellectual commitment* to the organization. Kular *et al* (2008) noted this in their extensive review of the literature on employee engagement. In addition, they found definitions that related to the amount of discretionary effort exhibited by

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employees in their job or simply as passion for work, "a state in which people,
during role performance, express themselves physically, cognitively and
emotionally" (p. 3).

Lockwood, of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), defined employee engagement as: "the extent to which employees commit to something or someone in their organization, how hard they work and how long they stay as a result of that commitment" (pg. 2). Towers Perrin, the Human Resource consulting firm, which in 2007-08 surveyed nearly 90,000 employees in 18 countries regarding their work engagement, defines the concept as: "employees' willingness and ability to help their company succeed, largely by providing discretionary effort on a sustained basis." Put another way, engagement is the extent to which employees go the extra mile and put discretionary effort into their work -- contributing more of their energy, creativity and passion on the job." (Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study, 2007-08 p. 3)

AON Hewitt, another global HR consulting firm that studies employee engagement and undertook surveys of 112,000 Canadian employees in 2011 to gauge their level of engagement, has another take on the subject. The company uses "say, stay and strive" as its short form definition of engagement. It sees employees as being engaged when they "speak positively about the organization to co-workers, potential employees and customers; have an intense desire to be a member of the organization and exert extra effort; and are dedicated to doing the very best job possible to contribute to the organization's business success." (QCBV-BSME website, 2011)

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Saks (2006), a professor at the Rotman School of Management at University of Toronto, concluded that in the academic literature, employee engagement has been defined as a "distinct and unique construct that consists of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components that are associated with individual performance. Furthermore, engagement is distinguishable from several related constructs, most notably, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behaviour, and job involvement" (p. 602).

An oft-quoted paper on employee engagement published by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) in the U.K. (Robinson *et al*, 2004) made particular mention of communication and relationship building and the importance of communication being two-way. IES defines engagement as:

"a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee."(p. 1).

The important difference between this definition and others is the inclusion of awareness of the business context and the need for the organization to work at a two-way relationship with employees. As such, this definition has considerable relevance to the topic of this paper. The following definition also captures the concept well in that it adds the concept of engagement being good for both the organization and the individuals within it.

"Engaged employees have a sense of personal attachment to their work and organization; they are motivated and able to give of their best to help it succeed – and from that flows a series of tangible benefits for organization and individual alike."(MacLeod and Clarke, p. 7)

Importance

The following sections highlight why the key topics covered by this paper are important areas of study in the context of business and organizational success.

Importance: Organizational/Internal Communication

Communication has long been recognized as an important topic of study for business and other organizations. There are some who would argue that without communication there would be no organization (Tompkins, 1987) or that communication actually creates organizational structures (Poole and McPhee, 1983) using a process Conrad and Ryan (1985) called *structuration* (Grunig, 1992, p. 563). This "chicken or egg" debate is an interesting one and may have pertinence today in light of enhanced opportunities for internal discussion enabled by internal social media.

Folz made a strong statement regarding the importance of communication in business organizations when he wrote:

"Organizational communication is *the* vital link in the chain of events that is the process of managing a business. It is the single factor that makes an organization viable, successful, effective, enduring. More than any other element, the communications of an organization project the "personality" of that organization to its internal and external audiences" (Folz, 1985, p. 3).

The work of Grunig and his colleagues, published in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communications Management* (1992), was aimed at gauging the economic contribution of managed communication to the organization -- this, of course, being the key concern of those in senior leadership positions and at the board level. They noted that their review of media theory and research found that

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"communication, especially mass communication, does not exert strong, direct, and powerful effects on publics (p. 164) and "the chance of achieving behaviour specified as a program objective with any particular member of the target public is 0.04 percent, or only 4 chances in 10,000"(p. 166) and suggested that gambling would have similar odds. In their chapter in that same Excellence study -- on evaluating public relations programs -- Dozier and Ehling wrote that for a program to be effective it has to either maintain or change a relationship with a stakeholder group, thus making an argument for public relations as *relationship management*. They suggested that the real art is in figuring out the best balance between what is workable and what is beneficial (Dozier & Ehling, p. 169).

In keeping with the broad theoretical perspective developed as a result of the Excellence Study, Dozier & Ehling assert that the symmetrical model of communication and public relations is "more efficacious because it assumes that the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of both top management and publics is subject to change" (p. 178). This is a much more realistic model, they note, than assuming one party or more can be converted to the business leaders' way of thinking (p. 178). Through this process "differences in agreement between organizations and publics are reduced: such reductions are key indicators of communication program effectiveness" (p. 182). This measure of efficacy is based on the setting of goals that work to increase mutuality between the organization and publics "upon whom survival and growth depends," thus allowing the organization to pursue its goals and achieve success (p. 182). At the time of the Excellence study, it was noted that symmetrical communication was "largely normative," a prescription as to how

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication public relations should be practiced, rather than descriptive of existing practices (p.182). The researchers held out hope, however, that symmetrical communication was indeed possible, with proper education and research and in organizations prone to a participative culture. This state was not widely achieved within Grunig's 40-year academic career. Indeed, in his career-capping article Grunig (2006) made several pointed comments apropos to the topic of this paper, designed to prod and inspire those who followed. Grunig noted that cultivating relationships was an important new approach for public relations, the heir to older models of communications including the two-way symmetrical model he had put forward. One example of this is the "sharing of tasks" with stakeholders, for mutual benefit (p. 168). This can certainly apply to the important internal or employee public and is something that organizations are embarking upon in their organizational communications efforts, especially with the assistance afforded through internal social media. He called for public relations scholars to use their theories to develop symmetrical principles of cultivating relationships, thus furthering the work of marketing scholars in the area of relationship marketing. He noted that public relations needs now to be seen as a *bridging* rather than *buffering* activity, and, as such, enters the realm of a strategic management function" (p. 171).

Using the broader term "corporate communication" but clearly referencing *internal communication* with employees, Kazoleas and Wright in Heath's *Handbook of Public Relations* state:

"Corporate communication has a large impact on organizational performance, culture and well-being. Large organizations are made up of interacting units that coordinate their efforts to produce products, serve clients, and maintain organizational structure. Lack of

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communication can have disastrous results leading to decreased performance, decreased productivity, problems with safety and morale, and (in some industries) regulatory and statutory violations."(2001, p. 472)

This comment on the impact of internal communication on key measures of what might be seen as the organization's "balanced scorecard" underlines its importance to the success of the organization.

Some researchers have posited that excellent internal communication is a strategic imperative for today's organization. Dolphin (2005) studied 24 organizations in the U.K. finding that large organizations accept that successful communications programs become an imperative in today's challenging environment. He found that managed internal communications are of increasing importance to U.K. organizations, that their role is strategic, and that the communications executive is today's strategic information manager (p. 185).

Unlike academics, consulting firms have proffered solid financial and other indicators of the value of communication. While this may be seen by academics as self serving, it is also the case that such firms have had substantial access to organizations and their employees as well as to corporate information, allowing them to survey hundreds of thousands of people annually. Not only does this allow an excellent snapshot of employee views, it provides the opportunity for comparison and analysis over time and across cultures. The consulting firm Towers Watson studied the return on investment (ROI) of communications through a multiregional study released in 2009. The firm noted that its "research has consistently found the firms that communicate effectively with employees are also;

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication the best financial performers." Their key findings underline the importance of communication in ways that have impact at the senior table. They noted that:

- Effective employee communication is a leading indicator of financial performance and a driver of employee engagement.
- Companies that were highly effective communicators had 47 per cent higher total returns to shareholders over the previous five years compared with firms that were the least effective communicators (Towers Watson, 2009/2010, p. 2).

Importance: Employee Engagement

Large organizations have for many years hired human resource consultants to undertake employee surveys in an effort to better understand employees' views and obtain guidance for improvements in the work environment. These firms include Gallup, AON Hewitt, Deloitte and Towers Watson, among others. While today, many of these surveys seek to measure the *engagement* of employees, terms used in the past have included *attitude, climate, culture, quality, involvement and satisfaction*. It can be argued that such surveys have, over time, been used for much the same purpose; to gauge how employees think and feel about the workplace and obtain information regarding needed improvements, all in support of greater organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

As noted by Saks in 2006, the concept of "employee engagement has the appearance of being somewhat faddish or what some call, 'old wine in a new bottle,' because there has been "surprisingly little academic and empirical research on a topic that has become so popular." He notes, however that the popularity of employee engagement is based on beliefs regarding the potential positive impact of

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Attridge (2009) reported that problems with work engagement are common worldwide. About 20 per cent of employees are so disengaged that they are busy "acting out their unhappiness" and undermine what engaged workers are trying to accomplish. An opposite 20 per cent are highly engaged and work with passion and a feeling of "profound connection" with their company. These employees "drive innovation and move the organization forward." The middle 60 per cent exhibit a moderate level of work engagement. (p. 387).

While various estimates of the financial impact of engagement exist, AON Hewitt (2011) has used the metric of total shareholder return. They noted that "organizations with high levels of engagement (65 % or greater) continue to outperform the total stock market index and posted total shareholder returns 22% higher than average in 2010. On the other hand, companies with low engagement (45% or less) had a total shareholder return that was 28 % lower than average" (AON Hewitt, Trends, p. 6). Gallup made this impactful statement in its 2010 report on engagement:

"Actively disengaged employees erode an organization's bottom line, while breaking the spirits of colleagues in the process. Within the U.S. workforce, Gallup estimates this cost to the bottom line to be more than \$300 billion in lost productivity alone. In stark contrast, world-class organizations that have built a sustainable model using Gallup's approach have an engagement ratio of more than 9:1. As organizations move toward this benchmark, they greatly

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reduce the negative effect of actively disengaged employees while unleashing the organization's potential for rapid growth." (Gallup Consulting, 2010)

Gallup has also noted that another key benefit of engagement is that it drives innovation (Gallup Consulting, 2006). Company research found that the best new ideas come from engaged employees, rather than *new* employees, contrary to common wisdom (p. 5.). They found that employees who scored in the top 25 per cent for engagement submitted more ideas than those in the bottom 25 per cent and the savings for each idea implemented was more than twice that of those in the bottom quartile, at \$11,061 versus just \$4,065. The willingness of engaged employees to recommend their company's products and services was the most powerful highlight of this research. They found that "67 per cent of those who were engaged AND in the top quartile on innovation were advocates, 2.6 times more likely than the working population"(p. 4).

While comments from consulting firms can be viewed as self-aggrandizing, the British government believed that employee engagement was such an important topic for both the private and public sectors, that it commissioned a study of engagement (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009) to serve as a guide for business and government, noting the importance of the topic in assisting the U.K. as it struggled with recession.

Haidt in his book, *The Art of Engagement*, put forward the view that what motivates people to become engaged is that they want to be part of something big, want a sense of belonging, of going on a meaningful journey, and want to experience their own impactful contributions (p. 17). He notes that "engaged people feel that

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whatever they're doing is unquestionably connected to making a difference in the
lives of other people" (p. 25).

The academic literature does not contain much hard data documenting the importance or consequences of engagement. It draws mostly on data reported by the consulting organizations. Kular *et al* (2008) noted that neither Kahn (1990) nor May *et al* (2004) included outcomes in their studies (p. 7). Kahn (1992), however, "proposed that high levels of engagement lead to both positive outcomes for individuals (eg. quality of people's work and their own experiences of doing that work), as well as positive organizational-level outcomes (eg. the growth and productivity of organizations)"(pg. 7).

A recent study in the marketing literature (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2010) found linkages between employee engagement and customer-oriented behaviour. The researchers noted that engagement, as defined by enthusiasm for, and immersion in, work, with a combined coefficient of 0.41 had the greatest impact on customer-oriented behaviour. (p. 62)

Literature Overview

Internal Communication Literature

Academic research regarding *internal or employee communications* appears weak and fragmented compared with the study of *external communication*, the latter known variously as *public relations, public affairs or marketing communications*. Scholars from many disciplines have ventured into this field - organizational psychologists, organizational sociologists, anthropologists, business academics

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interested in marketing, human resources, leadership and strategy and, of course,
those in public relations and communications.

Grunig, and his coauthors, David Dozier, William Ehling, Larissa Grunig, Fred Repper and Jon White, made a monumental contribution to the broad field of *managed organizational communication* -- and with it, internal communication -- with the publishing of their book, *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, in 1992. In this work, supported by the research foundation of the International Association of Business Communications (IABC), Grunig and his colleagues theorized that excellence in the field is based on a two-way symmetrical system of communication. Explaining the concept in simple terms, they noted that in "the two-way symmetrical model, practitioners use research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviours of both their organizations and publics" (p. 12).

A good way to understand Grunig's theory is to take note of what he called the *worldviews* of those businesses and organizations who would be most likely to practice two-way symmetrical public relations. These organizations, he said, would believe in: interdependence within the environment; a system open to interpenetrating systems and free exchanges; adjustments in equilibrium through cooperation; equity and respect for all involved; autonomy, allowing people to be innovative and self-fulfilled; innovation, openness to new ideas and flexible thinking; concern with consequences of their own behaviours; willingness to engage in conflict resolution through negotiation, communication and compromise; and a view of the political system as a mechanism for open negotiation among interest or

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication issues groups (Grunig, 1992, p. 44). Grunig noted that the two-way symmetrical model of communication is a real model that organizations can use, not just an idealistic one.

"It is a model that organizations can use but often do not because an authoritarian dominant coalition sees the approach as a threat to its power.... This ethical approach also contributes to organizational effectiveness more than other models of public relations." (Grunig, 1992, p. 320)

This thesis remains a bulwark in the academic and practitioner thinking in the field, and its message and application -- although with the benefit of additional thinking -- is proving to be even more obvious and important in today's world, than it seemed 20 years ago. It has strong application to internal communications as today's knowledge-based organizations are recognizing the value and power of their human resources as a strategic advantage.

Grunig and his colleagues were able to show that symmetrical concepts were in evidence throughout the literature on organizational communication. These concepts included: trust, credibility, openness, relationships, reciprocity, network symmetry, horizontal communication, feedback, adequacy of information, employee-centred style, tolerance for disagreement and negotiation. They also noted that communication audits found that employees are most satisfied with information that helped them see how their jobs fit into the organizational mission, informed them about organizational policies and plans, and about relationships with key constituencies in the organization's environment. They also highlighted "the desire that employees have, especially those in managerial ranks, to communicate

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In a critical reflection on the state of the public relations discipline and what they termed *intraorganizational management communication*, Cheney and Christensen (2001) urged researchers to look more carefully at employees as stakeholders. They flagged employees' heavy involvement in their organizations, and their capacity for *social agency* and *voice* as compared to other stakeholders outside the organization. The activities of internal organizational communication are important to public relations scholars for a number of reasons, they argued including: the emergence of critical or *political* consumers and employees, technological advances, geographic mobility and other factors; and what they viewed as the wise consolidation of communications functions in large organizations recognizing the overlap of audiences. In particular, they called for consideration of how employees view messages --such as value statements --meant for external audiences and how they see threats to organizational reputation (p. 177).

The importance of the employee audience was highlighted by Argenti (1998) who stated that, "Employees are perhaps the most important constituency of all. Once a company has lost the faith and goodwill of its employees, it faces an uphill battle as it tries to correct its errors and rebuild credibility with those who hold the future of most corporations in their grasp"(pg. 199). He also noted that people today question the status quo and want to make their own decisions. Rather than being told what to do, they want the ability to share their ideas and have a role in what the

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company does, want to work more with their heads than their hands and want more information about the company for whom they work. In what sounds almost out of date and simplistic in today's information environment, Argenti notes that employees are likely to read reports about their companies facing increased foreign competition in the local and national media and therefore the organization needs to try to provide to staff its view of the problems and how the corporation intends to respond (p. 199).

Mary Welch and Paul Jackson (2007) heeded the calls of people like Cheney and Christensen, Berstein (1984, p. 97) and L'Etang (2005, p. 522) regarding viewing employees as stakeholders and took a fresh look at internal communication and its attendant theory. They proposed a shift in focus from a uni-dimensional single public to a more realistic and strategic multiple internal stakeholder approach (p. 183) that "differentiates stakeholder groups while simultaneously providing a means to focus on all employees." They posited, "if internal communication is the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders at all levels within organizations, these stakeholders need to be identified"(p. 183). Given the stakeholder literature (Freeman, 1984, 2001) this seems an obvious progression for the field and one that would be in keeping with Grunig's theory of two-way symmetrical communication. They note that stakeholder leadership thinker Freeman (1984, p. 216) "eventually accepted the legitimacy of the term internal stakeholder after research with managers demonstrated they identified with the concept of internal stakeholder groups. Freeman, they point out, identified a range of internal stakeholders including line management (boss and boss's boss), team

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication members, and other internal groups (related departments, subsidiary managers). Welch and Jackson proposed that employees could be divided into stakeholder groups in a number of different ways as follows: all employees; strategic management -- the dominant coalition, top management or strategic managers (CEOs, senior management teams); day-to-day management -- supervisors, middle managers or line managers (directors, heads of departments, team leaders, division leaders, the CEO as line manager); work teams (departments, divisions); and project teams (internal communication review groups, company-wide e-mail implementation group) (p. 184). It is worth highlighting that the last group, project teams, is more and more in evidence in today's organizations.

As a result of their research in the stakeholder literature, Welch and Jackson proposed a new definition of internal communication: "the strategic management of interactions and relationships between stakeholders within organizations across a number of interrelated dimensions including internal line manager communication, internal team peer communication, internal project peer communication and internal corporate communication "(p. 184). They laid out the following dimensions of internal stakeholder communication: internal line management communication; internal team peer communication; internal project peer communication; and internal corporate communication. It is interesting to note that new technology, for example today's sophisticated corporate intranet with social media-type capability, is making such complex interactions and relationships much easier to accomplish.

Key internal communications topics

The next section provides an overview of the literature regarding several of the most important strategic internal communications topics.

Senior Leadership and Communication

Managed internal corporate communication between senior leadership and employees is the topic of most pertinence to this paper. As noted by Welch and Jackson (2007) communication between top leaders and employees focuses on all employees and it ensures clear, consistent and continuous communication and, as such, is instrumental in building employee engagement (p. 186). While it would be ideal for communication between the leadership team and all employees to be two-way symmetrical, their view was that this is usually not possible except in very small organizations (p. 187). As noted by Grunig in the Excellence study (1992, p. 569) however, "mediated communication can be symmetrical as long as it addresses the needs of employees to make sense of how they fit into the organization, to communicate openly with top management about plans and policies, and to understand the activities of the organization in the environment."

A 2001 IABC Foundation report sponsored by Deloitte and Touche entitled Communication Competence and Business Success, came to an important conclusion that relates to senior leadership's role in communication. While the study group initially defined communication competence as "the presence of strategic planning, effective communication management, and skilled communications managers"(p. 3), after reviewing various case studies, it came to quite a different conclusion that points to the importance of senior leadership's involvement in communication. The

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication study found that in all examples of business success "there were four common elements: clarity of purpose, effective interfaces, effective sharing of information and consistent communication behaviour of leaders. By clarity, they meant "what top leaders and employees think the business or special initiative intends to achieve" (p. 3). Effective interfaces was defined as "the competence of people in the organization to manage situational communication; the level of trust between people at all levels (and particularly between those at the top and those far below)" (p. 3). Effective sharing related to "the integration of formal and informal processes of distributing ideas, opinions and good practice" and consistent communication behaviours meant "the message-consistency and communication competence of the most senior people in the organization" (p. 3).

The key implication of these findings for communications practitioners is that they need to be more business savvy. The researchers urged fellow internal communicators to "stop worrying about how good our tools are and concentrate on what's keeping top management awake at night." Practitioners, they said, need to be seen as people "who can manage change programs, not simply communications channels. As business people, not just communication managers, we build contact networks and levels of influence inside our business"(p. 4).

Bill Quirke (2008) argues that in today's world of flatter organizations where authority is vested in the person, not the position, it is the leaders' job to navigate change through an environment driven by knowledge, networks and relationships. He noted that internal communicators should build stronger relationships between management and staff, especially in times of change. He stated that this requires

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commitment from senior management to invest time in face-to-face communication,
"despite apparently always having more urgent things to do" (p. 14). He also noted
that communication must come from a committed senior management team, not
just a single charismatic leader, "because lack of commitment is transparent and
readily detected" (p. 14).

Many academics who look at *discourse* as bringing meaning make the point
that leadership is all about communication, even if the leaders do not realize this.

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) note:

"Leadership is a language game, one that many do not know they are playing. Even though most leaders spend nearly 70% of their time communicating, they pay little attention to how they use language as a tool of influence" (p. xi). From this perspective, it is necessary to raise practitioner awareness of the importance of language in the doing of leadership and to join calls by researchers, such as Cunliffe (2001), Daft and Wiginton (1979), and Shotter (1993), who argue for recognition of the centrality of language in management." (Clifton, 2012)

Other pertinent findings and comments related to senior leadership and
communication:

- the best companies were found to invest in helping leaders and managers
communicate with employees (Towers Watson, ROI study, 2009/10 pg.2);
- companies that were found to be highly effective communicators were more
likely to train their managers to deal openly with resistance to change. However,
only three out of 10 organizations were doing so. (Towers Watson, ROI study,
2009/10 pg. 2)
- management needs to give the internal audience equal attention to those
external to the organization (Wright,1995);

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- employees had become the number one constituency (Argenti, 1998)
- and the organizational relationship with employees is seen as the lifeblood of the organization (Buckley *et al* 1998)
- "Communicators need to provide employees with adequate information; with opportunities to speak out, to get involved, to be listened to *and* to participate actively (Smidts *et al*, 2001) (Dolphin p. 182)
- Increased amounts of communication are not necessarily better if it suggests more involvement (by employees) that does not materialize (Grunig, p. 556).
- changes in a communication system will not make employees more satisfied or an organization more effective unless concomitant changes are made in organizational structure and result in goal achievement "of which participation in decision making is an indicator" (Grunig, p. 557).

Change Communication

These days change within organizations is a constant. In order to remain successful in today's global environment, strategy dictates the need to constantly reappraise, reorganize and retool -- and to do it quickly. Some have likened the pace of change in today's organizations to 'changing the tires on a race car while at top speed.' Dolphin points out that "Employee communications doesn't have (just) any role in the management of change: it has *the role*" (Quirke, 1995, Kitchen & Daly 2002). Quirke (2008) notes that studies show that most change initiatives fail to deliver their planned benefits. He asserts that poor communication is at fault, despite recognition of its importance (p. 137).

"When change shoots communication to the top of the management agenda, it exposes the weakness of existing communication practices. Like agreeing to suddenly run a marathon when you have not routinely kept fit, you realize, too late, that day-to-day fitness is vital. Effective communication minimizes the pain of change, prevents problems and helps the organization arrive at its desired goal more quickly." (Quirke, p. 137)

Quirke put forward some major principles required for successfully communicating change: create a sense of urgency; communicate the context and the full picture; communicate the why as well as the what; maximize the sense of continuity and stability; do not wait for all to become clear-- the grapevine will communicate if management does not; communicate probabilities and scenarios; give the timescale; make face-to-face the main communication channel; explain the implications for the individual so they can figure out what they are supposed to do; use involvement to get commitment as the more employees are involved in discussing how change can be implemented in their area, the more committed they will be; train managers in what might be called the soft skills of communicating, not how to put forward the argument but how to listen and connect at the appropriate emotional level; invest enough time to communicate so that you have strong relationships in advance (pp. 149 - 154).

Klein (1996) made some very incisive recommendations regarding communication of what he termed "good change", the type of change that would, for example, make a company more profitable without consequent job loss or other negative fallout. As a result of such a change process that he personally witnessed -- with the benefit of employee ongoing attitude survey data -- he concluded that a key issue was not so much the communication process but lack of employee

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication involvement. He found that in one plant, where industrial engineers were active with the staff and able to answer questions and explain what they were doing, the negative effect was largely neutralized. Based on the change process he studied and a review of the literature, he made the following conclusions: that an intensive multimedia approach is necessary at the beginning of such change processes, as ambiguity is highest then. This helps to reduce uncertainty. As the organization moves through the various stages of the change program and people see the impact of the change, attention should be paid to addressing and adjusting to specific issues. It is very important to publicize successes during the change process (pg. 44). Regarding the specific issue of dealing with problems that occur during implementation of change he commented that rectifying problems through feedback and adjustment was important. He suggested developing communications structures that legitimate and encourage the disclosure of problems and the discussion of solutions. Klein also noted that significant operational problems are likely to occur that are to some degree based on misinformation and lack of clarity. Intensive face-to-face communication seems to be warranted at such times to clear up misunderstandings (p. 44).

In times of change, many managers think they do not have time to communicate or should wait until all decisions are made notes consultant Angela Sinickas (2001) adding that this approach is foolhardy. She writes that "opening information channels and making sure that communication flows in the right directions can be critical to performance. Further, holding back information may prove destructive, giving employees and even customers the wrong signals (p.3).

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Being silent while things are happening in the background sends unintended messages to employees: that management does not know what it is doing, is doing nothing, or is contemptuous of employees "(p. 3). Managers need to know that employees would be satisfied with process updates, options being considered and the criteria being used to make decisions, she states.

Web 2.0 and Social Media for internal communication

One of the most significant changes that has occurred with regard to internal communications over the last few years is the use of Web 2.0 (McKinsey, 2009). More and more organizations are now employing such technologies right from the beginning of the employer-employee relationship -- for engaging employees during the recruitment phase. Web 2.0 and social media tools are also becoming a large part of workplace communication. Companies have put in place their own intranets with social media-type functionality. While internal use of social media has not reached the proportion of external use, it is fast becoming standard operating practice at many companies. Organizations are putting in place platforms that allow an easy flow of two-way communication between management and employees via blogs with feedback mechanisms; staff members are writing their own mini-blogs; employees engage in online discussion groups and there is a huge capacity for collegial and project level communication, including the sourcing of project team members through the use of profiles posted by each employee. IBM, for example, uses its Beehive social media application to facilitate a broad range of employee communications and interactions. (IBM Watson Research, see Appendix 2)

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A report by AON Consulting (2009, p. 2) noted an emerging preference for Web 2.0 media in employee communications. While the millennial demographic uses all such tools more than non-millennials, the differences are not as big as many would expect. For example, non-millennial/millennial use of the organizational intranet was 65% versus 72% respectively; for instant messaging, the numbers were 46%/48%; and for social networks and blogs the numbers were 13% versus 20% and 8% versus 13% respectively (AON Consulting 2009, p. 6).

Referencing the IBM approach, Argenti (2011) notes that at world-class companies, employee communication strategy has evolved online. He explains that it allows for the harnessing of the collective intelligence of employees and how this formed a "force of collaboration." IBM uses what it calls "jam sessions" on its intranet to fuel innovation. Argenti reported that its 2006 jam session, which included employees as well as clients, resulted in the birth of 10 new businesses. He quotes Mike Wang, IBM VP Strategic and Executive Communication:

"For the jams, the collaboration is in the open...It helps us overcome a challenge or organizational caution or fear -- once you open up the thinking of the company in a radically democratized way, such as our jams, the simple idea of breaking down organizational barriers to success can be overcome." (Argenti, p. 62)

Despite the increased use of social media, and its successful use in companies such as IBM, companies are still struggling to measure the return on investment of these tools. However, highly effective communicators are more likely than the least effective communicators to report their social media tools are cost-effective.

(Towers Watson, 2009/10, p. 2))

Research, Evaluation and Measurement

One of the greatest challenges for communication practitioners has always been how best to conduct preparatory research and then measure and evaluate outcomes. Whether the difficulties associated with measurement are because many practitioners have a background in journalism rather than business or another more measurement-oriented field, as noted by Stacks (p. 3), or reasons such as having been placed in technical rather than managerial roles, as noted by Watson (2001, p. 261), there is no doubt that organizations today need evidence of how communications is contributing to organizational goals and that communicators must rise to this challenge if they are to remain credible. In its study of the return on investment for communications, Towers Watson (2009/10) commented: "Measurement is critical. Companies that are less effective communicators are three times as likely as highly effective communicators to report having no formal measurements of communication effectiveness (pg. 2).

Academics such as Lindemann (1990), Baerns (1993), Bell (1992), as well as Watson, have noted the key barriers to evaluation as being lack of thorough awareness of research techniques, doubts that research is important, time constraints, lack of personnel and inadequate budgets (Watson p. 264). Watson's conclusion is the importance of communications leadership at a senior level so access to budget becomes greater. It is possible, too, that with regard to employee

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communication, senior leadership senses that it is getting value. Towers Watson's evidence and admonition (above), however, should assist in this regard.

Another challenge faced by internal communicators today is the fact that much communication is now taking place online, and in a much more social way. Mechanisms to measure impact, even for mainstream social media, are not yet clear as the field and the thinking is changing by the minute. Stroh, in *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, (p. 213) argued for what she termed a postmodern approach more related to the process of relationship building than of the outcomes of relationships. She advocated a focus on:

"the relationship processes; that is, of engagement and enrichment through constant dialogue, debate and discourse. This is the making of true values, not only for the organization, but also its environment, and, ultimately society as a whole....Organizations can maintain strong relationships with stakeholders by conducting action research with full participation of all involved, constantly sharing open and honest information, and getting involved in discussions and discourse regarding shared interests. The answer is not to be fixated on measurement, but rather to be more flexible in the acceptance of less positivistic approaches, and to use participating research to achieve a deeper understanding of contexts and behaviour (p. 213)

Stroh noted that in *participatory action research* (PAR), participants are involved in the data gathering and processing, and share in decisions about the use of outcomes (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). "In other words, participants share ownership of the total strategic and research process. Furthermore, PAR has a strong emphasis on power sharing between the researcher and the researched" (Stroh, p. 214).

Employee communications consultant, Angela Sinickas (2007), notes that when considering how to measure the effectiveness of new-media tools such as blogs and RSS feeds, it is important to measure the outcomes, not just the activity.

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She suggests that while you can measure such things as the number of people visiting or commenting on a blog, more meaningful measurements should start with identifying a desired business result and identifying stakeholder behaviours that will lead to that result. One example might be to use a pilot/control group approach, where you promote the new technologies more heavily in some locations than others. The difference in behaviour change and business outcomes can then be measured between groups, she suggested. Another example would be to ask people once they have changed some behaviour to what extent different types of communication influenced their behaviour change (p. 11).

Employee Engagement Literature

The definitions and importance of employee engagement have been covered above. As noted by virtually all the academics writing on the subject of employee engagement "there has been surprisingly little academic and empirical research on a topic that has become so popular" (Saks, 2006, p. 601). Saks found two streams of research that provided models of employee engagement. One was the result of Kahn's work and related to the psychological conditions associated with engagement and disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety and availability; and the other arising from the burnout literature (Maslach *et al*, 2001): sustainable workload, feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful, valued work.

Saks (2006) pointed out the importance of *social exchange theory* (SET) in explaining employee engagement. Cropanzano and Mitchell noted, in relation to SET, that a series of interactions between parties "in a state of reciprocal

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interdependence" generates obligations. Such relationships evolve over time into "trusting, loyal, and mutual commitments as long as the parties abide by certain 'rules' of exchange," they said. (2005, p. 603) SET provides a broader explanation as to why individuals will respond to the necessary psychological conditions or antecedents of engagement with varying degrees of engagement. Individuals can repay their organization through their level of engagement. When employees receive resources and benefits from their company, they feel obliged to repay the organization with higher levels of engagement. On the other hand, if the organization fails to provide these resources, the individuals are more likely to withdraw and disengage themselves from their roles (Saks, p. 603).

The study undertaken by Saks in 2006, based on SET, was the first empirical test of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Of significance to researchers and practitioners alike, his findings revealed that *perceived organizational support* (POS) was the only significant predictor of employee engagement with both individual jobs and with the organization.

"...it would appear that the caring and concern associated with POS creates a sense of obligation on the part of employees who reciprocate with greater levels of job and organization engagement. Thus, organizations that wish to improve employee engagement should focus on employees' perceptions of the support they receive from their organization (p. 614).

Based on these findings, Saks recommended that organizations demonstrate caring and support for employees by using such tools as surveys, focus groups and suggestion programs to determine employees' needs and then act on the findings by putting in place policies and programs -- such as flexible work arrangements -- that

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respond and might cause employees to reciprocate with higher levels of engagement. He also suggested that one size does not fit all and that managers find out specifically what resources individual employees need in order to boost engagement. To generate a state of reciprocal interdependence, as suggested by Cropanzano and Mitchell, (2005), Saks underlined the need for a long-term and ongoing process. He also concluded, based on his research and that of others, that:

"...engagement needs to be viewed as a broad organizational and cultural strategy that involves all levels of the organization (Frank *et al*, 2004), a series of actions and steps (Shaw, 2005) that requires input and involvement of organizational members (Robinson *et al*, 2004) and consistent, continuous, and clear communications (Kress, 2005)." (p. 614)

In summarizing their view on the literature on employee engagement, Kular *et al* suggested that the root of employee disengagement is poor management "whereby employees do not have good working relationships with their managers and are denied the opportunity to communicate and have some power in decision-making, let alone receive information from their managers" (p. 17). They noted the importance of managers being caring towards employees and also engaged personally in their work before they can engage their subordinates. Engagement levels in the management ranks must rise, they concluded, before they can be expected to rise in employees given the impact management can have on employees. (p. 17.) They also pointed to the need for research into the effect of managerial interventions on employee engagement, suggesting that given communication is a key driver of engagement, training managers in how to communicate effectively might be effective in improving perceptions of belonging and involvement (p. 21).

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Further they pointed to the need to give employees the opportunity to feed their views and opinions upwards, noting this as a key driver of engagement. The literature points to the fact that employees want to be kept 'in the know' about what is happening in their organization and have a sense of involvement with their employer. They assert that from a communication perspective, employers can increase employee engagement by going beyond downward communication and making sure that people are treated as valued individuals (p. 22).

Communication and employee involvement, engagement literature

As noted earlier, prior to the notion of *employee engagement*, consultants worked with organizations to assist with their relationships with employees and processes in order to further corporate goals. These initiatives were variously known as *employee involvement*, *employee commitment*, *quality assurance*, *quality improvement*, and so on. Many of these programs recognized the importance of internal communication to the task at hand.

Some researchers noted the importance of trust and communications in predicting employee's involvement. Thomas, Zolin and Hartman (2009) concluded that openness is a key factor in employee involvement. Thus, when employees believe that the organization is a safe place to express themselves, they are likely to see themselves as more involved in the organization's goals. They found that quality of information appeared to be a prerequisite for trust in coworkers and superiors. The relationship between communication and trust is complex they found and called for future research to triangulate the simple measures used in the audit to the more commonly used scales of trust, organizational openness, and involvement (p.

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309).

Using data from a survey into employee involvement and communication at a British higher education institution, Thornhill, Lewis and Saunders (1996) found significant relationships between employees' perceptions about communication and their attitudes towards the institution. However, they noted that the literature on employee involvement and communication suggested that effective communication will only occur if a number of issues are addressed. These related to the nature and style of communication and the importance of meeting the needs of employees, not just those of the institution. They also highlighted the importance and establishing credibility and practicing communications consistently in order to be effective (p. 13).

Writing on the topic of organizational quality improvement (QI) Buckley, Monks and Sinnott (1998) expressed surprise at the lack of emphasis placed on internal communications as part of the process of effecting change. They noted that researchers such as Morris, Meister and Hunt (1994), who studied why quality improvement efforts failed, suggested that such initiatives should not be undertaken without first conducting an internal communication audit. They expressed surprise that "the stated objectives of many organizations involved in such initiatives rarely include any defined communications based outcome goals " (p. 223). Further, they noted the "intuitive logic" of analysis and development of the internal communications process being central to any quality improvement process and noted the lack thereof consigned many such efforts to frustration. (p. 223).

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In a study focusing on the financial services industry, Assaif and Sargeant (2000) reported that internal communication was perceived to have had an impact on a variety of factors, all of which, one can argue, are related to employee engagement. Their study of large financial institutions found that six key categories of outcome were seen as resulting from internal communication: a sense of shared vision, job/personal satisfaction, the development of a service focus, empowerment, commitment, and loyalty. Further, they noted that "the increasingly competitive financial service environment has recently forced organizations to consider the role that their employees might play in the attainment of a genuinely sustainable source of competitive advantage.

"The role of internal communication has thus acquired particular significance as organizations strive to communicate customer needs, organizational values etc. to staff working at every level and, moreover, to encourage staff to maintain a two-way dialogue with management"(p. 299).

Employee engagement communication literature

Senior leaders, consultants and communications practitioners seem to intuitively recognize the importance of communication in helping to drive engagement. Case studies and articles regarding how organizations put in place employee engagement programs (Towers Watson, JIT, 2010) and change programs (Kitchen and Daly, 2002) speak to the importance of communication yet the link is not as evident in the broader literature. However, in a report commissioned by the U.K. government (MacLeod and Clarke, 2009) on the importance to the economy of engaging workers, especially as the U.K. emerges from the recession, the writers state that communication is a critical factor for enhancing performance through

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employee engagement. They note that they found four broad enablers to employee engagement coming up time and time again in their review: leadership, engaging managers, voice, and integrity (p. 74). It can be argued that each of these requires a strong focus on communication. They noted that:

- Leadership of an organization needs to provide a strong strategic narrative that is a "clearly expressed story about what the purpose of an organization is, why it has the broad vision it has, and how an individual contributes to that purpose." (p. 74).
- Engaging managers -- who are at the heart of organizational culture -- to facilitate and empower rather than control or restrict their staff; they treat their staff with appreciation and respect and show commitment to developing, increasing and rewarding the capabilities of those they manage.
- An effective and empowered employee voice is important, where employees' views are sought out, listened to and where employees see that their opinions count and make a difference. Employees speak out and challenge when appropriate and a strong sense of listening and of responsiveness permeates the organization enabled by effective communication.
- Integrity is key. Behaviour throughout the organization is consistent with stated values, leading to trust and a sense of integrity.

They argue that good quality internal communication enhances engagement and emphasize that employees need clear communication from senior management to understand how their own roles fit with the leadership vision. Unsurprisingly, they cite poor communication as a barrier to engagement and a cause of disengagement

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(Welch, p. 338).

The Gallup organization notes that:

[. . .] within the best performing organizations there is a cultural alignment between the employees and the company, paired with a strategic alignment between activities and company goals. These organizations use their corporate *communication touch points* to reinforce their commitments to employees and customers" (Gallup, 2010, p. 5, italics added).

Commenting on the employee engagement program at Japan Tobacco Incorporated (JTI), Martin Braddock, a Towers Watson regional vice president, noted: " ...the most important thing is the *communication*. Inform employees of what you are doing and why you are doing it, all the time; keep the dialogue going (Towers Watson, 2010, p. 1, italics added). He underlined the fact that once embarked upon, engagement requires a continuous effort, to improve upon weaknesses but also to demonstrate where you are actually meeting employee expectations

As organizations have moved to recognize the importance of employee engagement, those in internal communications have taken heed. Reporting on a 2009 study regarding global best practice in internal communication, a consultant and practitioner study team found "the most noticeable aspect across the study was the emerging importance of employee engagement in the role and purpose of internal communication" (p. 32). Their research, for global bank, HSBC, found genuine efforts at two-way dialogue with employees and considerable use of new technology. They found CEOs taking the time to blog and keep blogs current. They also found leaders using video streamed online, and time provided in front-line

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication workplaces for people to watch. Some companies were using their own social media-type channels while others were using Facebook, Bebo, YouTube and Twitter (Alexander, Lindsay-Smith & Joerin, p. 34). Another key finding of the study was that many companies were reducing the number of channels used to communicate with employees, some eliminating print altogether.

A 2007 report developed by the internal communications consulting firm, Melcrum,¹ noted that people are using Web 2.0 technologies more and more in all aspects of their lives, and that such technologies provide "unprecedented opportunities for users to create content and actively participate in the interaction among many constituents, and is a powerful driver of engaging consumers in ways not previously possible" (p. 4). In its communications toolkit (2007) on driving employee engagement, it covered key topics including change management, employee recognition, the importance of storytelling and training, as well as best communications channels from face-to-face to wikis. It noted:

- the importance of researching and building on what drives individual employees through a combination of surveys, in-depth interviews and focus groups and then targeting communications to like groups of employees (p. 5);

¹ Melcrum is a privately held research and training business that focuses on best practice and emerging trends and strategy in internal communication with offices in the U.K., U.S.A. and Australia. Melcrum noted in 2007 that it advised communications leaders at close to 70 per cent of the Global Fortune 100 largest companies and 84 per cent of the Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100.

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- designing communications channels based on employee preferences, for example, if group members like reading a certain style of newspaper, fashion your communications in a like manner (p.6);
- documenting different reactions to change among various groups and figuring out how to deal with various groups, such as saboteurs, who may feel demotivated because they have not been consulted; (p.7);
- recognizing the contribution of employees involved in change processes in meaningful ways;
- spreading the word by making a big effort to gather stories and communicating these in appropriate ways based on audience research, thus humanizing the undertaking (p. 13).

Other experts in the field have also put forward valuable recommendations.

Kahn (1992) highlighted the importance of dealing with anxieties that have potential to become widespread by holding open meetings (p. 343). Aprix and Gay (2006) wrote about the importance of creating a clear line of sight between employees and business strategy in support of employee engagement. They suggested four key steps: the development and validation of core messaging with senior leaders taking a critical role to ensure a consistent understanding of the issues (p. 27); aligning leaders and defining their roles. The importance of top-level engagement in the communications process is stressed by virtually all writers (Alexander 2009, Melcrum 2007, Aprix & Gay 2006; Moorcroft 2006, Assif & Sargeant 2000.) Moving from one-way to two-way and horizontal communications is also a key theme for all.

With regard to measurement and evaluation, the study by Lindsay-Smith *et al*, (2009) found that many companies are using "a full suite of sophisticated measurement approaches to ensure they have reliable data, from measuring ROI to using pulse surveys and focus groups to gauge the effectiveness of specific communications or channels" (pg. 34). However, there were also many instances where the internal communicators were "too mentally exhausted or under too much pressure to move onto the next project to do the measurement part (p. 34). They noted that it is important to be able to show the value of what you are doing. One suggestion was that if communicators are unable to do their own primary research, they can take advantage of secondary research available through such organizations as IABC, Melcrum or the global consulting firms that do research on employee engagement (p. 35).

Study goals, design and methodology

This study aims to shed light on communications approaches and practices of organizations deemed to be top Canadian employers. The study was designed to achieve the following goals:

1. gain a sense of the *culture* or *worldview* of organizations that have highly engaged workforces;
2. provide rich information regarding the communications approaches used by such organizations;
3. obtain insight, based on high quality employee survey data and expert input, into what communications approaches and topics are most closely associated with high employee engagement.

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4. provide a practical guide for communications practitioners regarding best and next practices in employee engagement communications.

An interview format versus a written survey was selected to address the first two goals allowing for a deeper insight into the subject organizations. Questions were selected on the basis of providing information on key strategic aspects of communications programs: chiefly communications in support of change management, and methods used to measure and evaluate communication. In addition, as internal use of social media provides such great potential for true two-way and rich horizontal communication, and can support the sourcing of ideas from individual employees and employee groups, a decision was taken to investigate organizational use of this technology. For the purposes of rounding out the information gathered from individual organizations, the study design included the seeking of input from communication and management experts in employee engagement. The rationale for the research questions is provided earlier in the document under the heading Research Questions. A list of interview questions for both the organizational and expert subjects is provided in the Appendices. To discover the communications approaches most associated with high engagement, employee survey data supplied through the Queen's/AON Hewitt employee study was analyzed, supplemented by the views of experts these two organizations. The Queen's team had already tabulated the data, denoting the employee engagement score of each organization. For this study, a simple correlation was calculated between this overall engagement score and the scoring for communications related questions and overall engagement.

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One of the approaches taken for this study -- looking at the organizational characteristics and communications mechanisms used by leading organizations found to have highly engaged employees -- is similar to the work of Grunig *et al* in the Excellence Study of 1992. Grunig looked at communications in what were considered to be top performing or excellent organizations. It is worth highlighting that communication within organizations is inextricably linked with other aspects of how the organization is managed, and as such, there are many interrelated factors. It is, therefore, impossible for any one of these factors to be totally distinguished from another. It is more realistic to look at groupings of characteristics. The overall research design -- consisting of a broad literature review, interviews with representatives of top companies and with communication, management and academic experts, combined with and an analysis of employee survey data -- allows for the triangulation of findings and a broadly based and rich outcome.

A total of 11 interviews and one online consultation were conducted for this research. Seven of the interview subjects were representatives of top-ranked companies and organizations in the Globe and Mail's Canada's Top 100 Employers 2012 list. Two were amongst the AON Hewitt 2012 top Canadian employers. Two of the companies were in the small to medium business size category (50 to 400 employees) and the others were from the large employer category (more than 400 employees). The largest firm had roughly 85,000 employees worldwide, the smallest, about 60, all within Canada. One firm had 30,000 employees, three were in the range of about 5,000 employees, and three were in the range of 350 to 500. All the large firms scored as at least an A in the categories *employee communications*

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication *and work atmosphere and social* on the Globe and Mail list except one which was ranked B+ in each case but ranked at the top of AON Hewitt Best Small to Medium Employers in Canada. The organizations were engaged in the following areas of business: air travel, construction (2), major bank, information technology (2), hotel, health care, and manufacturing. Of the nine representatives interviewed, two were CEOs, one was a vice president responsible for Human Resources, one was responsible for Sales, one for Learning and Development, and the rest were Communication Directors or Managers. Of these, two had singular responsibility for employee communication.

The three experts consulted were:

- Mary Welch, PhD., a professor at the Lancashire Business School, University of Central Lancashire, who had a career in corporate communications prior to completing her PhD in Internal Communication at the Manchester Business School;
- Rob Lewis, a partner with AON Hewitt in Toronto, who previous to his current position in the firm's talent practice, spent 12 years in the communications practice in Boston.
- Einar Westerlund, Director of Project Development with the Queen's Centre for Business Venturing at the Queen's School of Business, a management consultant with expertise in employee engagement. Mr. Westerlund provides organizational development support to enterprises facing rapid change and growth and works directly with firms enrolled in the Queen's/AON Hewitt competition for best small to medium-sized business.

Findings

1. Key organizational and internal communications characteristics

In every case the subject organizations were found to be highly values driven and communications were highly value laden. The CEO and senior leaders were very active in communicating face to face, with those in the C-suite making significant efforts to speak directly to employees numerous times per year, often in both large and small groups. A key feature in almost every instance was emphasis on the organization's founder and the founder's story, thus demonstrating to employees the organization's founding values and beliefs and tying these to today's business practices. Communications managers and others noted that corporate vision and values statements constantly guided them. In the case of a relatively small high tech organization with about 60 staff, the CEO said he makes the effort to meet each new employee for one hour to talk about his founding vision. He says that right from the start he wants employees to know that he sees each individual's contributions as valuable to the team, no matter their status in the organization.

AON Hewitt's Rob Lewis noted that he sees senior leadership as the employee engagement driver most linked to communication. "If advising clients regarding communications I'd ask: Are you senior leaders visible? Are they credible? Are they consistent in their communications and actions?" He noted that if messages and actions do not align, it is better not to communicate, as this will decrease engagement. Leaders need to be honest and open and have a personality that allows

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employees to feel they have a relationship with top management, he said. The quality of communication has a lot to do with culture of the organization, he noted, and whether the founder's vision can be carried forward. He said organizations that have been able to develop a highly distinctive brand and culture with good communications from the start seem to be able to embed this quality into the organization. They also develop a strong reputation in the marketplace and are thus able to attract employees that believe in and perpetuate that communications culture such that it would be difficult for anyone to change. Companies with high engagement have strong cultures, personalities, internal and external brands, he said. (personal communication, March 21, 2012)

Overall, it was apparent that most of the organizations were much less hierarchical than in the past, especially in terms of the ability of individual employees to communicate with senior management. In large organizations, this might take the form of commenting on blogs posted by senior leaders. In smaller firms, CEOs were willing to communicate directly with employees by e-mail. In large and small organizations alike, communication was seen a constant priority and senior leaders' communications with employees were frequent. In terms of internal communications being a priority of management, even one of the smallest firms had hired a professional facilitator to gather information from employees about organizational communication and how it could be improved.

Interviewees revealed great emphasis on openness and transparency, particularly with regard to disclosure of financial information and organizational

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication strategy and planning. Information about the business environment, particularly with regard to strategic challenges, was readily shared. In organizations large and small, there is a regular annual schedule of employee town hall meetings based on the business calendar. As one CEO noted: "We try to maximize complete openness around the company so everybody knows everything about the company, all the numbers, all of the problems, all of the strengths, all of the strategies." In this company employees are also shareholders with a 50 per cent stake in the company. Despite this, the CEO noted that some on the board of directors have expressed concern about such openness in communications and the level of involvement and effort required of management. Employees in other subject companies were also shareholders or benefited from generous profit sharing. In the case of the air travel company, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of employees hearing directly from the CEO and senior leadership to such an extent that it will fly any employee who wishes to attend such meetings to the head office location free of charge. At the financial institution the employees are guided by a concise vision, mission, strategy framework that sets out graphically, in the shape of a house, guiding principals and expectations for leaders. Here, one of the key traits noted for leaders is that they "live transparency, and demonstrate unwavering integrity." Employees in such organizations are encouraged to ask questions and to contribute. Such companies were found to make special efforts to ensure employee comfort level with asking questions and making suggestions including the holding of smaller meetings with the CEO and senior leaders. Also, employees were encouraged to read and respond to blog posts and other communications from CEO and other senior

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As noted by Groysberg and Slind (2012, p. 1)), the shift to having a conversation with employees rather than a one-way or slow two-way interactions, is a disorienting process for organizations but one that "reaps great rewards in terms of employee engagement and strategic alignment." The culture of the organization must adjust to listening to employees and acting on suggestions. The communications director for the global technology company noted that "two-way communications is the future of communications. The concept that you can fully control messaging is outdated and outmoded. There are a lot of advantages to paying more attention to not even two-way communication but multi-way communication." She added that the input from employees is shared with other areas of the organization, and working together, the various parts of the organization can put these new ideas into action.

From the perspective of a consultant who has worked with many companies in the small to medium-sized employer category, an organization's worldview and communications are strongly linked. Einar Westerlund, Director of Project Development with the Queen's Centre for Business Venturing at the Queen's School of Business, commented that "at the end of the day, we see organizational culture and core values as significant influences on communication and ultimately on engagement, with many enterprises clearly fostering in conscious ways cultures valuing openness, trust, constructive confrontation of issues, frequent and genuine recognition of individual contributions and accomplishments, etc." Westerlund also noted that "style and process generally loom as at least as important or even more

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While best practice would suggest that managers be supported in communicating with their staff members, this was not always the case. A number of organizations did target managers as a separate audience for face-to-face meetings however, many did not. Some noted that major corporate-wide strategic announcements should be the domain of senior leaders, with managers charged with translating this for their employees and providing a line of sight between the individual employee roles and corporate strategy. The financial institution representative noted considerable emphasis on training managers in such communication approaches and had found non-punitive ways to measure this by providing feedback from online employee polls. She also pointed to the use of 360 degree feedback mechanisms for individual performance management, a practice that can identify strengths and weaknesses in the employee communications of managers.

2. Face-to-face continues as key communication channel but new technologies playing greater and greater role: e-mail, print still used

While corporate communicators have made shifts in the channels used to communicate broadly with employees given new technologies, face-to-face communication is still seen one of the best ways to communicate effectively with employees. In large companies and small, as noted above, senior leaders make significant efforts to speak directly with employees both in large venues and in smaller group settings. Employee Engagement consultant Einar Westerlund

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commented that "Communication modes vary, but personal verbal contact would appear to remain by far the dominant and preferred means for connecting vertically and diagonally through the hierarchy to gain positive outcomes." He noted that many of the higher-ranked best employers in the small to medium-sized company sector make excellent use of town hall-type meetings, "wisely using them for total team building and maintenance and not just for presenting business updates." He noted that there is some evidence that social media are beginning to come into play in what he termed horizontal connectedness. However, he expressed surprise at "the lack of evidence of use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. in organizational communications in any planned way" in small to medium-sized organizations.

(Personal communication, April 20, 2012)

The vast majority of larger leading companies had adopted new social media-type communications technologies for communications with their employees. One of the smaller organizations had been using Facebook as a means of sharing news and information with employees but was no longer satisfied with this platform and was transitioning to another internally based social media type portal. Another small organization had not moved to internal social media; it has a preponderance of blue-collar employees who do not work at desks and had found face-to-face communications channels -- both with senior management and between supervisors and employees on the manufacturing floor -- to be working very effectively. This company, due to its size, was able to be very hands-on and direct in its communications with employees. An example is that it gives supervisors the leeway to provide monetary rewards on the spot in recognition for good suggestions made

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Microsoft SharePoint was the most widely used platform for internal approaches, however, most agreed that it was not optimal without tailoring and upgrading. Some had undertaken their own programming to enhance Sharepoint capability and customize the platform to their needs. Other companies noted the use of IBM Connections. One company, a global enterprise content solutions firm dealing primarily with large public and private sector organizations, provides intranet and internal social media-type systems as part of its product offerings and has been a living laboratory for its products. The company representative said it sees the benefit of mixing and matching various applications depending on internal needs of the organization. A few companies had found other technological platforms for this purpose.

Common functionality of internal social systems includes the ability to blog, micro-blog, vote, and respond to blog posts, as well as functions such as pulse surveys, rating, tagging, peer-to-peer communications and live chat. Some organizations have put in place on-line capacity for employees to nominate others for outstanding performance. The bank representative mentioned that it consults employees online regarding various Human Resource Programs, for example, what tokens of recognition employees would like to receive.

The posting of profiles by individual employees, in ways akin to Facebook or LinkedIn is widely used and seen as effective. Employees can note their roles, their experience and strengths, and special projects they have worked on. Typical functionality includes posting of a photo, work experience, current projects, status

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication updates, messaging capability and information on the reporting structure, peers and so on. There is generally a capability to seek out people with certain areas of expertise through key word search. This is particularly useful in today's organizational environments where there is often a need to source expertise for teams from across various functional or geographic areas. It makes cross-pollination and horizontal or sideways communication much easier than in the past. The communications/social media officer at one construction company noted that at their company, employees have been allowed to be authentic in such postings, in keeping with corporate values, but in other similar firms, the approach is more prescribed. She commented that a policy of openness in this regard combined with a loose set of social media guidelines, while questioned by some, is the best policy in the long run as it supports authentic communication.

The development of online communities is another large area allowing for social or relational connection within organizations. The large international bank that took part in this study had recently established this capacity. Three types of communities have been established: public, restricted and moderated. Most are business related but others are also being supported. The representative noted that while some communities have been established by the communications area and assisted in getting started, independent groups have spawned others, bringing together people with similar interests from across the organization. In this company, communities exist for change management and customer service and there are geographically based communities for local discussions. Each community has one or more community managers. Commenting on the role of corporate

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communicators in two-way or multi-way communications at the international technology company, the Director of Corporate Employee Communications said, "We need to enable communications and the conversations and the collaboration and then, in some ways, get out of the way. You can't control everything. You can't categorize everything. Just like on the internet, which I would call 'in the wilds' you have to let the community dictate which way it's going to go and then become a member of the community, and only a leader when you need to be a leader." She noted the need for both reactive and proactive channels, explaining that reactive channels allow the organization to respond to input and proactive channels get important information into the hands of employees. Communicators in her company use a Twitter-like mechanism for these purposes.

Electronic newsletters have overtaken print for the vast majority of companies. The articles are short, carefully tailored to their audiences' interests and time constraints. Newsletters may be specific to a function or to an activity --such as sales and service. Some companies still utilize large print publications for storytelling that supports internal corporate brand building but frequency of publication is far less than in the past. Also, there was evidence of the use of print newsletters within divisions of large and global organizations, tailored to audience wishes and needs. One of the smaller firms, primarily specializing in highway construction, continues to use a professionally produced printed newsletter, with a strong focus on people and founder values, in addition to a carefully planned face-to-face communications program that suits its functional jobsite realities

The use of e-mail remained very strong for important top-down

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication communication, although many commented about e-mail overload. Interviewees noted, however, that if e-mail is used properly, and it consistently contains important information, employees recognize this and will read it.

Virtual face-to-face communications was supported through video conferencing both in large group situations and from desktop to desktop, but this was far less common. The reason this channel has not taken off is not clear. There was also evidence of "Twitter" type messaging and internal text messaging.

The corporate intranet has moved beyond its earlier iterations to something that is well organized and easy to navigate, taking on more of the features that employees are used to from the likes of Google. One representative noted that content such as e-newsletters is posted on the intranet but also pushed to employees via a subscription approach by which they are alerted to the newsletter through e-mail.

3. Communication and engagement facilitate and speed change

Many organizational representatives reported that organizational change is now far easier to achieve due to ongoing two-way communications between employees and management. It is no longer a matter of senior management taking decisions and then communicating the changes. Senior management and communicators report that due to ongoing communications and dialogue, employees are now more engaged in the organization and are extremely knowledgeable about business issues and competitive forces. They are encouraged to suggest change and innovation and this ongoing dialogue within the organization

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication means they are not surprised when change is signaled. In addition, when announcements about change are made, employees have various ways of asking questions and obtaining more information. Many of the organizational representatives said they make a point of communicating specifically with managers so they are well prepared to deal with questions from employees. However, about half of the respondents said more could be done to assist and train managers in preparation for change. Some noted the fact that manager performance review now consists of reviews by subordinates, colleagues and superiors, and that this 360 degree approach also ranks them on their communications with staff.

Company representatives who were interviewed overwhelmingly noted the significant effort made CEOs and senior teams to keep employees current regarding business issues - whether to inform employees about financial and efficiency results or about the strategic environment. For example, a small manufacturing firm in the study reported that its CEO and senior leaders hold all-employee meetings monthly to provide updates regarding the business generally and quarterly to go over the balance sheet. The representative noted: "We are an open book company. There is a great deal of trust because we have open, two-way communication." Not only does this company provide overall corporate information, but also local results for each plant. This allows employees to see a direct tie to their efforts. In the case of this manufacturing company, all employees share in the profits and bonuses are paid on local plant results. In addition to the regular updates, the CEO makes a point of meeting individually with small groups once a year, thus providing a more comfortable setting for employees to ask questions. It was interesting to note that

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this firm has expanded considerably through takeovers in the last few years and the company has found that about one half of the existing employees leave within 18 months as they are not comfortable with the increased accountability that goes hand in hand with the this style of management. The company, however, is very happy with the engagement and loyalty of workforce that is being developed at each of its locations.

At the major bank -- which has been growing considerably over the past few years through acquisitions -- transparency and sensitivity to existing cultures underline the approach to communicating change. The bank representative commented that one of the prime organizational leadership principles is transparency and this is much practiced in change management communications. There is a need to accept and communicate the negative side of change, she noted. The bank's approach includes accepting the difficulties associated with change, "to actually acknowledge the challenges that come with change instead of white washing it, and making it sound like it's all going to be perfect." The other communication success factor identified in dealing with acquisitions is recognizing the importance of sensitivity to existing cultures, channels and approaches. The bank pays attention to ensure that the various communications that come about during change seem familiar and comfortable for employees. This approach or style allows for a much more open dialogue and makes asking questions and making suggestions about the process totally acceptable, thus overcoming resistance and accelerating change.

4. Awareness of need to measure communications great, but still a challenge

Each of the company representatives was well aware of the importance of measuring their communications efforts but many were still challenged by exactly how to do this. A number noted they found the regular employee surveys conducted as part of their ongoing employee engagement efforts very useful. Such a survey, repeated on an annual basis, allows organizations to obtain a multi-dimensional reading on all their efforts in support of employee engagement, not just the communications aspects. The disadvantage is that results of specific communications efforts or campaigns often cannot be measured. Such surveys normally contain a few questions specific to communications -- for example, questions regarding satisfaction with communications relative to senior leadership, benefits, corporate social responsibility, etc. Some probe staff members' perceived knowledge regarding various corporate initiatives by asking employees to rate their awareness on a Likert-like scale. The question might be something like: "I'm in the know about the _____ initiative" with a scale provided for ranking. One organization reported conducting a broad employee survey it developed on its own as well as smaller surveys in areas where improvement is required. This company also participates in other surveys offered nationally so has multiple ways of gaining insight. The results are shared at corporate employee meetings and discussed at meetings of a special employee committee charged with handling some of the more challenging issues. Another reported working closely with the consulting firm that develops the standard engagement survey to craft questions that are organization specific and measure communications.

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Those using internal social media report using measures available through these platforms including hits on various content, responses to polls that are posted, and qualitative responses to blogs and other postings. In addition, they look at whether or not employees embrace new processes that have been communicated. The large financial institution noted that measurement of communications on the social intranet had been quite basic to start with, looking at the number of hits and tags, but that benchmarking has now been put in place in Canada and the U.S. to obtain more meaningful information to drive ongoing improvement.

Professor Mary Welch noted that it is vitally important for practitioners to regularly research employees' communications needs and needs of organization. She suggested this should be done in same way as companies audit their accounts. "It is time organizations saw communication as important as financial systems," she said. "They need to keep looking at what is happening and to move flexibly with the times." She commented that measurement and research skills will become more and more important part of the skill set for practitioners noting they "need these skills at their finger tips." (Personal communication, March 19, 2012)

5. "Next" practices will be driven by drive to engage employees and the "social organization"

As organizations become more interested in fully engaging their employees and move to more dialogic, relationship-based approaches to management, ways of communicating with employees will continue to transition and change, according to interviewees. The director of employee communication for the global content

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management firm summed up her view of "next" practices saying:

"There are three trends that one should look at. The first is the change-- if it hasn't happened already -- from one-way and control to collaboration, multi-way and enabling. The second is in terms of technology, that the social intranet will be one of the key tools in the toolbox for anybody engaged in employee communications.... the third, is to bring together process management, knowledge management and employee communications so that you have the structure and the work flow and the employee communication all together. "

Clarifying the meaning of *knowledge management*, she explained that most people would associate it with the development of such things as policy and procedure manuals and other informational supports in the workplace, earlier known as *reference management*. Today, the meaning has been expanded, she said, and it covers a range of things but generally, "the practice of getting the right information to the right people in the right manner."

An example of how *process management* and enterprise-wide *knowledge management*, she said is in communicating and supporting organizational change. In addition to using conventional channels to communicate change such as face-to-face, e-mails, newsletters and staff meetings, the communications plan would also recognize process channels, where, for example, a pop-up might be used to flag the change specifically at the point where the employee is making an entry. In other words, the technology would allow the information to also be channeled exactly where the employee "hangs out" or is working, in addition to the standard approaches.

Another company representative also recognized the growing importance of *knowledge management*, noting that this field is still very young. She pointed to

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication research done by McKinsey Consulting into the benefits of Web 2.0. in 2009, and their findings that internally networked companies grow faster and have greater profits. According to the McKinsey Study, the key business benefits reported by companies using Web 2.0 technologies included: greater ability to share ideas; improved access to knowledge experts; and reduced costs of communications, travel, and operations. Many of the interviewees said that Web 2.0 tools have decreased the time to market for products and have had the effect of improving employee satisfaction. Their key concern, though, is the need for better analytics, something not yet developed and some predicted it would be some time before the analytical tools required will catch up.

Expanded use and development of social intranet platforms was also mentioned as a "next practice" by many of those interviewed. They predict there will be ongoing expansion of the technological means of obtaining employee input and feedback and that knowledge and experience of corporate users will be refined to make way for powerful communications mechanisms. They also predict improved means of evaluating and measuring internal social media.

A move to more targeted, customizable use of internal social media was also identified as a future best practice in order to support employee engagement through communications. "Right now we target the employee group as a whole" one company representative said. " We need to make sure that we don't leave certain roles out." She noted that her company has considered the use of various personas as models to ensure better targeting of all the various roles and types of people within the organization.

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Organizations are recognizing that certain employees, particularly those from Generation X and the Millennial group, are looking to have a more social environment at work. One interviewee noted efforts to support online development of employee social communities and communities supporting personal interests, not only in geographic locations but also across locations.

Interviewees noted that employees and the technologies that support them are becoming more mobile with the advent of powerful smart phones and tablets. Ensuring that this growing group is fully involved in the organizational dialogue means that communicators must work with their Information Technology colleagues or outside providers to ensure that no matter what technology employees are using, they can be part of the conversation, they said. The communications director for the global high tech company pointed out that "it isn't trivial to be able to do a good mobile strategy and so for some organizations the gap between what we should do and what we can do is quite large and a little bit intimidating." She said that her company has been able to implement and test mobile applications because it is in the business but many firms would not, as yet, have that capacity.

While research conducted for this study (Citrix Corporate Website) noted the growing availability of sophisticated video conferencing technology both for large groups and desktop to desktop, companies generally had not started to use this technology to any great extent. Several representatives noted, however, that they foresee growth in its use over time, and that it could be very effective in certain cases, particularly when there are issues of geographical separation within the

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Another next practice area noted by a few respondents was the use of new technologies for scanning employee-generated content to identify trends. For example, blog or mini-blog content and the content of discussion groups could be scanned. Such information could then be used to gauge interest or opinion regarding various topics and inform decision-making or communications activities. The interviewees said they recognized that such activity could be seen as invasive so proper protocols and transparency would be required.

Additional pertinent comments from the experts

It is worth noting that the link between employee engagement and communication was highlighted by Einar Westerlund, Director of Project Development with the Queen's Centre for Business Venturing at the Queen's School of Business. "We've got a ton of statistical data affirming the importance of communication as vital organizational connective tissue differentiating the employers of choice from the rest, he noted "Senior executives and the next levels down in small-medium enterprises play a particularly significant role. Leadership availability, accessibility, openness and interest in communicating in person with all levels emerges as a key swing factor, ultimately contributing in very direct ways to driving employee engagement and commitment to the success of the enterprise" (personal communication, April 20, 2012)

Having consulted for both private and public sector organizations, Rob Lewis of AON Hewitt, commented that engagement communication is much easier for private sector organizations. The greatest potential for success seems to be in

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication companies that are held privately, he said. The founder or leader is less constrained about how the organization is managed and what can be communicated. Employees are able to align with the personality of the corporation and trust the organization more than either public companies or public sector organizations. This means that the public sector requires tremendously strong leaders to deal with these matters, he noted.

Dr. Mary Welch commented on what she calls the fluidity of employee engagement. "Employees who are engaged today may not be next week, she said. "The question is: What is required to "feed" them and keep them engaged?" She noted part of the answer may be providing communications based on the individual personalities of employees -- providing communication in various ways, through various channels, with content based on what is appropriate for the employee. With current technologies, it is possible for employees to tailor their consumption to their own interests and needs. She added that if an employee is highly engaged, the organization must treat them as extremely valued. "We need to know a lot about their communication preferences. Do we need to tailor it or will they tailor it?" She suggested that organizations need to provide information in enough ways so employees can they can tap into what they want when they have time.

Employee Engagement survey data findings

Table 1 below documents the correlation coefficient found between the communications-related questions on the Queen's/AON Hewitt Small to medium-sized employer survey (50 - 400 employees) and the average employee engagement

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication score. This information sheds light on what communications messaging and approaches may have the greatest impact on the engagement of employees. It can be used as a guide for those involved in supporting employee engagement. The data represents the scores for the top 50 organizations from data collected from a total of 6,168 employees in the 2012 survey.

The average engagement score is comprised of the six questions used to gauge employees' interest and intentions in relation to the 'say, stay, strive' questions on the survey; in other words, whether they intend to say good things about their employer, stay with the employer, and strive to do their best work or work beyond the expected for their employer. These are, in essence, average scores from each employee's submission to the survey questions. This is the score against which organizations are benchmarked in calculating their ranking relative to employee engagement.

Table 1

Correlation of communications-related questions and employee engagement score in Queen's/AON Hewitt Small to Medium-sized organizational survey, 2012 n= 50

Ranking	Communications Question	Correlation Coefficient
1	Organizational Reputation	.73
2	Communications regarding learning, development, career opportunities	.64
3	Communications regarding how recognized	.61
4	Honest leadership	.56

5	Communications regarding how performance managed	.47
6	Senior leadership - open and honest communications	.43
6	Communications regarding pay program	.43
7	Communications regarding health maintenance	.42
8	Communications regarding corporate social responsibility	.41
9	Communications regarding environment	.21
9	Communications regarding retirement savings	.21

The table above shows that the top-ranked and most significant correlations between overall employee engagement and communications indicators are: *organizational reputation; communications regarding learning, development and career opportunities; communications regarding how employees are recognized; and the perception that the leadership is honest.* In terms of the relative strength of the correlations, there is a clear line of demarcation between the top four results, noted above, and the rest. However, according to Stacks (2002, p. 230), correlation coefficients between plus or minus .70 and plus or minus .90 are considered high. Therefore, the highest correlation relative to communications and employee engagement is for *corporate reputation*. Correlations between plus or minus .40 and plus or minus .70 are considered moderate. Therefore, a moderate correlation is found relative to communications regarding *how performance is managed, open and honest communications from senior leadership, communications regarding the pay program, health maintenance and corporate social responsibility.*

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It is worth noting that statistically, there is still a great deal of random error (Stacks p. 230) associated with all of these scores so their reliability must be considered. Nevertheless, those involved in employee engagement communications can take some guidance from these results and continue to measure as they go.

Discussion

The global push for productivity and innovation, driven by today's highly competitive forces, is having a big impact on employee communications within top Canadian organizations. This study of internal communications practices in leading Canadian employers found that such organizations recognize that brain is a far more important contributor to competitiveness than brawn and are working hard to increase the level of engagement their employees have with their organizations. As the business literature suggests, senior leaders in today's successful organizations recognize that it is essential to harness and align the power of human cognition and behaviour with organizational strategy. This study found that successful Canadian organizations are communicating back and forth with employees on an ongoing basis, using multiple channels. Organizations that want an engaged workforce recognize that the top-down approach to employee communications is no longer acceptable. CEOs and senior leadership teams in these top-performing organizations are engaging employees frequently and face to face on strategic business topics; they are also using internal social media to establish an open, ongoing discussion. In addition, these entities are using new technologies to empower employees to communicate across silos and across geography. They are also enabling those within

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the organization with a wish for social connection at work -- often the younger age demographic -- to form internal communities. These top Canadian employers also recognize that this valuable brainpower necessarily comes with the myriad complexities of what might be called the "human vessel." This entails entering into a relationship or many relationships with employees, thus creating behavioural expectations at both the group and individual level. With this comes the necessity for a give and take approach on each side. These organizations, therefore, are highly relational or social. The 'to and fro' of ideas and actions between management and employees appears to occur at a much higher speed than in the past.

Management's wish to engage employees -- together with the new external and internal social media technologies -- increases the need for business-savvy and creative communications practitioners. Practitioners need to understand the business and public environment and based on this knowledge, be able to provide honest and open counsel to management, even if such counsel might not accord with the inclinations of senior leadership. To be credible with their employees, communicators and their organizations must recognize and align with heightened public expectations developed as a result of major ethical business transgressions of the last decade and act ethically and communicate transparently. Communicators have an important role to play in recommending and facilitating openness and more democratic and discourse-based organizational communication. With the increased use of social media -- both external and internal -- organizations and their senior leaders can no longer expect to have internal communications and public relations staff members act as a buffer between the organization and the public. As suggested

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication by Grunig, the role needs to be seen as a bridge to the various stakeholders.

Communicators must be creative in their approaches to engaging employees in organizational discourse and can take guidance from how discussions are handled on social media external to the organization. Some of these approaches -- such as polling, voting or games -- made possible by internal social media, may seem foreign to the organization and make some leaders uncomfortable. However, the employees are experiencing such mechanisms through their personal use of social media and understand how they work. Senior leaders must also build trust if they are to see employees truly engaged -- and trust comes through action. Seeing employee suggestions being implemented can reap big rewards in terms of employee engagement.

A significant finding of this study relates to the positive impact of employee engagement communication on change management. Interviewees noted that employees in their companies were already well informed at the time decisions were announced. With considerable ongoing discussion within the organization about the strategic environment and potential strategies, the result was greater knowledge and acceptance on the part of employees at the time changes actually were set to take place. The saying "the only constant is change" is certainly a truism in today's organization. Those who can master the change process, engaging and involving employees and thus achieve employee buy-in, have much to gain in terms of productivity and competitiveness. Huebner, Varey and Wood (2008), noted that it is important for organizations to implement modes of *legitimization* into managed communication. They pointed to the potential role of social networking as part of

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this sense-making or legitimization. Although they do not specifically mention internal social media, given the increasing use of such media for internal blogging and ongoing online discussion, the role of such internal discourse could be significant in making sense of the situation for managers and employees and helping them to understand, accept and move forward quickly to implement change.

While the practices of Canadian top performers are generally consistent with established best practices, this study suggests that front line managers in a significant number of organizations are not being as well trained as they should be regarding the communication environment. As noted, Towers Watson has found that companies highly effective at communications were more likely to train their managers to deal openly with resistance to change (Towers Watson, ROI study, 2009/10 pg. 2). As many companies are moving to a system where performance reviews for managers are done on a 360-degree basis -- including those in this study -- front line managers may be getting feedback that indicates improvement is needed. The Human Resource and Communications leadership in such organizations could use this as a signal to provide such training.

Measurement and evaluation is another area where communicators in the study continue to face challenges. While they are using analytics that are available through internal social media platforms, they recognize more effective means of actually measuring outcomes are needed. Quite a number said the enterprise-wide employee engagement surveys carried out annually for their organizations by consulting firms were helpful in this regard. Some had adapted the survey by working with the consulting firm to include specific communications questions.

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Others had developed their expertise in this area and were carrying out more advanced measurement and evaluation that could actually test the specific benefits of communications. A number noted that as internal social media becomes better developed, analytics will also be improved and this may assist internal communicators. Another is that communicators can take advantage of secondary research available through such organizations as IABC, Melcrum or the global consulting firms that do research on employee engagement, as noted earlier. Also, an ongoing process of research that Stroh calls *participatory action research* (PAR), may be prove valuable. As noted in the literature review, PAR sees participants "involved in the data gathering and processing, and share in decisions about the use of outcomes. Participants share ownership of the total strategic and research process with strong emphasis on power sharing between the researcher and the researched" (Stroh, p. 214). Discourse analysis could also assist greatly in measuring outcomes. In this context, such analysis might focus on the words used by management and employees in online communications with the of aim revealing information relevant to the understanding of each side of the communication and also about the relationship between the parties. Such analysis is becoming easier with new technologies, and could, perhaps, be reported on in real time. This would allow management to address misunderstandings quickly.

While there was evidence that some organizations in this study were recognizing and acting upon the communication needs of different internal stakeholders, this has not had as much take-up as it likely should. There is certainly evidence of targeting information in different ways for various employee groups --

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication management versus front line staff -- for example, but there was not evidence of trying to find ways to deal with groups exhibiting the predictable types of reactions to change, for example. Also, while a number of the companies were training their managers how to communicate and deal with resistance to change, a number admitted it was something they should be doing but were not.

The results of the analysis of the AON Hewitt/Queen's engagement surveys show that efforts to build a strong corporate reputation will pay big dividends in terms of employee engagement. In addition, it is important for organizations to provide information to employees about how they can learn and develop themselves and about how the company will demonstrate it values individual employees. Finally, ensuring the perception that senior leadership is honest is an important guiding factor for employee engagement communicators. Of course, that requires that such is actually the case.

One proposition that bears reflection as individual organizations fully implement a dynamic, multi-way flow of conversation, is that such conversations will become highly generative, such that corporate strategy and implementation will more and more be created based on such input and discussion. Today, the norm is that internal communication supports and allows for the alignment of the efforts of individual employees with the organization's strategy. That strategy is, of necessity, articulated by the leadership. However, one could argue that corporate strategy and implementation could be the result of the combined efforts of all, as developed through a powerful, purposeful ongoing conversation. The conversation involves both communication and relationship building, words but also deeds, meaning

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication drawn not only from written and verbal content but from nonverbal and symbolic cues and actions. In organizations where this were to become the case, one could argue that engagement of employees would be extremely high and that high productivity, competitiveness and customer service would result.

An organization's communications reflect the organizational culture or worldview, and, conversely an organization's culture and worldview reflect its communications, as noted earlier. This is why it is important that the communications and public relations of an organization be guided by the overall corporate strategy. The challenge is to embed this approach within the culture as noted by Grunig in his article "Furnishing the Edifice"(2006). Lewis, of AON Hewitt, noted that he sees this as more prevalent in organizations that have particularly distinct internal and external brands from the very start. He also stated that that it is very challenging to achieve in the public sector and in public companies where powerful outside influences can change things overnight. Are such organizations doomed to have lower levels of engagement, lower productivity and profitability?

It is important to note that employees will continue to have more and more interaction with stakeholders of all kinds facilitated by external social media and other new forms of customer-organization interactions. The influence of customers, interest groups and other stakeholders will continue to grow as the capacity of social media technologies is expanded. Individual employee interactions and greater abilities to mine the massive amount of data generated through the new communication mechanisms, have the ability to give many in the organization an expert view of the customer and the environment, once the purview of marketing,

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication communications and senior leaders. Employees, therefore, will have even more to contribute in terms of organizational direction.

The use of e-mail is still very prevalent for top-down communication. There is evidence in the consultant literature that while there employees complain of e-mail overload, they are still very likely to read such e-mails from senior sources.

Conclusion

As Grunig noted in his Excellence Study, the best communications is in evidence in best organizations; the two realities cannot be separated (1992, p. 248). This view would appear to have held true for the organizations in this study. All had been deemed top employers with highly engaged workforces through a rigorous process of review. All demonstrated a dedicated commitment to employee communication, with key quality attributes including values-based, two-way, cross-silo, and horizontal communication across geography, senior level involvement, transparency, frequency and multiple channel use. The noticeable difference in organizations that excel at employee engagement communication is the tremendous effort they put into involving employees in two-way dialogue and ensuring an ongoing conversation. Web 2.0 technology, including internal and external social media, has contributed greatly to making this possible. Employees, accustomed to using such technologies for relationship building and information gathering and sharing in their personal lives, are keen to use it at work. Even the older generations of employees, who have not fully adopted such technologies at home, are jumping at the opportunity to use them in the workplace. The potential for the democratization of communication as a result of social media, starting to be realized in societies

Running head: Canadian best practices in employee engagement communication around the world, has extended from public sphere to the organizational level with the introduction of internal social media. CEOs are blogging and employees are encouraged to respond. Senior leaders must be prepared for a certain amount of controversy -- and corporate policies regarding what is and is not acceptable must be clear.

Stakeholder theorists, Freeman and McVea note Svendsen's conclude that "in an increasingly volatile world, the ability to balance the interests of all stakeholders will be a defining characteristic of successful companies in the next decade. This is not to say that companies will be able to satisfy everyone's interests all the time. However, companies that have a strong set of values and that can communicate their business goals clearly will maintain stakeholders' support when the results are not in their favour." (Svendsen, pg. 188, The Stakeholder Strategy) It is fair to say that the internal employee audience is one of the most important stakeholders and maintaining employee support during fast-changing and financially-trying times is a very worthy goal.

Definition: Employee Engagement Communication

As a result of the research undertaken for this paper, the following definition of *employee engagement communication* is proposed:

Employee Engagement Communication is the purposeful, valuable, transparent and generative communication exchange, often in the form of an ongoing multi-channel conversation, which takes place within organizations seeking high employee engagement. Together with responsive human resource policies and other supportive management practices, it builds the trusting relationships that are a necessary precursor for such organizations. Employee engagement communication is administered and encouraged by organizational leaders, beneficial to management,

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employees and customers alike, supports innovation, efficiency and effectiveness, and reflects and brings to life for all internal players the organization's full meaning, personality and direction as a continuously evolving entity.

What does this mean?

An explanation of the key words and phrases contained in the definition follows:

Purposeful

The organization communicates, with regard to both content and style, in a planned and purposeful way, linked with overall corporate strategy.

Valuable

The organization strongly believes in the value of communicating with its employees not only to benefit the business but for the personal benefit of individual employees, outside stakeholders, customers and shareholders alike.

Transparent

The organization is open with its employees to the full extent possible given competitive or political limitations and holds transparency as a value. It listens and responds to employees, anticipates their communication needs, and comes down on the side of openness. It communicates frequently. In times of uncertainty, it does not feel a need to wait until the full story is available. It shares business strategy and the good, bad and ugly of what transpires. Its leaders demonstrate their humanity and admit to their failings.

Generative

The organization sees the ongoing discussion with employees as productive, able to produce new ideas and actions, and expected to build upon itself over time.

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Exchange

The communication goes back and forth and there is give and take.

Ongoing multi-channel conversation

This suggests that the planned and purposeful communication does not stop and there is ongoing discussion. This communication takes place through multiple channels within the organization that individually may either allow for instant response or slower, more thoughtful response (one-to-one; face to face in groups; through organizational social media which may be instant one-to-one, or Twitter-like; through blogs or newsletters or white papers with capacity for response; video in groups and one-to one; through questionnaires and polls; staff meetings, town-hall like meetings, retreats and any others means available for such discourse.)

Administered and encouraged by organizational leaders

The purposeful communication within the organization is a responsibility of organizational leaders and is supported by them both through the provision of an appropriate budget and their personal effort and involvement. However, the organization also encourages self-generated ongoing communication within or across groups as this supports organizational creativity and innovation.

Organization's meaning, personality and direction as a continuously evolving entity

Employee Engagement Communication supports the understanding of organizational ethics and values, helps to guide employees regarding what needs to

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be done and the way to get things done while at the same time signaling ongoing
organizational change.

Future Research

Many areas of future research are suggested by this study of employee engagement communication. Based on views put forward by Welch and Jackson, there is a need to study the targeting of internal audiences. Organizations need to know what is required to "feed" employees and keep them engaged as Welch suggested. This could involve research into ways of understanding the individual personalities of employees and determining how to provide communication in various ways, through various channels, with content based on what is appropriate and of interest to the employee. There is also the question of whether organizations need to tailor content and channels or whether this can be left to employees without fear of employees missing key communications.

Another research area noted by Welch -- and touched on to some extent in this study based on the correlation of overall engagement data from AON Hewitt -- is how elements of content are linked with elements of engagement. In other words, what kind of information delivered in what way can best increase employee engagement? We know from this study and through expert opinion, that organizational reputation has a big impact on employee engagement. How can organizations optimize their communications and relationship building with employees based on reputation management?

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This study revealed that the take-up of video technology for communication within organizations is slow. It seems, more and more, that people -- especially the younger generation -- want to communicate in writing rather than face-to-face or via telephone. This runs counter to what one might expect given the move away from the written word. What is it about written social media communication in an organization that makes it attractive?

Measurement, the traditional bugbear of communication practitioners, would truly benefit from greater research effort. Internal social media bring with them great potential for measurement given the powerful capacity of these technologies. Those interviewed for this research mentioned the need to move beyond the early measurement tools used for both external and internal social media, such as number of hits, page views etc. Research into useful measurement tools for practitioner use would add greatly to the field.

Finally, as there is more and more discussion and discourse happening within organizations at all levels and such discussion can inform senior management much more easily than in the past, it is possible that leadership of an organization will actually come from a broader group -- and there will be faster change -- and perhaps more understanding of why things are changing. This would, potentially, be in keeping with what the discursive scholars believe, that communication actually structures the organization. On the other hand, the current openness we are seeing in some organizations may fall prey to politics and existing power bases -- something akin to what is happening vis-à-vis the various political movements -- the Arab Spring, Occupy, etc. where the same old power systems

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start to take over once again. Discursive scholars, while covering many perspectives, are united by the view that language does not mirror reality, but constitutes it (Fairhurst, 2009: 1608). Research into how discourse aimed at employee engagement actually connects, frames and instructs the organization would be of great interest.

Limitations of this study

As in any research, limitations apply to this study and its results. The sample group of companies was small. The normal and human researcher bias exists. The company representatives consulted, of course, want to present their organizations in the best light. The experts bring their own biases. The AON Hewitt/Queen's data applies to small to medium enterprises only. Nevertheless, there has been an effort to triangulate the information and data utilized. The literature review was broad and information sources and types were varied.



Organizational Guide to Employee Engagement Communication

*An outcome of a study of Best Practices in Employee Engagement
Communication among top Canadian employers, with input from consultants and
academics in the field, and a broad-ranging literature review.
Prepared in fulfillment of the capstone research component of the
McMaster University Master in Communication Management (MCM) program*

Karen Humphreys Blake, APR
August, 2012



Organizational Guide to Employee Engagement Communication

In today's environment, where employee engagement is crucial to productivity, innovation and competitiveness, organizational communication is about having an active, ongoing conversation with employees and encouraging communications among various parts of the organization. For this to be successful, senior leaders and internal communication professionals, or others tasked with managing and supporting communication with employees, must work to align overall corporate strategy and communication strategy. More than ever, employees want to know where they fit in and how their contribution makes a difference. They want to know about the organization's business strategy and to actively contribute to the organization's future. They also want to feel that the organization supports them and to be treated fairly. New media technologies make having an ongoing conversation with employees much easier but there is still a strong need for ongoing face-to-face communication with senior leaders and direct managers. Transparency of communications is expected and measurement and constant improvement is key to continuing success.

Organizational readiness

An Employee Engagement Communication strategy cannot be undertaken in the absence of support at the organization's senior level. This requires a willingness to place high priority on developing an organizational culture that values employee participation and the necessary human resource and other policies and activities that make the organization a good place to work. Management must be willing to accept that it cannot control all messaging, and it must willing to act on employee suggestions. If a high level of readiness does not exist, the effort could well be more damaging than continuing with the status quo.

As noted by Professor Alan Saks of the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, "Engagement needs to be viewed as a broad organizational and cultural strategy that involves all levels of the organization, a series of actions and steps that require input and involvement of organizational members, and consistent, continuous, and clear communications" (p. 615¹).

¹ Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21 (7) pp. 600-619

James Grunig, one of the most respected academics in the field of corporate communication, noted in his landmark *Excellence* study that organizations practicing communication excellence believe in:

- interdependence within the environment;
- a system open to interpenetrating systems and free exchanges;
- adjustments in equilibrium through cooperation;
- equity and respect for all involved;
- autonomy, allowing people to be innovative and self-fulfilled;
- innovation, openness to new ideas and flexible thinking;
- concern with consequences of their own behaviours;
- willingness to engage in conflict resolution through negotiation, communication and compromise;
- and a view of the political system as a mechanism for open negotiation among interest or issues groups (²Grunig, 1992, p. 44).

Among academics, there is a debate with regard to the extent to which communication influences the organization or vice versa. This also makes common sense. Those working within organizations over time come to see there is an ever-shifting dynamic as ideas are communicated, gain hold and are modified over time and structures and practices change accordingly. However, it is impossible to sort out the impact of organizational culture on communication versus that of communication on culture. Navigating this changing reality is where the expertise, sensitivity and relationship building skills of the senior communications officer and communications team members (and in smaller organizations, those tasked with handling this area) come into play. The person charged with overseeing employee communication should strive to be knowledgeable and up to date as possible about the field, the organization, what has transpired in similar organizations. It is important, too, that this individual and the communication team have built strong relationships within the senior leadership team and at other organizational levels.

(See note at end of document for suggestions regarding readying the organization.)

² Grunig, J. (1992). *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 44)

What is employee engagement communication?

It may be helpful for those intent on maximizing their communication efforts in support of employee engagement to define what their organization means by *employee engagement communication*. The following definition is proposed as a starting point for an organization wishing to improve in this area:

Employee Engagement Communication is the purposeful, valuable, transparent and generative communication exchange, often in the form of an ongoing multi-channel conversation, which takes place within organizations seeking high employee engagement. Together with responsive human resource policies and other supportive management practices, it builds the trusting relationships that are a necessary precursor for such organizations. Employee engagement communication is administered and encouraged by organizational leaders, beneficial to management, employees and customers alike, supports innovation, efficiency and effectiveness, and reflects and brings to life for all internal players the organization's full meaning, personality and direction as a continuously evolving entity.

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Transparent

The organization is open with its employees to the full extent possible given competitive or political limitations and holds transparency as a value. It listens and responds to employees, anticipates their communication needs, and comes down on the side of openness. It communicates frequently. In times of uncertainty, it does not feel a need to wait until the full story is available. It shares business strategy and the good, bad and ugly of what transpires. Its leaders demonstrate their humanity and admit to their failings.

Generative

The organization sees the ongoing discussion with employees as productive, able to produce new ideas and actions, and expected to build upon itself over time.

Exchange

The communication goes back and forth and there is give and take.

Ongoing multi-channel conversation

This suggests that the planned and purposeful communication does not stop and there is ongoing discussion. This communication takes place through multiple channels within the organization that individually may either allow for instant response or slower, more thoughtful response (one-to-one; face to face in groups; through organizational social media which may be instant one-to-one, or Twitter-like; through blogs or newsletters or white papers with capacity for response; video in groups and one-to one; through questionnaires and polls; staff meetings, town-hall like meetings, retreats and any others means available for such discourse.)

Administered and encouraged by organizational leaders

The purposeful communication within the organization is a responsibility of organizational leaders and is supported by them both through the provision of an appropriate budget and their personal effort and involvement. However, the organization also encourages self-generated ongoing communication within or across groups as this supports organizational creativity and innovation.

Organization's full meaning, personality, direction as a continuously evolving entity

Employee Engagement Communication supports the understanding of organizational ethics and values, helps to guide employees regarding what needs to be done and the way to get things done while at the same time signaling ongoing organizational change.

Stepwise approach to employee engagement communication

1. **Assess Readiness for major organizational focus on engagement:** Your organization must be ready to place a major focus on employee engagement and have its homework done with regard to human resource and communication policies and associated training. It is essential that there be frank and open discussion at the senior level, likely including the board of directors, of what employee engagement and supportive employee engagement communication approaches will mean for the organization. A key finding from the academic literature (Saks, 2006)³ is that *perceived organizational support* (POS) was the only significant predictor of employee engagement with both individual jobs and with the organization. Caring and concern demonstrated by the organization creates a sense of obligation on the part of employees, he noted, recommending that organizations that wish "to improve employee engagement should focus on employee's perceptions of the support they receive from their organization" (p. 614). (See note at end of document below regarding readying organization.)
2. **Assess engagement and employee communication:** Conduct an assessment of employee engagement and employee communication needs to gain a base level of understanding. You will likely need to hire expert outside assistance for this as it will involve a corporate-wide employee engagement and communication survey, in-depth interviews and follow-up focus groups with employees at all levels.
3. **Involve management and front line staff:** Based on information gathered, involve middle management in planning the next steps along with senior team members. Also involve front line staff.
4. **Develop internal communications action plan:** Develop an internal communications action plan aimed at truly engaging employees in an ongoing conversation. (See definition of Employee Engagement Communication above for guidance.) As noted by Groysberg and Slind (p. 1) of the Harvard Business School, the plan should be aimed at: closing the gap between you and your employees, promoting two-way dialogue, engaging employees in telling the company story, ensuring you have a clear strategic

³ Saks, A. M. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of employee engagement, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21 (7) pp. 600-619

agenda and that the conversation is aligned with the resulting organizational objectives.

- 5. Set regular face-to-face meetings for CEO and staff:** A good place to start is to implement a regular series of face-to-face meetings between the CEO (and senior leadership team) and large and small employee groups. It is important to educate and inform staff about the corporate vision, strategic challenges and financial and other metrics. To develop trust and credibility, it is also key to bring them into the conversation well ahead of planned changes, even though you may not have all the answers. Employees are particularly interested in:

- how their jobs fit into the organizational mission;
- learning, development and career opportunities;
- how performance is recognized;
- organizational policies and plans;
- and about relationships with key constituencies in the organization's environment.

- 6. Provide opportunities for managers:** Be sure to build in specific communication opportunities for managers. It is especially important for those in managerial ranks to be able communicate openly with top management. Managers have a major role to play in engaging employees and ensuring this group is well informed, on side and feeling engaged themselves is essential to reaping the benefits of employee engagement.

- 7. Enable targeted communication based on employee interests:** Recognize the need to target information to various employee audiences or individuals based on specific interests and needs. The best approach may be to make it possible for individual employees to tailor for themselves what information they receive, just as we are now able to do through online subscriptions and news. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, for example: through the use of electronic newsletters that provide short "teasers" for the articles, thus allowing employees to choose only those articles of interest; by internal social media approaches, such as CEO and other senior level blogs that allow for online employee feedback; the development of online interest communities, for example, regarding special projects, performance improvement, human resource policies or anything that particularly interests employees. Employees may also be interested in participating in and seeing the results of one-question polls and short surveys. In order to ensure that employees obtain information the organization feels is essential, it must designate a specific channel or medium for this purpose. Many companies continue to use specially-marked e-mail for this purpose.

- 8. Train managers in change communication:** Train managers in communication and how to overcome resistance to change. Studies have shown that organizations that are highly effective communicators are more likely to train their managers to deal openly with resistance to change. As

noted by Quirke (pp. 149 - 154), here are some major principles for successfully communicating change:

- create a sense of urgency;
- communicate the context and the full picture;
- communicate the why as well as the what;
- maximize the sense of continuity and stability;
- do not wait for all to become clear-- the grapevine will communicate if management does not;
- communicate probabilities and scenarios, give the timescale and make face-to-face the main communication channel;
- explain the implications for the individual so they can figure out what they are supposed to do;
- use involvement to get commitment as the more employees are involved in discussing how change can be implemented in their area, the more committed they will be;
- train managers in what might be called the soft skills of communicating, not how to put forward the argument but how to listen and connect at the appropriate emotional level;
- invest enough time in communicating so that you have strong relationships in advance.

Klein (1996)⁴ noted the following as a result of an organizational change process he studied: The negative effect of change was largely neutralized when industrial engineers implementing the change were active with the staff members involved and able to answer questions and explain what they were doing.

As a result of his work and the literature he reviewed, he recommended:

- that an intensive multimedia approach is necessary at the beginning of such change processes, as ambiguity is highest then. This helps to reduce uncertainty.
- as the organization moves through the various stages of the change program and people see the impact of the change, attention should be paid to addressing and adjusting to specific issues.
- it is very important to publicize successes during the change process. Develop a way to rectify problems through feedback and adjustment by developing communications structures encourage problem disclosure and discussion of solutions (p. 44).

⁴ Klein, S. (1996). A management communication strategy for change. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 9 (2) pp. 32-46

9. Build or improve intranet, internal social media system: Increase the capacity of your intranet and internal social media systems with such features as blogging, micro-blogging, polling and other feedback systems for employee use.

Ensure you have creative, knowledgeable staff trained in internal communications and social media approaches to handle responsibilities in this area.

10. Build in plans for measurement in advance There are many ways to measure the impact of employee engagement communication including conducting another employee engagement and communication survey and comparing the results with the results of the initial benchmark survey. Pilot new approaches in one area of the organization and compare the results obtained through old and new approaches. Consider using *participatory action research*, as recommended by Stroh² where participants are involved in the data gathering and processing, and share in decisions about the use of outcomes.

11. Place significant focus on organizational reputation: Analysis of AON Hewitt/ Queen's Centre for Business Venturing data for this paper found there is a very high correlation between corporate reputation and employee engagement. While reputation is built in many ways, it is advisable to place a significant communications focus on this area in order to attract and retain engaged employees.

Readying the organization

The senior communications executive/officer can assist in readying the organization for employee engagement and supportive employee engagement communications in a number of ways. Of course, there must be a reasonable level of interest and willingness on the part of the CEO and senior team. Even if this exists, the reality of such change can be surprising and even threatening. Communicators and human resource professionals supporting the move toward a more engaged workforce must be prepared to deal with this eventuality and even the risk of abandonment as discussions progress at the senior leadership table. Preparation should include strong evidence of the value of employee engagement and employee engagement communications. There are many sources of information available. Good sources for communications practitioners are available through the International Association of Business Communicators, (IABC) and similar associations in the U.K. Many consulting firms such as Melcrum, Angela Sinickas, and Towers Perrin have posted useful information on line. There are a number of excellent books on the topic of employee

² Stroh, U. (2007). Postmodern Corporate Communication Strategy. In *The Future of Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*, Elizabeth L. Toth (Ed.) Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

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engagement many management and engagement consultants provide considerable information on line. See suggestions at the end of this document. Here are a few ways to prepare the organization: establish an employee engagement working group; prepare data regarding what other organizations are doing, especially those in the same sector; survey staff regarding the various engagement issues; conduct an organizational communication audit; put in place supportive human resources programs including orientation plans for new employees, an employee suggestion system, supportive performance management and pay plans, and employee benefits suggested by staff.

Suggested reading:

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**LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES**

A study of Corporate Communications in support of Employee Engagement

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Purpose of the Study: This study is for the final major project or "capstone" required for completion of my Master in Communications Management Program. I am conducting this research to gain an understanding of how leading companies in Canada today approach communications with their employees to support employee engagement.. I plan to develop a practical guide for communications practitioners based on a review of the literature in the field and information provided through these interviews. I hope it will assist them in developing appropriate approaches, platforms and messaging to support employee engagement in the workplace of the future.

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A good way to think about the significance of employee engagement can be found in this definition drawn from the work of A. M. Saks (2006): "Employee engagement is a when a positive attitude is held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee."

I invite you to take part in this study to share knowledge of successful approaches in employee engagement communications.

Procedures involved in the Research: I will be interviewing 10 - 15 representatives of leading companies in Canada that have been recognized by award programs. Most of these individuals will be involved in managing employee communications or public relations but for small to medium-sized organizations, it may be that the CEO is the most appropriate person to be interviewed.

I also plan to interview a number of leaders in the field of employee communications. This may include representatives of major consulting firms, academics or individuals recognized for outstanding career attainment in the field. The information gathered will assist in rounding out the information and provide expert views of future developments in employee engagement communications.

You can assist me by taking part in an interview that will involve questions about the topics of your communications with employees and the approaches and communications channels you use. This interview will likely take approximately one hour. I would like to conduct the interview by phone, and with your permission, record the interview and take notes.

A sample of the questions follows:

- How do your organizational values drive your approach to communications and messaging to employees?
- What communications channels is your organization using to communicate with employees?
- What approaches are you using to involve employees in two-way communication and enable them to contribute through their work to the success of the organization, make suggestions etc?
- Are you using social media to engage with employees? How?
- Are you using video conferencing? How?
- How effective do you find these tools?
- Has your organization given any thought to how it can best engage young people - Generation X and Millennials -- through communications?
- Do you believe that organizations need to communicate on various platforms and in different ways depending on the age of individual employees?
- Do you measure the effectiveness of your employee communications? How? How are these results used?
- What do you believe will be the leading "next practices" in employee communication to support engagement?

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I will also ask questions about how you structure your organization to conduct your communications with employees and about those involved in developing messaging.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. It is not likely that there will be any harms or discomforts involved in answering the interview questions. You could feel uncomfortable with the state of practice in your organization and aspire to do better. I will not be identifying you or your company by name. I may describe certain facts about the company such as its key business, size and location. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time. I describe below (under the section headed Confidentiality) the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Potential Benefits: The benefit of this study is that it will lead to the spread of knowledge of how highly successful organizations use communications to increase the engagement of their employees, and thus, improve performance. Employee engagement suggests mutual benefit for the employee and the employer, something that is very much in keeping with our societal values. You may request a copy of the results and thus benefit from the views of other leaders in this area.

Confidentiality for Organizational representatives: You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. No one but me will know whether you participated unless you choose to tell them. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

The information/data you provide will be kept in a locked desk drawer where only I will have access to it. Any information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed, the data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality for Consultants, Academics, other Experts: By virtue of your role in this project -- that of contributing your particular expertise -- I believe it is important that you can be identified. However, if there is information that you provide that you would like to remain confidential, please advise me of this during the interview and your request will be respected.

Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, You may withdraw at any time within five days following the interview, even after signing the consent form. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study. If you decide to withdraw, you will be given a choice as to whether some aspects of the information you provide may be retained for use.

Information about the Study Results: I expect to have this study completed by approximately March 31st. If you would like a brief summary of the results, you may indicate this on the attached consent form.

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Questions about the Study: If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at: humphkl@mcmaster.ca or by phoning 613-547-4378.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

Consent to Interview

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study being conducted by Karen Humphreys Blake of McMaster University.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Recording of Interview

1. I agree that the interview can be audio/video recorded.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Results Summary

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address: _____
or to this mailing address: _____

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Interview Questions: Organization or company representatives

Before we get started, I would like to reiterate that, as noted in my original e-mail, the names of participants and their organizations will not be used in the final report and that I commit to maintaining the confidentiality of the information you provide. Also, you may withdraw from this research or choose not to answer one or more questions without any consequences whatsoever for you or your organization.

I am going to cover - structure of organization to support communications, your values, communications around change, channels used, generational issues and future/next practices.

Background Questions:

of employees

of locations

1. (a) What positions within the organization are involved in communication with employees -- communicating such things as the organizational vision and values, learning and development opportunities, corporate social responsibility initiatives and information involved with change management? b)→ (If not mentioned in response to question) Do you have a corporate or employee communications function?
2. Who within the organization is involved in deciding what messages are communicated to employees? How is this done?
3. How do your organizational values drive your approach to communications and messaging to employees?
4. What approach do you normally take when communicating about the need for change?
5. Are managers provided with training regarding how to communicate the need for change and how to deal with resistance to change?
6. How does your organization communicate with its employees regarding its vision, what it stands for and what is expected of employees?
7. What does your organization do to communicate to employees about bonus programs (if any) and employee benefits?
8. What communication channels is your organization using to communicate with employees? (Prompt - technological, face-to-face, print etc.)
9. What approaches are you using to involve employees in two-way communication and enable them to contribute through their work to the success of the organization, make suggestions etc?

10. a) Are you using social media to engage with employees? b) If yes → How are you using social media (Prompt: to build community, communicate/engage in real time, collaborate or share ideas, adapt to organizational/HR change, encourage health and wellness, provide understanding of how individual jobs contribute to overall success, other? Please provide an example of what works well and what does not work.- Are you using an internal social media system (e.g. Sharepoint)? How are you using the internal social media system? Please provide an example of what works well and what does not work

b) Are you using an intranet? b) If yes → How are you using the intranet? Please provide an example of what works well and what does not work

c) Are you using video conferencing? b) If yes →How are you using video teleconferencing? Please provide an example of what works well and what does not work?

11. (For companies not using any of the above channels).... How are you: building community in your organization? ensuring employees collaborate and share ideas? helping employees adapt to change? helping employees understand how their job contributes to overall success? What works well and what does not work? Please provide examples.

12.Has your organization given any thought to how it can best engage young people - Generation X and Millennials -- through communications?

13.Do you believe that organizations need to communicate on various platforms and in different ways depending on the age of individual employees?

14.Do you measure the effectiveness of your employee communications? How? How are these results used?

15.What do you believe will be the leading "next practices" in employee communication to support engagement?

16.Is there anything else you would like to add regarding employee engagement communications at your organization?

Interview Questions: Experts

1. In your experience, how do leading organizations structure themselves to ensure effective communication with staff members in support of employee engagement?
2. What do you believe are the key values driving organizational communications in these companies or organizations?
3. Do you believe that organizations need to communicate on various platforms and in different ways to engage employees of different ages?
4. What approaches, platforms and technologies are best practice organizations using?
5. What are the best ways to measure the effectiveness of employee communication? How should these results be used?
6. What do you believe will be the leading "next practices" in employee communication to support engagement?
7. If you could provide only one piece of advice to organizations seeking to improve their corporate communications in support of employee engagement, what would it be?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding employee engagement communications?

Background on IBM Beehive

From IBM Watson Research Centre: Project Beehive

Beehive is an internal social networking site that gives IBMers a "rich connection to the people they work with" on both a personal and a professional level. Beehive helps employees make new connections, track current friends and coworkers, and renew contacts with people they have worked with in the past. When employees join Beehive, they get a profile page. They can use the status message field and the free-form "About Me" section on their profile page to let other people at IBM know where they are, what they are doing, and what they are thinking. Beehive also lets them post photos, create lists to share their thoughts, and organize events. ¶¶ For example, employees can find out what that team they spent late nights with a couple of years ago working towards a deadline, is up to now by checking out their profiles. They can see the latest pictures their ex-teammates have shared. The Beehive photo page shows the owner, title, and description of the photo, along with tags and comments people have exchanged about it. A photo *is* worth a thousand words -- it is a visual memory that can connect or reconnect people to their coworkers socially.

Users can create top-five lists, called "hive fives," to share their thoughts on any topic they are passionate about. For example, they can add a "hive five" list that outlines their ideas about their project, and then invite their team members to "reuse" the list and voice their opinions. Hive fives cover a lot of territory, from clearly work-related subjects to the kinds of personal exchanges that might only happen among collocated team members at the water cooler. Hive fives are a light-

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weight way to share ideas and a great way to keep in touch with remote team members.

Beehive can also come in handy for upcoming conference calls. If users don't know the people on the call, they can go to their Beehive profiles beforehand and find out if they have common interests -- either work-related or recreational -- or if they have colleagues in common. Beehive is a quick way to figure out who a person is and what they spend their time doing.

If users are hosting an event, they can create an event page in Beehive and invite people to attend. The page can be a place to spread the buzz about the event and get people talking about it through the comments feature. It's also a handy place to keep track of who is invited and who's RSVPed, and to share photos and reminisce about the event afterward.

<http://domino.watson.ibm.com/cambridge/research.nsf/0/8b6d4cd68fc12b52852573d1005cc0fc?OpenDocumen>