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EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS: FOCUS ON INTERNAL PUBLICATIONS**

Blocklyn, Paul L. "Employee communications." *Personnel* (UMI Infostore, Dept. ACH, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346), May, 1987. pp.62-66. \$11.00.

The author uses both a readers' survey and the responses of 154 human resources managers to evaluate employee communications systems. To convey information, 87% of the respondents used some kind of written or visual information, 94% used meetings of varying frequency, and 96% used bulletin boards. The most frequently discussed topic at meetings (32%) was benefits and policies. Bulletin boards, both physical and electronic, were used most often to post the following: job openings, policies and procedural changes, legally required notices about equal employment, affirmative action, wage and salary information, company and community activities, safety information, and educational or training opportunities. Employee publications were the favored means of announcing promotions and new hirings (54%), for informing staff about hiring, promotion, and termination (60%), medical benefits (71%), and savings and retirement plans (70%). Sixty-six percent of companies preferred meetings to announce organizational changes. The human resources managers gave the following overall ratings of their companies' internal communications systems: excellent 7%, above average 36%, average 42%, below average 6%, and poor 5%.

Clampitt, Phillip G., Jean M. Crevcoure, and Robin L. Hartel. "Exploratory research on employee publications." *Journal of Business Communication* (Association for Business Communication, Speech/G1326, Baruch College, 17 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10010), Summer, 1986. pp.5-17. \$10.00.

This article describes a research project that surveyed editors of 300 employee publications and critically analyzed 53 of the publications from a wide spectrum of American organizations. The study found that while the most frequent reason (57.6%) for starting a publication was for internal communication, the purpose often shifted to use as a motivational (35.6%) or informational (33.9%) tool. The most frequently published articles were for employee recognition. Other high frequency categories included company awards, personnel changes, and benefit programs. Most editors (65.3%) judged the effectiveness of their publications by verbal feedback from employees; over a third conducted formal surveys. They also overwhelmingly indicated that their publications reflected management philosophy, but most felt they had only a moderate impact on productivity. The researchers note that in balancing the needs of employees and management, many editors lean toward a trivialization strategy, focusing on harmless and non-controversial news.

* Prepared by Linda Oppenheim, Social Sciences Reference Librarian.

** Items on this list should be ordered directly from the publisher. Addresses are given in connection with each reference.

Hartsfield, William E. *The BLR encyclopedia of employee handbooks*. Madison, CT 06443. Business & Legal Reports (39 Academy St.). 1993. 1 vol. loose-leaf. \$151.85.

This compilation provides hundreds of prewritten handbook entries. In the first section, the author defines the role of the handbook, discusses which topics to include, considers legal issues and precautions for avoiding the threat of potential liability, and discusses production requirements, strategy, design, writing style and updating. Section II furnishes a portfolio of prewritten entries including the following topics: communications; equal employment opportunity; public relations; complaint and grievance systems; benefits; employer services; discipline and work rules; salary and pay; personnel policies and practices; employee development; separation and termination; safety and health; security; and union status. The final section includes samples of complete handbooks, arranged by size of organization. Some are identified as useful in preserving a company's "at will" status. Others are designed for the companies that regard handbooks as contracts, or think their employees and the courts may view them as such. A similar guide is William S. Hubbart's *Personnel policy handbook: How to develop a manual that works* (McGraw-Hill, Attn: Order Service, P.O. Box 545, Blacklick, OH 43004, 1993, 582pp., \$80.95.) It is designed to help plan and organize a supervisor's policy manual as well as an employee handbook. He also provides objectives, sample procedures and wording, typical forms to be used with policies, and extensive checklists for auditing handbooks.

Haus, Deborah. "Giving employees bad news." *Public Relations Journal* (Public Relations Society of America, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003-2376), December, 1993. pp.18-23. \$4.00.

This article shows how four companies (Northwest Airlines, Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield, Time Warner, and Citibank) used employee communications to convey bad news. Related articles examine the cases of two additional companies: "Candor helps Boeing handle massive layoffs," by Michael J. Major and "Empowered employees fuel successful merger," by Thomas J. Sloan. The latter article analyses the 1992 merger of Kansas Power and Light and Kansas Electric into Western Resources. In each case, the company faced negative public opinion, uncomplimentary news coverage, internal shake-ups, or slumping profits. The various communications tactics and media used included: 1) special editions of company newspapers that offered lengthy explanations of all pertinent events and progress reports from the president/CEO; 2) videotaped or in-person appearances by the company's chairman/CEO addressing such employee concerns as the company's financial stability, job security, opportunities for career advancement, and market share erosion; 3) monthly staff meetings for officers, directors and mid-level managers to convey the latest news; 4) open forums between the president, CEO or managers and randomly selected employees; and 5) a series of mental and physical health workshops to help employees deal with job-related stress.

Johnson, Pamela R. and Susan Gardner. "Legal pitfalls of employee handbooks." *SAM Advanced Management Journal* (UMI Infostore, Dept. ACH, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346), Spring, 1989. pp.42-46. \$11.00.

Employee handbooks are used by companies for the following reasons: to communicate rights and responsibilities; to achieve equitable and consistent personnel decisions; to enhance employee morale; to set the tone of employer-employee relations; and to promote the corporate image. Until the 1980s, personnel policy manuals were regarded as unilateral statements of policy. Since that time, the courts have found in employee handbooks implied and enforceable

contract rights that challenge the at-will doctrine, which allows employers to dismiss workers employed for an unspecified period of time whenever and for whatever reason they choose. This change reflects legislative modification and judicial reevaluation of a principle that has been severely criticized for its harsh effects on workers. Johnson and Gardner advise managers to review and update their handbooks annually with legal counsel, evaluate and clarify the language used, include restrictive clauses, make frequent mention of management discretion, and include only those provisions which managers are willing to follow and apply consistently.

Larkin, T.J. and Sandar Larkin. "Reaching and changing frontline employees." *Harvard Business Review* (HBS Publications, Attn: Customer Service, 60 Harvard Way, Box 230-5, Boston, MA 02136), May-June, 1996. pp.95-104. \$22.00, issue. \$9.00, reprint.

The authors stress the following as the most important points in communicating a major change to employees in large companies: 1) Communicate only the facts not values; 2) Communicate face-to-face rather than through videos, publications or large meetings; and 3) Use frontline supervisors rather than executives to introduce the change. The authors emphasize that the only effective way to communicate values is to act on them in recruitment, performance appraisals, promotions, and bonuses. They believe that the frontline workforce is thoroughly cynical and quote a study that found that 43% of employees believe that management cheats and lies. The authors point to the trend of increasingly negative feelings toward senior management as the reason for having employees' immediate supervisors communicate change. They also recommend that 80% of a company's communication time, money, and effort be spent on supervisors, as the authors term them, the "opinion leaders" of the organization. They point to research done by numerous large corporations over the last twenty years that consistently indicates that the supervisor is the employee's preferred source of information.

McGoon, Cliff. "Putting the employee newsletter on-line." *Communication World* (International Association of Business Communicators, 1 Hallidie Plaza, Ste. 600, San Francisco, CA 94102), March, 1992. pp.16-18. o.p.

This article describes the experience of two companies that produce electronic newsletters. The Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) uses the speed and feedback advantages of e-mail to transmit a weekly newsletter to 4,000 employees at 50 locations. They have also developed a separate weekly e-mail newsletter for social information. The director of the company's Organization Communication department says that a great deal of time must be spent training top management to be effective communicators. Effective articles are brief, have an informal radio news style, and include a contact person's name and phone number. AT&T's electronic newsletter reaches 120,000 employees worldwide every day. The publication includes announcements, reproductions of articles printed or broadcast in the media that mention AT&T, stories about developments in telecommunications and related industries, and employee letters. The publication also provides employees with database access, allowing them to request the full text of any item appearing in the newsletter.

Pavlik, John V., Ikechukwu E. Nwosu, and Diane G. Ettl. "Why employees read company newsletters." *Public Relations Review* (Institute for Public Relations Research and Education, University of Florida, P.O.Box 118400, Gainesville, FL 32611-8400). Fall, 1982. pp.23-33. o.p.

The authors did a content analysis of several corporate publications and a mail survey of employees of a large corporation in the Midwest. They found that employee position in the decision-making hierarchy is not related to higher

readership of company publications, although level of career aspirations is positively related to readership of company news. Sixty-eight percent of the employees reported reading all the work related articles, while 17% reported reading all the departmental features in any single issue of the newsletter.

Sinickas, Angela D. "Supervisors are not the preferred communicators!" *Communication World* (International Association of Business Communicators, 1 Hallidie Plaza, Ste. 600, San Francisco, CA 94102), November, 1992, pp. 25-28. \$9.50.

The author challenges the findings of research studies that indicate that employees prefer their supervisors as their primary source of information. She believes that communication audits should ask for current and preferred sources of information *subject by subject*, such as benefits or the company's financial situation. Using this approach, employees will for some subjects show a preference for company periodicals or special brochures that provide detailed or highly graphic information. For other subjects, the author states that only top management will be seen as credible information sources. Supervisors are preferred when company issues need to be explained at the job level. She concludes with recommendations for a useful communications survey.

Sosnin, Betty. "Corporate newsletters improve employee morale." *HRMagazine* (Society for Human Resource Management, 606 N. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314). June, 1996. pp.106-110. \$10.00.

The author, who edits several corporate newsletters, promotes the value of newsletters as a means for management to disseminate accurate and timely information that dispels rumors and instills employee confidence. She provides practical guidelines for publishing a successful newsletter and for hiring the right editor from outside the company and lists several ideas for stories. The common pitfalls Sosnin warns readers to avoid include: beginning with an unrealistic publication schedule, using a committee to write and edit the newsletter; relying on frivolous topics such as jokes and recipes instead of real news to fill the publication; and writing in a stuffy, jargon-filled style. She also discusses the advantages of electronic newsletters. Finally, she encourages companies to evaluate the newsletter after the first year and provides several sample questions for a reader survey.

Wright, Donald K. "The role of corporate public relations executives in the future of employee communications." *Public Relations Review* (JAI Press, 55 Old Post Rd., No.2, P.O.Box 1678, Greenwich, CT 06830), Fall, 1995. pp.181-198. \$50.00.

The author suggests a new role for public relations practitioners—communication executive. This officer would participate in decision-making, report to the most senior management, clarify overlapping internal communications functions among other departments, and enhance communications with employees. The author says that public relations responsibility for internal communications in corporations is typically much more limited than its role in external communications; junior staff members usually carry out technical tasks such as writing and editing company newsletters. Wright believes public relations executives should make certain that their organizations communicate honestly and regularly with employees on topics these workers consider important, encourage senior management to develop relationships with employees, involve supervisors with effective two-way communication, make better use of information technology, and design and conduct research to determine if employees are actually receiving the most important internal messages.