**

**ENGAGE FOR SUCCESS TOOLKIT**

USING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

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PURPOSE OF THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit aims to share best practice and learning, to highlight the most effective internal communication channels for a variety of audiences.

INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that UK organisations are facing new challenges and rapid changes to their workforce. It is vital that organisations adapt to the demands of their staff and the changing working environment in order to attract and retain talent. The complexity and fast pace of change in today’s workplace is putting new pressures on organisations. A key pressure facing many organisations is communicating with and engaging a remote workforce.

We have an ever increasing number of remote, regional, hard to reach workers in our organisations who require new communication channels and approaches in order to be engaged. As the demographic of our workforces change and the location of our workplaces move, it is key organisations still provide an internal communications approach to inform and engage all their people no matter their location.

There are two key factors that are changing our workforces, the ever-changing demographic and the increasing demand for flexible working. There are now five generations in the workplace, suiting the needs of everyone is extremely difficult, so it is crucial to have a varied and adaptable internal communications strategy to reach and engage with as many people as possible.

This toolkit provides insight into new internal communication techniques, how to make the most of digital innovations and how we can engage our ever-increasing remote workforces

## Organisational practices - what’s changing?

‘Flexible’, ‘agile’ and ‘smart working’ all refer to organisational practices that are based around changing the culture of a workplace, addressing working time, working location and the pattern of working.



Flexible working describes a type of working arrangement which gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times employees work ([CIPD](https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet)). A lot of research has been carried out that shows staff are more productive when working in an environment they are more comfortable in. It has been predicted that by 2020 over 70% of organisations and individuals will have adopted flexible working across the UK [(Lancaster University’s Work Foundation, 2016)](http://www.theworkfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/398_Working-Anywhere.pdf).

The [Agile Future Forum (2013)](http://www.agilefutureforum.co.uk/AgileFutureForumReport/report.html#p=4) described agile working as a set of practices that enables an organisation to build an ideal workforce based on four dimensions: time (when do people work?), where (where do people work?), role (what do people do?), source (who is employed?). The Agile Future Forum believes agile working is about matching the resources and the demand for service, increased productivity, and improved talent attraction and retention.

This means that we can no longer rely on the traditional forms of internal communications, with all staff in the same location, based at a desk and a computer, working the same hours as each other and have the same preferred communication methods. All this highlights the ever-growing need for our internal communications to reflect our workforces and be smart, agile and flexible to suit their needs. We need to identify new methods to engage a remote and hard to reach workforce.

It is not only our workforce and place of work that is changing. Digital is becoming an ever more integral part of the way we all work. Digital is the enabler of remote working and is therefore, something to be embraced by internal communication teams to align with working practice trends. Digital is often feared, but we hope to highlight how it can be used to engage all generations in the workplace.

## What is a hard to reach employee?

A lot of these changes have meant that our workforce is becoming harder to reach, people are not all in the same place at the same time and organisations are becoming more diverse, meaning traditional internal communication techniques are no longer as effective and we need to adapt.

Hard to reach and remote workers are often defined as:

* Those that choose to be remote workers and have flexi-working; tend to work from home and be digitally connected but lack regular face-to-face communication
* Those that do not have a choice in where/how they work due to the nature of their job e.g. retail and construction; do not have regular access to online channels or face-to-face communication.

Expectations and needs are changing. We need to make sure our internal communication strategies are: focused, engaging, relevant and using the most effective channels available.

COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

To become committed to a course of action, we typically go on a journey. We consider whether what’s being proposed fits with our circumstances and aspirations, before moving on to examining how the detailed ‘nuts and bolts’ will work out and what this will mean in terms of how we go about fulfilling our daily role or completing a task or starting something new. This is a journey that takes an individual from ‘knowing about something’ to ‘committing to act’ and doing something different. These are the types of outcomes effective communication can deliver.

Different communication channels (E.g. print based channels, social media, events, face-to-face etc.) will support different steps in that journey and deliver different outcomes that help bring about the change you need to see.

The full communication journey means becoming *aware* of the change or initiative, *understanding* its implications both personally and organisationally, *supporting* it, becoming *involved* in deciding how it might be implemented, and finally fully *committing* to making it work. Each of these *outcomes* is realised by using different communication channels that help facilitate the journey.

This journey may not be the same for everyone; different audiences may need to go on journeys of different lengths. Some may only need to have an understanding of what is planned or proposed while for others the outcome required is to be wholly committed to the change or course of action.

Identifying your desired outcomes involves:

* Describing in terms of observable behaviour and attitudes, what outcomes you need from each group you have identified
* Understanding where each group is in the ‘here and now’ - for example, you may need commitment from an individual or group of individuals, but at the moment they may only be aware of what is planned. The communication outcome you are looking to achieve is moving them from ‘awareness to commitment’.
* Defining the types of communication channels you need to deliver those outcomes, bearing in mind which channels your audience use and more importantly trust. A simple rule of thumb is that there are channels that facilitate a dialogue e.g. webinar and channels that cascade information e.g. email.

## Communication preferences and channels

Of course, there isn’t a ‘one size fits all’ approach. We all like to consume and interact with information in different ways depending on our roles and individual preferences. To decide upon which communication channel will deliver the best outcome, you need to also take into account the needs of your audience and their communication preferences.

We are all different and don’t necessarily fit into a specific category or groups of ‘channel’ types. However, it is useful to understand what the broad demographic of your organisation looks like and how this might influence your internal communications channel choices and approach.

Good internal communications practice starts with a healthy dose of employee insight. We need to find out who our audience are, what their information preferences are, how they like to consume information, understand their attitudes to leadership and what drives their willingness to go the extra mile at work. Having this essential information will help you build a more comprehensive and inclusive communication channel mix; which provides something for everyone and will help to bridge the internal communications gap between an intergenerational workforce, from Boomers through to Generation X / Millennials in your organisation.

The best sort of communication is two-way and inclusive. Most audiences want to be involved and have some means of contributing to the discussion either directly or indirectly, so your channel matrix needs to allow you listen to what’s going on and also help individuals and groups to connect with each other and share their thoughts and views in return.

The channels you use to reach and engage your audience should depend on what you need to achieve with your communication, the preference of the target audience and the resources and budget available to you.

## Setting your communication channels’ objectives

Communicating a new vision or organisational strategy is very different from sharing your organisations full year results or launching new brand guidelines. The reality is that no two organisations, campaigns or change programmes are the same and have different desired outcomes.

When considering what type of communication channel will be most effective to reach and engage your target audience based on the desired outcome you want to achieve, it is worth resisting any temptation to revert to channels that you have used previously or are familiar with, until you know that these will give you your desired outcome.

To help you set your objectives you may want to consider the following:

* What channels does your audience use and more importantly trust?
* What is it that you are communicating?
* What are your measurable outcomes by channels and /or audience?
* What resources do you have and need to achieve these outcomes?

Experience says that in order to achieve your desired objectives and required outcomes you may need to use a range of channels. If you need to communicate a complex issue then you need to use channels that create trust and connect individuals and teams. But these channels (e.g. face-to-face) may also need to be augmented by those channels (e.g. email announcements, intranet, newsletter) that help to reinforce the messages or provide updates on the progress that has been made. Below is an example of the communication objectives for a restructuring announcement:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| AUDIENCE | CURRENT | OUTCOME | INDICATORS OF SUCCESS |
| Senior managers | Awareness | Commitment | * Know all success factors
* Organise and lead staff briefings
* Release any managers or staff requested
* Acting on feedback
* Are publicly and privately committed
 |
| Middle managers | Awareness | Involvement | * Understand significance of announcement
* Organise staff f2f/counselling sessions
* Acting on feedback
* Are publicly and privately committed
 |
| Assistant managers | Awareness | Support | * Have detailed knowledge of the announcement
* Are able to answer any queries and can feedback areas of concern to managers
 |
| All staff | - | Understanding | * Have been briefed and understand announcement
* Have a timetable in place for 1 to 1 counselling
 |
| HR managers and advisors | Awareness | Commitment | * Know all success factors
* Have established an employee hotline
* Are able to handle queries effectively
 |
| Unions | - | Awareness | * Have been briefed by HR
 |



## Consider the strengths and limitations of your communication channels

There is no one perfect channel as each one has inherent strengths and limitations. A blend of channels can be used to maximize their strengths, allowing for greater impact. Using multiple channels can also have a cumulative and reinforcing effect, increasing the effectiveness of the messages communicated.

To help assess how effective your communication channels are at delivering your desired outcomes, try plotting them using the ‘richness & reach’ model below. To help you we have included a couple of examples of different channels:

TYPES OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Communications channels are used to broadcast information and/or engage an audience in two-way dialogue. Increasingly they are used to do both simultaneously, especially with the rise of internal social enterprise and digital collaboration tools. In this section we are describing the range of channels available to communicators and the type of scenarios where you may need to use them.

Intranet and digital channels: The staff intranet has traditionally been useful for everyday transactions such as a quick glimpse at the latest organisational news; updates on pay and pensions and usually to access your online HR system. Over the last few years, people have begun to expect more from their intranet than information download; they want to interact with the platform in the same way we do in our personal lives - i.e. digital engagement.

Rather than just reading an article, people expect to be able to share their views on it through posting a comment. It has become more of a social space with forums, blogs, vlogs (video-blogs) and use of hashtags becoming the norm. Other platforms such as Yammer and Chatter, to name a couple, are on the rise and can often plug the gap that your intranet leaves. This may be beneficial and part of your wider engagement strategy, where your intranet doesn’t have the IT capability and you are capitalising on external media. However, it may be adding extra noise in an already crowded space of which you have no control or input. Either way it needs to be taken seriously as the de facto way people are choosing to interact with each other, and possibly their managers and senior leadership. We cannot underestimate the impact of digital communications and it needs to be factored into all communications and engagement plans. We explore this in more detail in the chapter ‘Communicating in the Digital Workspace’.

Video content: Is another way of reaching audiences and is a preferred way to access information with popular sites such as YouTube and social media platforms being used to constantly share and stream video. As an internal communications channel this needs to be relevant and work well - i.e. no one wants to watch a Board meeting, but they may appreciate a two minute video sharing key facts and thoughts from the CEO on a change that affects them.

There are practical considerations of where you host the video content and who can access it.



Before including video as part of your plan ask yourself some initial questions.

1. Do your staff have access to the intranet and is this the best platform to host video files?
2. If they are an operational workforce spending most or all of their working day away from a desk, do they have mobile devices such as tablets or smartphones?
3. If they do, is your intranet mobile-optimised?
4. For those who can access it, will it be subtitled for accessibility?
5. Is sound enabled on desktops/laptops? Does everyone have work-issued headphones to listen to content?

If staff can easily access the content it may still not be the best method for reaching them. Consider the following:

1. Why video content - what is it adding that the written word / another channel is not?
2. Format of video - is it a cartoon illustration, address at the camera, interview
3. How will you get feedback on messages being conveyed - will there be a commenting feature so staff can share their views or will you invite views to be sent in separately?
4. Perhaps you don’t want views and just to broadcast information - in that case is this the best medium as people now expect to leave feedback and may be frustrated if they can’t
5. If it is the best / most engaging method, how are you filming it - on a smartphone; using in-house expertise; hiring an agency or anything in-between?
6. Depending on the message you are trying to get across; the audience engaging with it and how the content is being viewed (e.g. DVD, on the intranet, on a private YouTube channel or at a conference); the type of finish can affect the level of impact. Are your audience expecting something very slick and professionally produced to feel invested in or would they rather hear from their senior leader informally filmed on their smartphone to add authenticity? These are the type of considerations to take into account before committing.

Face-to-face: Staff surveys frequently tell us that people value face-to-face events and time with peers; managers and senior leaders. This can take the form of a regular team brief; small roadshow events; larger all staff or leadership events; open forums; informal lunch or breakfast meetings with senior leaders and staff or even shadow boards where junior staff can attend. All of these help create a more open, transparent and collaborative work environment, where staff can fully contribute their ideas and feel that they are being listened to.



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| CASE STUDY: HER MAJESTY’S PASSPORT OFFICE, HOME OFFICE |
| Within Her Majesty’s Passport Office there is a monthly team brief, *Let’s talk about*, which gets teams together to talk about a particular topic, structured around three key questions. Sometimes visual aids are used, such as videos, to keep it fresh and varied. Once the team have had their discussion, they send through their group feedback. This is collated and sent on to the sponsor, generally a director or deputy director, who then formulates a management response addressing the key issues, points and questions posed. A summary of the feedback is also published on the intranet and teams are encouraged to discuss the management response as part of their next team meeting. This process ensures all staff are given the space to share their views, influence organisational change where possible and hear back from the sponsor on how their feedback is being used. In a recent HM Passport Office internal communication channels survey\* it was voted as being in the top three most useful and trusted channels by frontline staff. *\*conducted in June 2017 with over 800 respondents.*  |

Newsletter / magazine: Whether a printed glossy, pdf, e-bulletin, or a mobile application - the traditional staff magazine / newsletter still has a place. Striking the right balance between corporate content and more social, human interest pieces is important in getting your audience interested but also in presenting a professional product. A corporate offering, edited and managed by the central communications team should feature in-depth articles; interviews with senior leaders to help them be less faceless and with staff to educate the business on what the people propping it up actually do. Essentially these type of communiqué should keep you connected and informed; without containing the time sensitive information you find in intranet updates or all-staff emails.

Posters / infographics/ visual communication: We all like to receive information in different ways; increasingly people are expecting to see data presented visually using infographics (e.g. a visual presentation of data such as graphs, icons etc) rather than just text. It can be easier to digest numerical information when presented like this rather than buried in lots of copy. However it is important to remember accessibility issues and ensure that you are offering your audiences multiple ways of accessing vital information; so whilst pole positioning of images via posters or on TV screens around the office can be eye-catching and provide a solution for time-poor employees; this should be accompanied with fuller detail (intranet, briefings etc) for those who require it.

Briefing document / cascade announcements: When making an important announcement that is resulting in a change to policy or operational procedures, which people need to be aware of in order to efficiently carry out their roles; a briefing document, usually cascaded via line managers, is still an essential communication tool for getting out practical information. This is best reserved for such change announcements and distinguishable from a team brief, for example, which is more geared towards encouraging two-way dialogue and engagement with an idea.

Channel Utilisation Matrix: It might help you to make a list of the unique strengths and limitations of each channel available to the audience. The table below is a simple analysis of some of the types of channels available and an indication of: when to use, likely strengths, limitations and desired outcomes.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication channel | Interaction | When to use | Strengths | Limitations | Outcome(s) |
| Face-to-face: By far the most preferred, most desired communication channel among audiences. Strive to include things like town-halls, leader-led listening sessions and team meetings | Two-way conversations, capturing feedback and sharing information are more important | For important content that has an impact on what people do and needs to be discussed and unpackedAddressing concerns and creating clarity of understandingCan be used to build a sense of community and belonging | Allows for questions, debating and ownershipAbility to immediately check and understand what has been heardFormal and informal | Significant investment of time to get it rightRequires robust presentation and facilitation skills.Can’t reach multiple audiences at the same time | InformEducateInvolvementCommitmentOwnership/ advocacyIncrease intention to act |
| Print: The most traditional, but sometimes the most effective way of talking to your audience. Internal publications still work if they have a clear purpose, especially for staff that are out and about on the frontline | One-way/passive way of sharing information, knowledge and insights. | Topics that don’t need discussionNon-urgent information for your audience to refer toDeep dive into topic areasPromote an event or campaign | Provides a consistent message to the entire organisationGood way to share detailed/ in-depth informationSource of reference information | Can be expensiveHard to track take up and understandingInformation is not up-to-date/ immediate | AwarenessInformEducateReinforce |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication channel | Interaction | When to use | Strengths | Limitations | Outcome(s) |
| Online: This can encompass e-newsletters, Yammer groups, Slack; WebEx so there’s plenty to choose from | Two-way | Great ways to share information, policies and business critical information.  | InteractiveTwo-wayFast, consistent and convenientEffective ‘pull’ channelCan be effectively tracked and measured | Requires necessary infrastructure and can be costlyNot everyone has accessHard to track take up and understanding | InformCollaborationInvolvement |
| Social media (internal): Increasing in functionality, App based tools (e.g. Yammer) are useful to reach mobile/remote teams. Empower your audience to access content when and where they want need it  | Two-way and interactive | Promote dialogue and discussion on a range of topicsKnowledge transferCan be used to build a sense of community and belonging.Raised leadership visibility/build internal brand | Accessible any timeTwo-way and interactiveEnables transfer of knowledge and sharing of experiencesBuilds relationships and sense of community | Requires infrastructureContent needs to be monitored on a daily basisNeeds to be actively managed to maximise return on investment | CollaborationInvolvementPersuade/ reinforce  |
| Intranet: Interactive channels that can support a push – pull approach | Can be one-way broadcast or two-way with user-generated comments on blogs, articles, polls, like / rating function  | Business as usual/news/ updatesKnowledge sharing/information repositoryCelebrations/campaign launches | Fast and consistent way of sharing messagesInteractive via chat rooms and use of blogsEasy to measure audience take up | Not everyone may have accessRelies upon the recipient to search for information | InformCollaborationInvolvement |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Communication channel | Interaction | When to use | Strengths | Limitations | Outcome(s) |
| Email: Fast and cheap way to share information with Individuals or Groups | One-way | Topics that don’t need discussion | Quick, easy and cheapEfficient way to share information across large groupsTargeted at recipientsCan be tailored by group/ audience | Hard to track take up and understandingImpersonalInformation overload can be an outcome | InformReinforce |
| Video/film: Inspirational and emotional way of telling stories in a consistent and compelling way | One way | Get your face-to-face message in the hands of a wider audienceVisualise/bring to life a major initiative and campaign | Visual and dynamic form of communicationWay of reaching large numbers of people with a consistent message | Can be costlyAuthenticity could be questioned (e.g. make sure it is not over hyped)Mobile workers may find it difficult to access/ stream | AwarenessInformMotivation |

## Recommendations

* Understand who you are communicating with and what it is you need them to know, how will they feel and what actions they need to take
* Establish clear communication objectives and identify which channels will support and deliver the outcome your looking for
* Use a multi-channel approach, one size doesn’t fit all
* Whilst digital communications can be fast and wide-reaching, most people tell us they still appreciate face-to-face wherever possible, so encourage leaders to invest the time in engaging with staff in person
* Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate - from intranet articles through to events - use metrics and qualitative feedback to inform your future offerings and demonstrate to staff that their views have directly shaped the communications they are receiving.

COMMUNICATING IN THE DIGITAL WORKSPACE

We now live in a world of instant information where questions can be answered and solutions to issues found at the touch of a button.

New technology has transformed the way in which we communicate and opened up significant opportunities for employees based across multiple locations, sites and countries. From being able to monitor the reach and response to a communication or message, to having assurances that messages have been received by teams, technology has and is likely to continue to transform the way in which we communicate with staff.

The use of video and other interactive tools means that virtual meetings and catch-ups can take place even when working in different places to colleagues, helping staff feel and stay connected with one another.

The enhancements and drive to digitalise communications is not just led by the improvements and accessibility of technology but also the desire of staff to want to be communicated with in a more timely way.

Social enterprise platforms: Over the last few years the number of companies using social enterprise platforms such as Yammer and Workplace by Facebook has significantly increased. Such tools can help encourage collaboration and sharing of information whilst also helping shift the responsibility of connecting to be jointly owned by all employees and not just seen as the responsibility of a HR or Internal Communications functions.

There are many benefits of using social enterprise platforms including:
Instant two way communication with staff regardless of their work team, base or role

* People are able to choose how much they interact with a platform
* Direct contact with colleagues across the organisation including senior leaders
* Reinforcement of an open, honest, culture
* Opportunities to find out how staff are feeling instantly
* Increase opportunity for creative campaigns and collaborative campaigns
* Instant connectivity between staff bases, wherever they are
* Recognising employee choice by giving people the tools they need to communicate with others as they wish and supporting this with more traditional communication channels.



## Considerations for implementing an enterprise social network (ESN)

There are some careful considerations which you need to consider if you are looking to implement a social enterprise platform in your organisation which include:

* Engage with your people – ask them what they want and how they’d like to use the platform, there is no point building something which they don’t want as it won’t be used. Pilots in teams and services are also a great way of gaining some initial feedback from staff too
* Alignment – ensure your chosen network aligns with your organisation’s culture and the intended outcomes of your wider communications and engagement strategy and can further enhance your existing internal communication channels
* Creative launch – plan a creative and engaging launch campaign to encourage staff to sign up and get involved. Look for ways to ask questions to help staff get comfortable in posting updates on the ESN and getting involved and having their say
* Ongoing support - ensure you consider and put into place any additional support staff and managers will need to fully embrace the new platform
* Trust – employees want to feel trusted using such technology and the implementation of an ESN is often part of a wider culture change, consider how you’ll gain senior manager and line manager endorsement for launching your ESN and how this can be built before, during and after launch
* Co-creation – your ESN should be jointly owned by all staff using this, not just your internal communications and HR teams. Consider setting up some guiding principles for the site with staff for example what is acceptable use and what isn’t
* Have room for growth – employees want to feel free and enabled to explore and experience your ESN, it is really important to have an engaging launch whilst also ensuring there is room for the platform to grow organically, not just as new features come onboard but if staff want to use this appropriately in different ways to support their roles
* Consider if you need to put any additional support in place so that the launch of a platform doesn’t lead to burnout or poor work-life balance with employees not switching off.

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| CASE STUDY: BRITISH HEART FOUNDATION (BHF) |
| The BHF first introduced Yammer in 2015 but relaunched the platform in 2017 along with the introduction of other Office365 programmes.More than 80% of BHF staff are based regionally and not in a main office. Within the retail directorate, this includes more than 700 shops and field teams. Yammer has proved very popular amongst retail colleagues, as it has given them the space to collaborate, share photos and ideas and communicate with colleagues they wouldn’t normally have access to.When relaunched in 2017, Yammer was integrated with the new intranet on SharePoint365 and more functions were migrated, such as a *Suggestion Board* and a *Thank you group.* These additions directed more staff onto Yammer and as a consequence, daily active users increased by 483% within three months.From an internal communications team perspective, Yammer requires minimal management, readily provides stories that can be shared more widely through other channels and gives a platform for senior leaders to recognise their staff publicly.In summary, it has worked most successfully for the BHF amongst field and remote staff due to:* Creating a closer community
* Increasing collaboration within retail as well as with other areas of the organisation
* Giving staff more opportunity to share their views – particularly beneficial for those in a very large directorate.
* Increasing peer-to-peer and senior management recognition.
 |

## Up-skilling differences in the workforce/generations

To successfully utilise digital technology to improve communications and enhance engagement levels it is important that you consider the demographics of your organisation. The world of work is rapidly developing and the concept of a ‘job for life’ is now quickly becoming redundant across the public as well as private sector. The emergence of technology and the power of employee voice is rising with organisations looking to fully reap the benefits of having employees as advocates for your organisation. These shifting sands present opportunities for developing and expanding the use of ESN when connecting with both small and large organisations.



Approximately 94% of the UK population (source: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/facts>) now have a mobile phone and access to other digital technology is no longer for one specific population group. These developments present organisations with an opportunity to upskill and develop their people’s digital skills. There are many benefits of doing this which include to:

* Support an organisation to fulfil their corporate social responsibilities by nurturing their staff and supporting the reduction of paper based information meaning less waste generated
* Help run efficient services and deliver outstanding services
* Modernise work practices
* Make connecting with a dispersed workforce easier
* Support people to use digital technology out of work e.g. online shopping, connecting with family in other areas of the country and world.

There are many approaches organisations can take to developing digital skills and the best way for your organisation will depend on your wider learning and development/workforce and IT strategy. When you are deciding on the best approach to use for your organisation, it is important to develop this in collaboration with your HR and IT teams. Some initial things to consider include:

* Carry out a digital skills audit - this can be utilised as a baseline to look at what people already know
* Consider ways of engaging people creatively to develop their skills, which they can use outside of work too e.g. gamification, points and awards
* Look at what technological developments are planned or could be planned for a team or service e.g. mobile devices, electronic job sheets
* Suggest a range of mechanisms to sell the benefits of moving to a digital approach.

Once you have some feedback and further information about your organisation’s wider approach, it is important to consider the actual and potential impact of this on your communications and engagement strategy. Some initial considerations you may wish to think about may include:

* What digital communication channels do your employees already use which can be adapted for staff communications?
* Can you share and train your staff to use a channel such as Skype for their personal out of work use and then also utilise this in a work setting?
* Do you need to increase employee choice and recognise the breadth and diversity of your workforce to offer a multitude of different communication channels for different demographics within your workforce?

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| CASE STUDY: WIGAN COUNCIL |
| Across Wigan Council, digital internal communication channels such as news through e-bulletins, briefs and the staff intranet are supplemented by other two way communication channels including:* A recently launched closed staff Facebook group, providing staff with an opportunity to hear and share information in real time and to connect with one another regardless of which service of the council’s 700+ services they work in. Over 500 staff joined the group within the first week
* Staff listening sessions every fortnight where the Leader and Chief Executive of the council meet staff, sharing with them the latest news and priorities and listening to and helping their ideas to improve services become a reality
* Team Time - an opportunity for all managers to meet with their teams face-to-face at least six times a year to share key priorities from senior leaders. It is also an opportunity to share local news and updates; whilst also feeding back what is working well and what can be improved.

Despite over a third of the council’s 4,500 staff working within frontline operational roles, using a blend of digital and face-to-face internal communications channels helps all staff hear about the latest news and updates and have plenty of opportunities to share their ideas and suggestions. All internal communications are part of a wider staff engagement strategy which is underpinned by the councils’ Staff Deal and BeWigan behaviours; these outline what staff can expect from the working at the council and in return what is expected of them.In reality, just as communications professionals do already, regardless of what happens with digital and the emergence of technology, there will be no ‘one size fits all’ approach with a variety of channels used to connect a dispersed workforce depending on its make-up, culture and industry.  |

## Benefits and pitfalls of using digital communications

Organisations will continue to adapt and change and the most successful will listen to how their staff want to be engaged with; and wrap their engagement strategy and communication mechanisms around this. Some research suggests the importance of face-to-face communication will decrease with new, more digitally savvy workers entering the workforce. The expectation is that this generation are more comfortable to receive news and updates via digital technology; whilst other research still sees face-to-face communication as remaining powerful and a trusted source.

There is always going to be a requirement for some form of face-to-face communication but perhaps the amount of this will decrease. Certain messages, such as organisational change, or key changes to roles are the sorts of things which face-to-face communication is critical in facilitating. However technologies such as ESN can support this; for example by hosting a live question and answer session after a key announcement. ESN can also be used to host questions and polls to show how employees feel and what they are worried about; or even in global or national organisations the use of live streaming to share messages.

## What’s next for ESN and are they here for the long term?

Technology is moving at an incredibly fast pace and the latest thinking from BBC News, 2017 states how its anticipated 65% of future jobs for children aged 16 years old and younger haven’t even been created yet. The speed and pace at which technology is moving presents challenges for enterprise social networks to keep them updated and responding to customer needs. That said, the basic functions of an ESN platform and the principle behind sharing information instantly across a wide audience will still be something which is needed for the future. If anything the speed and reaction time will need tobecome even quicker. As newer generations come through the workforce they will be more digitally savvy which also presents more opportunities for enterprise social networks or similar and further advanced tools to use for communications in the future.

In the more immediate future, enterprise social networks are likely to increase in number and platforms will become smarter as technology advances. ESNs currently fulfil a range of purposes from connecting individual teams or employee groups together to whole organisational wide platforms to connect bigger staff groups and teams which traditionally have been branded as ‘hard to reach’. Over the next few years we are likely to see platforms begin to provide a range of functions for both team and organisational level communications. We’ve already begun to see this with the emergence of Workplace by Facebook and Yammer by Microsoft.

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## Recommendations for your digital communications:

* Invest in digital-based enterprise social network (ESN) platforms and communications but make sure you invest in the right one for your organisation. Shape what the offer would be with staff, providing them with a sense of ownership
* Take a closer look at your organisation’s DNA - what generations are typical members of staff and how do you embrace new technologies to connect with one another
* Ensure your communications and engagement strategy reflects your organisation and their digital aspirations; whilst being inclusive and ensuring there is still a degree of non-digital communications where appropriate
* Keep an eye on the latest communication technology, each year existing platforms evolve and grow and new platforms emerge which continually provide better opportunities for digital in our communications
* Ask your staff what they want and how they want to receive information and be prepared for different methods being more and less useful for different staff groups.



SUMMARY

This toolkit has demonstrated that working environments, the needs of staff and the communication tools available are all changing. Staff are becoming harder-to-reach, either due to geographical and technical barriers, or because traditional channels are no longer engaging our staff the way we’d hoped. Therefore we need to reach them using channels that suit their needs and adapt the way we communicate. This toolkit has showcased best practice in the hope of giving you the information and tools you need to better communicate with your workforce in new and engaging ways; where possible making the most of new technologies available.

This toolkit has highlighted the importance of creating a communication strategy appropriate to your audience and your objectives. No one channel is perfect and there isn’t a one size fits all approach. Every communication plan needs to be developed based on the audience you are trying to engage and the outcome you are wishing to achieve. You need to take your colleagues on a journey and different channels are more effective than others; for different parts of the journey. Continuous evaluation is crucial to measure the success of your communications with both metrics and feedback from staff.

Staff involvement is key in both the development of the communication strategy as well as encouraging dialogue between staff and management. It’s important to find ways to involve staff in the development of any communication strategy and subsequent communication plans. Their feedback is vital on both current channels, what is effective and what is not, and how they would like to be communicated with. It is also important to give your staff the opportunity to provide ongoing feedback and engage with communications, projects, updates, etc. If staff have the opportunity to engage with, and share their opinions and feedback as part of the communication plan, is it more likely to be successful in landing its key messages.

Finally, digital is a key focus of this toolkit showcasing the benefits and best adoption practices, alongside the considerations that need to be thought through before launching to an organisation. It is also important to upskill your staff to ensure you can use a digital channel to its full potential. The benefits of digital channels include instant updates, two-way dialogue, quick and vast audience reach and in-the-moment feedback. However, face-to-face communication is still well-trusted, respected and has a very necessary place in all communication strategies; it is therefore not to be taken for granted. Those that have successful communication plans have a well-balanced matrix of channels that suit their staff and their needs, where possible utilising the benefits each channel has to offer.

All staff, cultures and organisations are different so not all channels and digital tools highlighted in this toolkit may be effective for you. But it is important that all organisations continually evaluate their communication techniques to ensure they still suit the needs of their staff. Also be prepared to try something new if need be; making the most of digital as new generations join our workforces and our teams become more and more remote. This toolkit showcases how digital channels can complement traditional channels and face-to-face communication; and that embedding a variety of channels is the most effective when engaging staff across the whole organisation.

