

Introduction

In this executive summary, you'll find highlights of Melcrum's comprehensive research report *Effective communication from the top*.

To find out how to purchase the full report with an exclusive 33% discount, see the order form on the back page or call +1 312 379 6500 or e-mail info@melcrum.com.

Senior leadership plays a crucial part in engaging employees, creating a lasting culture of innovation and creativity, and mobilizing the organization towards a common goal. But you're probably also aware that it is no simple task either to encourage senior leaders to communicate with employees on a regular basis, or to help them to do so effectively and with a common, consistent message. So how can you champion, measure and improve your senior leaders' communication? With data from over 1,000 communicators and over 40 in-depth practitioner case studies, **Effective communication from the top** will give you all the answers you need.

This summary gives you an overview of what you'll find in the report's nine chapters:

- 1. Making the business case for senior leadership communication**
- 2. Performance and delivery of senior leadership communication**
- 3. Skills and competencies for senior leaders**
- 4. Attitudes and behaviors of senior leaders**
- 5. Measuring senior leadership communication**
- 6. Communication tools and media**
- 7. Face-to-face communication channels**
- 8. Communication strategies for new leaders**
- 9. Taking a long-term approach to senior leadership communication**

Melcrum's research on senior leadership brings you:

- Benchmark data from best-in-class companies. Learn from the experiences of **AstraZeneca, HP, Michelin** and many others.
- Statistics and results from real-life case studies to prove the business case for improving senior leadership communication – build your case on data from over 1,000 communication practitioners.
- Tried and tested techniques for getting senior leaders more involved in communication.
- Templates, tools and models to help you improve senior leaders' communication and measure the results.
- Advisory articles and top tips from thought leaders including Jim Shaffer, Angela Sinickas, Alaric Mostyn and John Clemons.
- In-depth leadership models to help you understand your senior leaders' behavior and enhance their performance.

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Case study organizations from the full report

AAA-CSAA

Alcatel

Allstate

ArvinMeritor

AstraZeneca

Bayer

BBC

British American Tobacco

BT

Diageo

Eastman Chemical Company

Electronic Data Systems Corporation

GE Healthcare

GlaxoSmithKline

Hallmark

Hewlett-Packard

MacLellan

Marconi

MasterCard International

Michelin North America

Nationwide Building Society

Nedbank

Norwich Union Insurance

Roche

Royal & SunAlliance

ScottishPower

Sensis

Serco

Suncor Energy

The New York Times Company

Wachovia

1. Making the business case for senior leadership communication

That the vital key to internal communication effectiveness in any organization is held by the company's leadership is self-evident to all ... except, in all possibility, your company's leadership. Ultimately, the most compelling argument for change will often come from your own internal employee survey data. Benchmarks and industry findings can help validate and add weight to your findings, but how do you convince your senior leaders that change is necessary, and the impact it can have?

“48% of HR and comms professionals report that the actions of senior leaders are a key driver of employee engagement”

Effective communication from the top gives you case studies from your peers around the world, and provides expert advice from thought leaders including Jim Shaffer, Angela Sinickas, Alaric Mostyn and John Clemons. This chapter collects together some of the richer data from studies over the last few years to help you build the business case for better senior leadership communication.

MARCONI

Showing the value of leadership communication

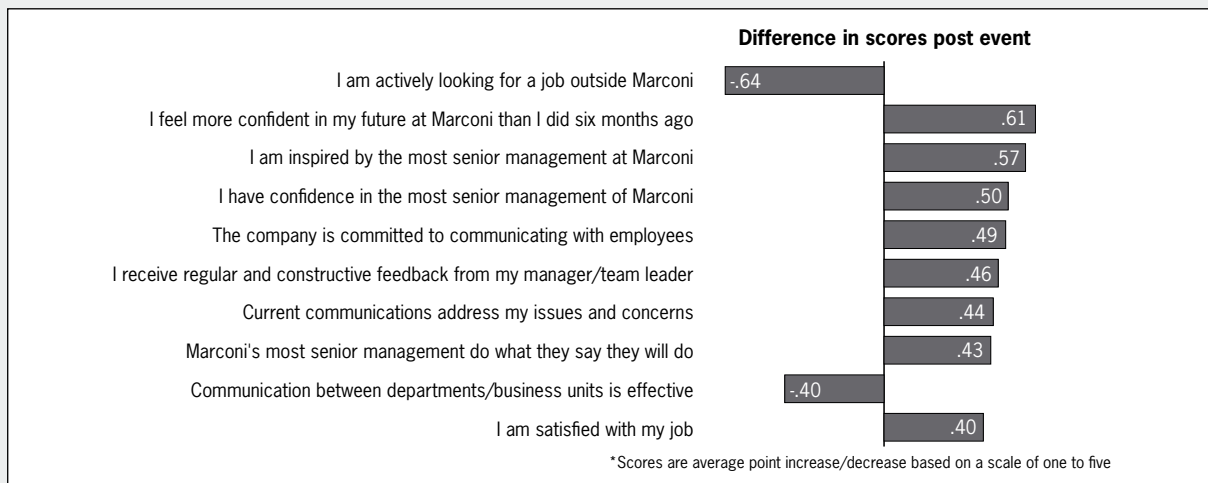
CASE STUDY

Sometimes the most difficult aspect of leadership communication is not convincing leaders to communicate, but showing them the value of their communications after the fact. Helen Johnston, head of internal communications at Marconi, offers one easy way to show executives that their efforts do make a difference.

“I wanted to demonstrate to our leaders the impact of their communications on employee perceptions,” says Johnston. “So during a

run of an employee survey at our site in Nottingham, England, we decided to freeze the survey immediately prior to an executive town hall, and then re-open it again the day after. When we got back the final results, we compared the two sets of scores – before and after – and found a notable increase in ratings after the town hall. The benefit of doing this was that we were able to take this data to the leadership team as proof that their communication with employees matters.”

Fig 2.4: A comparison of employee attitudes before and after an executive town hall at Marconi



2. Performance and delivery of senior leadership communication

The key problems communicators have cited about their senior leaders' involvement in communication have fallen time and again into four areas:

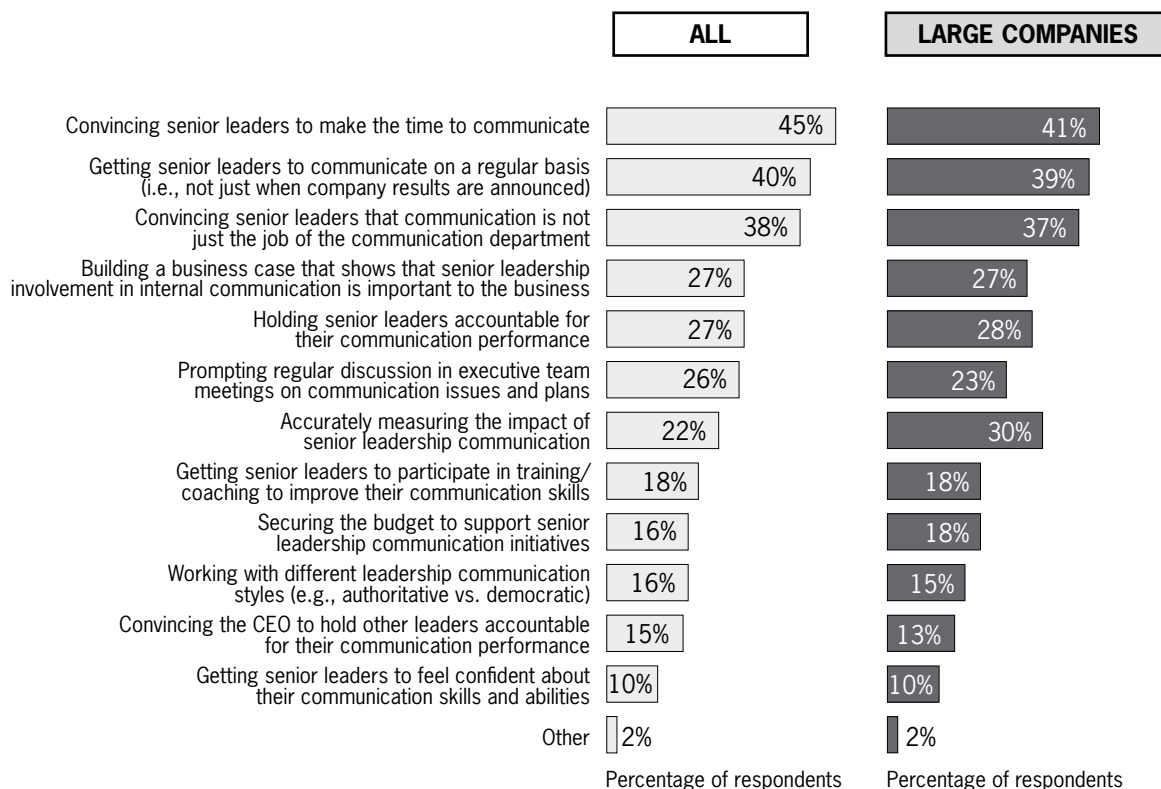
- **Time:** A constant struggle to find enough holes in leaders' schedules to timetable them for regular, formal communication programs with staff.
- **Willingness:** Even where there is the time, improving one's communication capability takes a willingness to do so. There also needs to be a willingness to take responsibility for communication.
- **Skills:** Assuming the leader has the time and is willing, there then follows the labyrinthine and convoluted process of establishing which skills they need to improve, how and when.
- **Behaviors:** The behavioral element breaks down into two parts: The basic need to understand one's own leadership style; and the need for senior managers to accept, attitudinally, their own responsibility to inspire and motivate. "We need more leaders, fewer managers" is currently a familiar soundbite in the internal communication industry.

This chapter looks at the key challenges internal communicators face, and the kind of information their senior leaders should be looking to communicate. With case studies and top tips from companies including AstraZeneca, Diageo, Eastman Chemical Company, EDS, Marconi and Michelin.

Key challenges identified by survey respondents

The data from our global survey further supports the key problems we identified during our interviews. We asked respondents to choose the top three challenges they confront when addressing senior leadership communication. Figure 1 shows the key challenges of all respondents and those in large companies.

Fig 1: The top challenges communicators have confronted with senior leadership communication (All data and large company data; respondents chose three options)



3. Skills and competencies for senior leaders

Most communicators would agree that for a senior leader to successfully communicate their company's vision, different styles, behaviors, actions and rhetoric need to be adopted. However, since no more than three in ten think that their senior leaders have good listening, dialogue or teambuilding skills, this can be a very difficult task.

In this chapter we look at how to go about improving the situation, reviewing the skills barriers senior leaders face and giving you a 'state of the nation' review of their existing abilities. You can also see practical models for leadership competency, and find out about communication training for senior leaders. With case studies, tools and tips from **Bayer, Diageo, MacLellan, Roche, ScottishPower, The New York Times Company** and **Wachovia**.

“Only 27% of communicators think that their senior leaders have good or very good listening skills”

ALCATEL

Get leaders to share their communication insight

Developing the communication skills and competencies of managers coming up the ranks is a good way to ensure future leaders are prepared for their communication responsibilities. One valuable tactic used at Alcatel to educate managers about communication is to invite a current senior manager to share personal insights and lessons learned about communication during the Alcatel Manager Learning Program.

“During the one-day communication module, we invite a senior manager who has been with the company for a number of years (usually over 6-8 years) to come and speak about their communication experience in managing and leading others,” says Catherine Coyle, head of internal communication for Alcatel North America. “We ask the leader to share how they've grown in their roles from an individual contributor to manager, director and so forth. They talk about why they've learned to focus

on communication and share some of the tactics they've tried that have worked well, or tried that have failed.”

One of the most effective senior managers invited to speak at the sessions shared the feedback from his 360-degree review and pointed out disconnects in his communication with his team. He then proceeded to explain how he went about bridging those gaps and the positive impact it had on his team's performance and their working relationships. “He gave tangible examples of overcoming communication challenges and pointed out how they helped him learn and grow to become a more effective leader,” says Coyle. “Hearing these kinds of insights and stories from actual senior leaders in the company has a much more profound effect on managers than if we were to stand up as communicators and tell them communication is important to leadership.”

CASE STUDY

4. Attitudes and behaviors of senior leaders

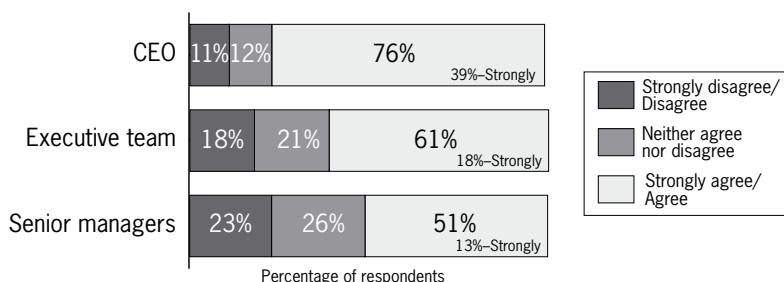
A cornerstone to successful leadership communication is a leader's belief that their role in communicating with employees is important – that it will help to create higher levels of employee engagement, ensuring employees are committed to the company's performance and ultimate success.

Do leaders believe their communication improves business performance?

Communicators globally feel most positive about the communication commitment from their CEO – 76% agree (39% strongly) that their top leader views his/her communication with employees as important to the bottom line (see Figure 2). However, only 51% believe senior managers see the business rationale for greater involvement in internal communication.

“Only 51% of communicators believe that senior managers see the business rationale for greater involvement in internal communication”

Fig 2: Extent to which respondents agree that: “Senior leaders believe their involvement in internal communication is important to business performance.” (All data)



These findings mirror what we heard in our interviews with communication professionals at companies around the world. Senior managers, overwhelmed with their operational and management responsibilities, are a much harder group to penetrate – and it's much more difficult to convince this layer of the potential business impact of more effective communication with employees.

More leaders, fewer managers

The distinction between “leader” and “manager” is a surprisingly new one. For many years, organizations have been led in an autocratic manner by (largely) dictatorial men, with very little appetite for any discussion on subtle distinctions in leadership. With the rise of the human relations movement in business, some of that may have changed, but even as late as 1995 the distinguished Kagan Report was saying that there was little meaningful distinction between leadership and management, and that they were very much the same thing at senior levels of the organization.

This chapter focuses on how understanding leadership styles and behaviors can be the key to unlocking communication improvement. With this knowledge, you can develop strategies which enhance and diversify your leaders' existing style rather than trying to change their personalities. Find out if leaders recognise their role as communicators, which characteristics a senior leader should demonstrate, and what the most common CEO leadership styles are. With case studies from **AAA-CSAA**, **Hallmark** and **ScottishPower**.

5. Measuring senior leadership communication

Staggeringly, despite the enormous influence senior leaders can have on the climate of the organization and the impact of its internal communication, nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents say they do not measure senior leaders' communication performance. Only about one in five say they do (see Figure 3). Communicators in large organizations are slightly more inclined to measure – but only slightly. Overall, 26% claim to measure leaders' communication performance, 57% say they don't.

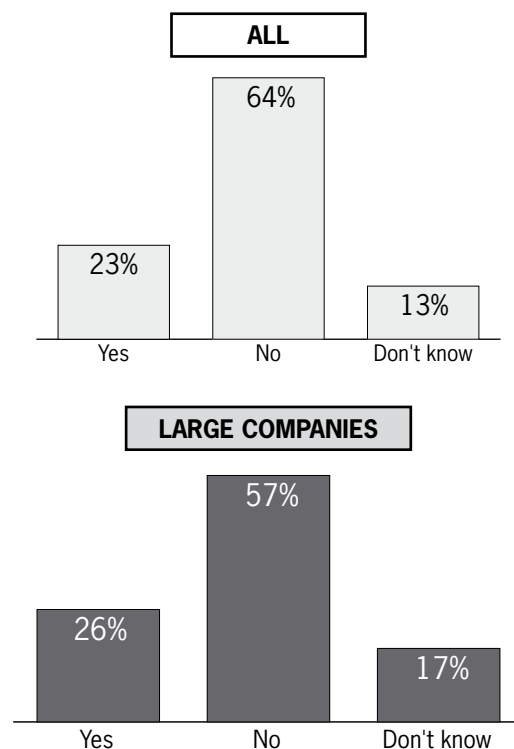
“64% of companies don't measure their senior leaders' communication performance at all”

The top three measures of senior leaders' communication performance

The majority of those who do actually measure performance do so by asking questions on their employee survey – 78% of communicators measure in this way. Over two-thirds (71%) also measure by gathering feedback after senior leadership communication has taken place (eg. feedback forms or surveys after a town hall presentation, conference call, webcast etc.) A large percentage of communicators (70%) also rely on qualitative feedback heard directly from employees.

Effective communication from the top helps you to accurately measure your senior leaders' communication performance. Find out how to hold your leaders accountable, how to constructively feed back results, and what key outcomes you should focus on. You can also benchmark against the strategies top companies like **AAA-CSAA** use to measure their senior leaders' communication performance. With extracts from the employee surveys of **Marconi** and **Suncor Energy**.

Fig 3: Percentage of respondents who measure senior leaders' communication performance (All data; large company data)



6. Communication tools and media

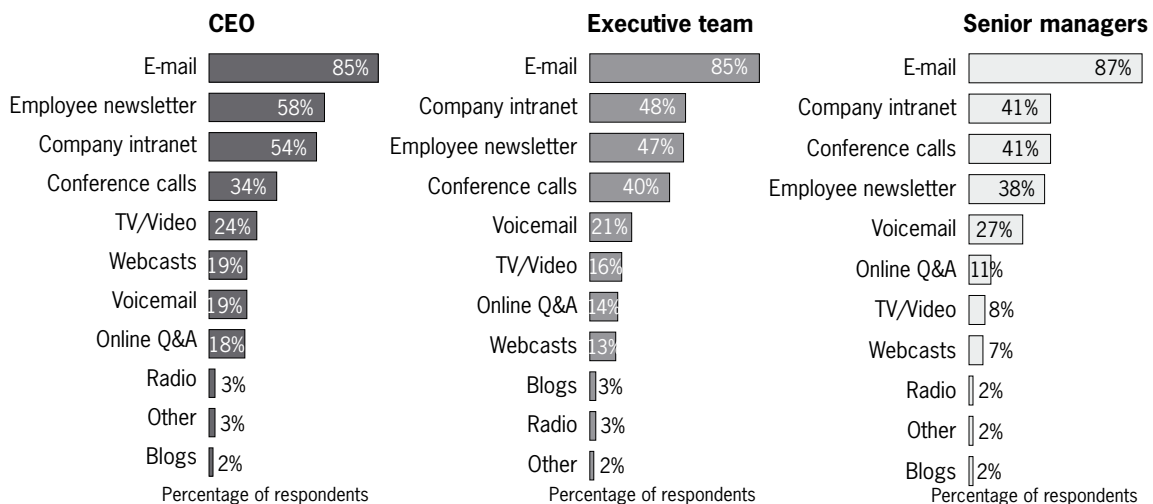
Across the board, e-mail is reported as the predominant communication tool for senior leadership communication. However, employee newsletters and the company intranet are also cited as being common communication channels, especially for CEOs (58% use newsletters, 54% use the intranet) and the executive team (47% use newsletters, 48% use the intranet). For senior managers, conference calls are viewed as an effective communication medium. Presumably, this is accounted for by the preponderance of senior managers who have teams spread across different locations, with whom face-to-face communication is not always a feasible option.

Blogs, despite their growing popularity, are still not used widely by senior leaders (less than 3% of respondents say they use this channel for senior leadership communication). However, judging from the attention blogging has received in communication circles in the last 18 months, and from the interest we observed during our interviews, this percentage is likely to increase.

In fact, one interviewee, Joel Postman from Hewlett-Packard, told us about a new twist on blogging – an HP audio blog – that was created for the busy senior vice president of the company's Software Global, Adaptive Enterprise and Consulting and Integration businesses (the full case study is available in the report).

Fig 4: Communication tools and media used most frequently by senior leaders

(All data; respondents could select more than one channel for each layer of management and therefore percentages will exceed 100% in total)



Although face-to-face communication is ideal, it isn't possible in all circumstances. Chapter six gives you an overview of the best tools (including electronic, telephone and broadcast tools) and channels available to help senior leaders deliver their message while increasing visibility and fostering trust. Including ideas and tips for putting a new spin on the 'standard' suite of tools, and innovative ways for taking a different approach to the tactical side of senior leadership communication. With case studies from companies including **Alcatel, BBC, BT, GlaxoSmithkline, Hewlett-Packard, Marconi, Nationwide Building Society, Royal & SunAlliance, Serco** and **The New York Times Company**.

7. Face-to-face communication channels

Getting senior leaders to communicate face to face, when feasible, will always be considered the best way for them to connect with employees. It's of course the richest form of communication, providing the opportunity for dynamic interaction and two-way discussion.

In addition to looking at tools and media, we also therefore looked at the face-to-face channels in use for senior leadership communication.¹

“It’s important to emphasise that being open will gain a leader more respect than hiding behind closed doors”

Alastair Ham, Director of Organizational Development, Norwich Union

Which face-to-face channels are used with senior leaders?

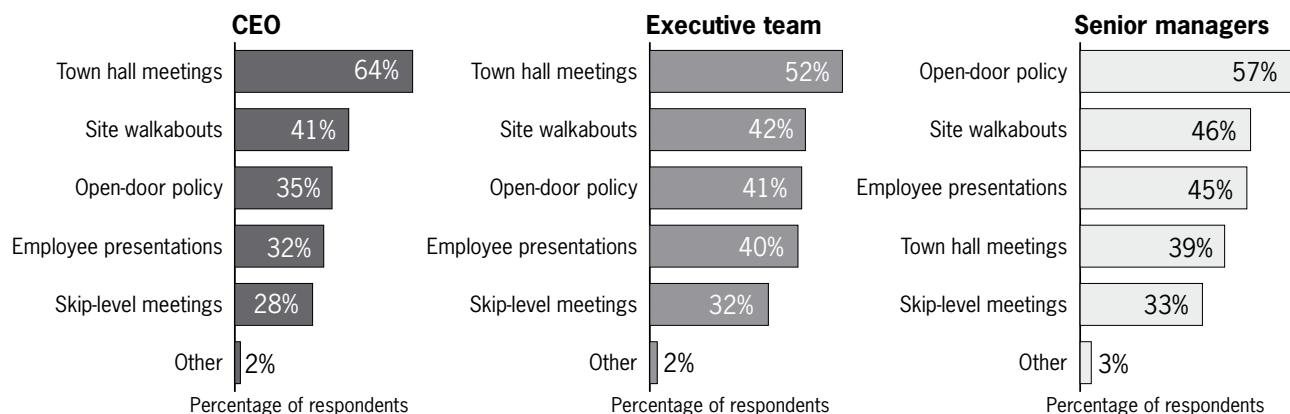
For the CEO and executive team, town hall meetings are the most common face-to-face channel used (64% of respondents say their CEO conducts town hall meetings, 52% also say the same of members of the executive team). For senior managers, this is much less true, for perhaps obvious reasons – town halls are typically used for major announcements or business forums, something at which an executive presence is typically a core part (i.e. it's not that they are underused for senior managers, merely that they are forums devised to allow executives to speak to employees). Yet, this is not to say that they are ineffective for senior managers (as many of our interviewees would testify), and it's therefore perhaps an improvement area for communicators.

¹ We defined face-to-face channels in the following way:

- **Town hall meetings:** Face-to-face gatherings between the leader and employees at a company site (e.g. roadshows).
- **Site walkabouts:** The leader walks around the site and talks with individual or small groups of employees.
- **Skip-level meetings:** Small group discussions between the leader and a cross-section of employees (e.g. a “brown bag” lunch or “coffee talk”).
- **Employee presentations:** For example, product demonstrations by employees to the senior leader, site updates, etc.
- **Open-door policy:** The senior leader's office is “always open” to employees to come and discuss issues.

Fig 5: Face-to-face communication channels used most frequently by senior leaders

(All data; respondents could select more than one channel for each layer of management and therefore percentages will exceed 100% in total)



While other tools and media can help get your senior leaders' message out, none has more value than face-to-face communication. Here we show the most effective methods you can use to enhance two-way communication between senior leaders and employees, and lateral communication between senior managers. Essential information includes John Clemons' roadshow checklist identifying the critical logistical components of employee-executive meetings, and the five top tips for driving upward communication. With case studies from **Alcatel, AstraZeneca, GE Healthcare** and **Marconi**.

8. Communication strategies for new leaders

First impressions are long lasting, which is why it's critical for new senior leaders to build relationships with employees, peers and customers during their first few months in office. In this chapter, we outline the tasks and priorities new senior leaders should focus on during their first 100 days. Find out what the priorities are of new CEOs around the world, how to build a communication plan for the first 100 days, and how to communicate a new leaders' vision.

The quantitative data in this chapter details the priorities for new senior leaders in a cross-section of global companies, with the overwhelming majority of respondents (45%) considering "communicating a clear vision of the future" as the most important.

BRITISH AMERICAN TOBACCO

Build a "CEO brand" in 100 days

The first 100 days are critical for building the brand for your new CEO, says Kate Hogben, internal communications manager at British American Tobacco (formerly of British American Tobacco Australia). "Your focus should be maximizing exposure and developing the new brand." The following are some ideas that worked well for Hogben when she was working for British American Tobacco Australia's CEO, David Fell:

1. Interview the CEO personally as soon as you can, understand his or her personal style and values (brand attributes) so you can start shaping and personalizing his communications profile (e.g., is he an ideas man, a "heart and soul" kind of guy, passionate about performance, demanding but fair, etc.). You are building a brand – don't be afraid to sell a little. But the CEO must, of course, be genuine to be credible.
2. Create impact: get the CEO in front of the whole company at the first opportunity. "We put our CEO on the cover of the company magazine and gave him the opportunity to address all employees at a company event and out in the field on a roadshow tour in his first month."
3. Hasten the CEO's immersion into the business by organizing monthly "buzz groups": informal breakfast or lunch forums with the company's key opinion leaders or connectors (i.e., the networkers). These are not necessary senior management – they should include employees and union and staff council reps. "The idea is to help the CEO connect with employees both to surface the real issues and to use them as a sounding board for new ideas," says Hogben. Employees in turn will create buzz about the CEO's vision, message and personal style. To personalize the invitations to buzz groups, Hogben used a voicemail message from the CEO followed by e-mail to set expectations.
4. Hogben believes it's important early on for the new CEO to be seen shaping, influencing and uniting his top team – the board. Orchestrate opportunities for the top team to be seen to be working together such as shared activities, panel style briefings or an interactive Q&A site on the intranet.
5. Finally, blogs are a great way for the new CEO to share his personal opinions and give employees a sense of his personality. However, this medium works best when your CEO is willing to write and maintain the blog personally.

CASE STUDY

9. Conclusion: Taking a long-term approach to senior leadership communication

Looking at the evidence on what develops effective leaders and compare it with the issues communicators have raised, it's difficult not to conclude that the current mindset towards senior leadership communication often seems resolutely focused on the short-term, tactical "quick fixes" rather than a long-term, strategic approach.

The focus on broad-brush tools

When we have studied the ways organizations work on the communication performance of front-line managers (see the Melcrum report **Making managers better communicators**), our research team came across a number of highly innovative solutions used in organizations around the world. Yet the vast majority of "communication solutions" deployed with senior management seem to be incredibly functional, gravitating around a few core tools (webcasts, voicemails, executive websites, roadshows, etc.) that not only seem to exist in much the same format in every organization, but are largely "broad brush" – mass communication that can be delivered by anyone to a vast audience in seconds. Few of them are tailor-made to a given solution. Few have a measured outcome (other than the delivery of a message). Few, in fact, are ideally suited to two-way communication.

The final chapter explains the benefits of applying a long-term, strategic approach to changing the nature of senior leadership communication. Find out how top communicators are going about this, where the focus of senior leadership communication currently lies, and the efforts that are being made to improve the situation. Including an in-depth case study from **Sensis** on developing a long-term leadership communication strategy.

Fig 6: Taking a short-term vs. a long-term approach

| Short-term/tactical: | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>INTERVENTIONS</p> <p>Broad-brush tools focused on inputs/outputs (webcasts, town halls, roadshows, Q&A, blogs, etc.).</p> | <p>FOCUS</p> <p>Current top leaders – leveraging them and getting them "out there." Major communication responsibility often lies with just one exec.</p> | <p>IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS</p> <p>Training, competencies, etc., generally focused on actions and activities (and skills), and designed to "fix" leaders, not work with them.</p> |
| Long-term/strategic: | | |
| <p>INTERVENTIONS</p> <p>Styled to individual leader, measured and driven by outcomes (trust, vision, etc.) and with good upward channels.</p> | <p>FOCUS</p> <p>Future top leaders – succession planning, building future communication behaviors over time. Current focus with a broader group.</p> | <p>IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS</p> <p>Based on individuals, and based on personal behaviors and styles – designed to complement what they already have.</p> |

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