

Unit 8: Corporate Communication Strategies

Unit code: M/602/2086

QCF Level 7: BTEC Professional

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 30

Unit aim

This unit provides the learner with the understanding and skills to support active engagement in the process of developing corporate communication strategies.

Unit introduction

Organisations today need to plan their communication systems to ensure up-to-date information, knowledge and awareness are always available to all who need them. A corporate communication strategy is the outcome of a strategic thinking process where senior communicators and managers take strategic decisions to identify and manage corporate communications and communicate them to stakeholders.

With or without a formal communication strategy, every organisation communicates with its audience in one way or another. However, to ensure effective relationships with key stakeholders, every corporate organisation requires a dynamic plan that allows it to strategically relate with its customers as well as other key internal and external stakeholders.

Communication is crucial to organisational effectiveness as it is the basis for maintaining pace and of ensuring that change can happen at all levels. It is through the management of sound and coordinated systems of communication that an organisation can integrate its various parts to ensure workforce harmonisation and achieve awareness of its performance.

Effective corporate communication is closely related to the success of the organisation. An organisation's reputation, survival and success rests on its ability to communicate with the public as well as its own employees and stakeholders. When effective corporate communications strategies are incorporated into a business structure, regardless of the size of the organisation, the ability to achieve global communication will be strengthened.

Corporate communication is closely linked to business objectives and strategies. It is the processes an organisation uses to communicate all its messages to key stakeholders. It encodes and promotes a strong corporate culture, a coherent corporate identity, an appropriate and professional relationship with the media, and quick, responsible ways of communicating in a crisis. It is essential if organisations

are to inform and influence external stakeholders, including their customers, and harness the efforts of all internal stakeholders towards the successful accomplishment of organisational objectives.

This unit gives learners an opportunity to look into the design of a communication system within an organisation such as their own workplace, one to which they are seconded, or through an appropriate case study.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria determine the standard required to achieve the unit.

On completion of this unit a learner should:

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
1 Understand the importance of corporate communication	1.1 discuss the purpose of corporate communication strategies 1.2 assess how corporate communications link to corporate objectives 1.3 analyse the relationship between corporate communication and corporate branding
2 Be able to conduct an internal corporate communications audit	2.1 plan an internal corporate communications audit 2.2 conduct an internal corporate communications audit 2.3 critically evaluate the effectiveness of current levels of practice
3 Be able to conduct an external corporate communications audit	3.1 plan an external corporate communications audit 3.2 conduct an external corporate communications audit 3.3 critically evaluate the effectiveness of current levels of practice
4 Be able to plan the development of a corporate communication strategy	4.1 plan the objectives of a corporate communication strategy 4.2 select the audiences to influence with a corporate communications strategy 4.3 plan appropriate measures to monitor a planned corporate communications strategy

Unit content

1 Understand the importance of corporate communication

Purpose: creates an effective bridge between the organisation and the public; creates and reinforces a positive image about an organisation; effective and timely dissemination of information; smooth and affirmative relationship with all stakeholders (internally and externally); allows all employees to understand the vision and direction of an organisation; encodes understanding of communication tools and techniques; encodes sophisticated approaches to global communication; the importance of two-way communication

Links to corporate objectives: supports strategic goals and objectives; supports management and human resources initiatives; helps employees understand organisational strategic goals and objectives and the reasons behind them; promotes strong corporate culture, company loyalty, corporate philosophy, corporate citizenship; promotes transparency and accountability; focuses efforts and resources on the activities and audiences most likely to have the biggest impact on the organisation

Links to corporate branding: communicates the essence of the organisation; promotes confidence in the quality and performance of the organisation's products or services; ensures adherence to corporate brand guidelines; minimises discrepancies between the organisation's desired identity and brand features; clarifies and embeds the brand strategy, brand position, brand identity and brand message

2 Be able to conduct an internal corporate communications audit

Methods: eg planning and launching, surveys, questionnaires, panels, interviews, critical incident analysis, network analysis, participant observation, document review, focus groups; survey participants, channels for distributing survey questions, how to receive completed questionnaires, evaluating and reporting

Internal communication processes: efficient and effective, integrated and coordinated systems; communication channels and flows; the grapevine, networking, conferences, newsletters and company magazines, video conferencing, email and websites, roadshows, seminars, training and appraisals, team meetings, team briefing processes, updating systems, vertical teams, action sets; lateral, downward and upward communication systems; interdepartmental/divisional; information as power; confidentiality and data protection; testing and evaluating information; primary and secondary data; organisational structure and culture; listening skills; megaphone management; unfreezing and selling change; developing synergy; evaluation processes; participation levels; types of strategy; systems thinking; connectivity; learning organisation; intellectual capital and knowledge management; strategic intelligence; decision making and taking

3 Be able to conduct an external corporate communications audit

Methods: eg planning and launching, surveys, questionnaires, panels, interviews, critical incident analysis, network analysis, participant observation, document review, focus groups; online methods eg online surveys, questionnaires, video conferencing; survey participants, channels for distributing survey questions, how to receive completed questionnaires, evaluating and reporting

External communication processes: efficient and effective, integrated and coordinated systems; networking, conferences, partnerships, joint ventures, customer and business forums, action sets; stakeholder inclusiveness and integration; communication channels and flows eg news releases, reports, advertising, online communications, speeches, interviews, websites, social network advertising and discussions eg Facebook, Twitter; developing relationships of trust, creating synergy, connectivity, systems thinking, inter-organisational participation processes, research processes, websites, expert institution linkage; breaking down barriers; information exchange and negotiation; intellectual capital and knowledge management; strategic intelligence; decision making and taking; collaborative advantage; collaborative capability; 'boundaryless' organisations; virtual communications; incrementalism; scenario building; win-win and zero-sum theory

4 Be able to plan the development of a corporate communication strategy

Strategy for effective communications: communications as infrastructure; strategic objectives; strategic implementation; planned and emergent strategies; strategic drift; monitoring versus evaluation; feedback processes; setting and measuring outcomes; action planning; agreeing timescales; cost-benefit analysis; feedback systems; control loop; target revision; regular and exception reporting; surveys and interviews; iterative processes; formal and informal knowledge channels; measuring inputs; processes; outputs and outcomes; quantitative and qualitative measures; 80/20 rule; disseminating awareness; sustainability

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

For learning outcome 1, it is possible that some learners will have had experience of developing aspects of corporate communications in their own organisations. They could be encouraged to share their experiences, which will be a valuable source of discussion. Other learners will be familiar with corporate communications through various forms of media. A useful starting point is to use topical examples of recent issues and events in which corporate communications have played a vital role for organisations. The BP oil well disaster and the British Airways cabin crew strike are good examples of the importance of corporate communication. In both of these examples, the chief executive of the organisation was responsible for communicating the organisation's response to the issues, whilst trying to uphold the image of the organisation on the national and global stage.

Some tutor input will be required on corporate objectives and corporate branding. This could be followed up by learners carrying out research to find appropriate examples of the links between corporate communication, corporate branding and corporate objectives.

For learning outcomes 2 and 3, tutor input will be required on the methodology of conducting audits. Learners need to have a broad knowledge of the range of auditing methods available for internal and external audits. Learners will need to focus on a single organisation, whether it be their own workplace, a work placement or a case study. They will need to select auditing methods that are appropriate and workable in their selected organisation. They could conduct an internal and an external audit of corporate communications in their selected organisation. Working individually or in groups, learners could be encouraged to exchange approaches, findings and options for conducting their audits. Once the audit is complete, learners will have gathered sufficient information on the various methods that the organisation uses to communicate internally and externally. Learners can use this information to evaluate the current levels of practice in the organisation and make judgements about the effectiveness of this practice.

For learning outcome 4, tutor input will be required on corporate communications strategies. A good way of following up this input is to use examples of real corporate communications strategies. Many organisations place their corporate communications strategies on the internet and learners will find this is a valuable source of information. Learners could exchange approaches, findings and options for improving communications internally within an organisation and externally between the organisation, stakeholders and others in its environment. Learners could link up with external organisations such as competitors, customer groups, suppliers and councils or institutions of expertise. Learners need to confirm the value of this information, knowledge and awareness and suggest how it can be gained by the organisation on an ongoing basis and shared appropriately within it. Learners could also develop a process whereby information, knowledge and awareness gained from frontline working can be passed on appropriately throughout the organisation.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments, activities and assessment
Introduction to unit and programme of assignments
Purpose of corporate communications – tutor input and discussion
Links to corporate objectives – research on internet to find examples
Corporate communication and corporate branding – learners research to find examples
Assignment 1: Conducting an Internal Audit
Tutor input and guidance
Assignment 1: Conducting an Internal Audit
Planning the audit, deciding on methods to be used, conducting the audit, evaluating the results
Assignment 2: Conducting an External Audit
Tutor input and guidance
Assignment 2: Conducting an External Audit
Planning the audit, deciding on methods to be used, conducting the audit, evaluating the results
Assignment 3: Planning the Development of a Corporate Communication Strategy
Tutor input and guidance
Assignment 3: Planning the Development of a Corporate Communication Strategy
Review of unit and programme of assignments

Assessment

To generate appropriate evidence, learners will need to research information and make decisions based on their findings. The internal and external audits and the planning of a corporate communications strategy will develop from the choices made as a result of learner research.

For AC1.1, learners need to show that they understand the crucial role that corporate communication plays in organisations. This needs to be more than just a simple statement. Learners need to expand the discussion, taking into account a number of points such as image, standards, stakeholders, vision and the global nature of communication.

For AC 1.2 and 1.3, there are opportunities to link the requirements for corporate objectives and corporate branding to the organisation learners will use to conduct audits. Learners need to assess how corporate communications link to corporate objectives and analyse the relationship between corporate communication and corporate branding. This can be developed as an introductory section to the audits conducted to cover the assessment criteria in learning outcomes 2 and 3.

For AC 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3, learners need to conduct an internal and an external audit of corporate communication in a selected organisation. This will involve learners demonstrating that they have planned the audits before conducting them. If a 'live' organisation is used, this may require consultation with appropriate personnel within the organisation. The audit of external stakeholders can be particularly sensitive. Learners need to seek approval and permission from appropriate personnel for the methods they intend to use. Learners will be required to select appropriate methods of conducting internal and external audits which may or may not be the same for both audits. This will depend on a variety of factors such as the type and size of the organisation and the methods that are feasible in the circumstances. Once the audits are completed, learners will have a bank of information on current corporate communication practice within the organisation. They need to use this information to critically evaluate the effectiveness of current levels of corporate communication practice in the organisation.

For AC4.1, it is not expected that learners will develop a comprehensive corporate communication plan. Learners need to plan the objectives of a corporate communication strategy for their chosen organisation. The objectives will develop out of the communications audits and the evaluation of current levels of corporate communications practice used as evidence for the assessment criteria in learning outcomes 2 and 3.

For AC4.2, learners need to select the audiences they want to influence with their corporate communications strategy. The nature and size of the audience will depend on the nature and size of the organisation. The selected audience needs to be appropriate and include internal and external stakeholders.

For AC4.3, learners need to plan appropriate measures to monitor their planned communication strategy. The measures need to be workable, cost effective and clearly linked to the strategy.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the criteria in the assessment grid. This is for guidance only and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Assessment criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
AC 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3	Conducting an Internal Audit	Internal corporate communications audit of a selected organisation.	Audit report
AC 3.1, 3.2, 3.3	Conducting an External Audit	External corporate communications audit of a selected organisation.	Audit report
AC 4.1, 4.2, 4.3	Planning the Development of a Corporate Communication Strategy	Planning for development of a corporate communication strategy in a selected organisation.	Report

Essential resources

There are no essential resources required for this unit.

Indicative resource materials**Textbooks**

Argenti P A – *Strategic Corporate Communication: A Global Approach for Doing Business in the New India* (McGraw-Hill Professional, 2008) ISBN 0071549919

Avgerou C – *Information Systems and Global Diversity* (Oxford University Press, 2003) ISBN 0199263426

Beyerlein M M and Harris C L – *Guiding the Journey to Collaborative Work Systems: A Strategic Design Workbook* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) ISBN 0787967882

Clarke S – *Information Systems Strategic Management: An Integrated Approach* (Routledge, 2006) ISBN 041538186X

Clutterbuck D and Hirst S – *Talking Business: Making Communication Work* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2003) ISBN 0750654996

Dawson R – *Living Networks: Leading Your Company, Customers and Partners in the Hyper-Connected Economy* (Financial Times/Prentice Hall, 2002) ISBN 0130353337

Galliers R and Leidner D E – *Strategic Information Management: Challenges and Strategies in Managing Information Systems, 3rd Edition* (Butterworth-Heinemann, 2002) ISBN 0750656190

Holtz S – *Corporate Conversations: A Guide to Crafting Effective and Appropriate Internal Communications* (Amacom, 2003) ISBN 0814407706

Little S E, Quintas P and Ray T (Eds) – *Managing Knowledge* (Sage Publications, 2001) ISBN 0761972137

McKenzie J and van Winkelen C – *Understanding the Knowledgeable Organization: Nurturing Knowledge Competence* (Thomson Learning, 2003) ISBN 1861528957

O Hair D, Friedrich G W and Dixon L D – *Strategic Communication in Business and the Professions, 5th Edition* (Houghton Mifflin, 2004) ISBN 0618432493

Ormeno M – *Managing Corporate Brands: A New Approach to Corporate Communication* (duv, 2007) ISBN 3835007815

Journals/magazines

Most general management journals will contain some relevant articles and these are listed together with more specialised journals.

Academy of Management Journal (Academy of Management)

British Journal of Management (John Wiley and Sons)

California Management Review (University of California, Berkeley)

European Management Journal (Elsevier)

Harvard Business Review (Harvard Business Publishing)

Information Age (Vitesse Media Plc)

Information Management (SourceMedia)

Information Technology and People (Emerald)

Inside Knowledge (Waterlow Legal and Regulatory Limited)

Journal of Communication Management (Emerald)

International Journal of Information Management (Elsevier)

Journal of Information Technology (Palgrave Macmillan)

Journal of Management Studies (John Wiley and Sons)

Management Today (Haymarket Business Media)

MIT Sloan Management Review (Massachusetts Institute of Technology)

Organization (Sage Publications)

Organization Studies (Sage Publications)

Strategic Communication Management (Melcrum)

Websites

en.wikipedia.org	Article on strategic communication and further links
www.idea.gov.uk	Local Government Improvement and Development – developing a strategic communication strategy in the public sector which equally applies to the private sector
www.managementhelp.com	Articles on strategic planning
www.odi.org.uk	Overseas Development Institute – how to write a communications strategy
www.tomorrowscompany.com	A research organisation – a useful source for articles