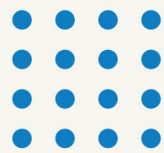# INCLUSIVE INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Pathways, Practices and Perspectives to Enhance Clarity, Build Connections and Gain Commitment for Organizational Success

Aniisu K Verghese Ph.D.

From the author of
Internal Communications – Insights, Practices & Models (2012) and **Get Intentional (2021)**

Contents

Introduction

This book is a follow-up to the first one I wrote on internal communications in 2012. A decade later – and what a world we live in today!

We have indeed come a long way – from Gangnam Style becoming the most liked video on YouTube (2012) to the Paris Agreement signing to fight global climate change (2016); from France winning the World Cup (2018) to Avengers: Endgame becoming the highest grossing movie of all time (2019). COVID-19 infects 81 million and kills over 1.8 million (2021), the war continues in Eastern Europe and a looming recession creates concerns for citizens around the world in 2022.

The world population reached 8 billion on November 15, 2022, according to the United Nations. An app called Chat GPT, based on artificial intelligence can create text conversationally and creatively that threatens to disrupt the future of many occupations, including communications.

These changes, especially the shift to digital and remote working have had a profound impact on the state of engagement and communication in organizations and upended how leaders and managers must connect, inspire and improve business effectiveness.

In the first book, I introduced internal communications and shared perspectives on a few topics that can support newbie professionals make inroads in their careers. Also, more seasoned practitioners address workplace challenges and concerns, especially on key topics such as building and coaching a team, crisis communications and messaging. I did delve deeper into what internal communications meant for India as a market through insights from the industry surveys conducted back then.

This edition takes the story forward by advancing more themes that will strengthen the practitioner's understanding of the subject as well as continue the dialog in the context of the world we live in. As work, workforces and workplaces shift dramatically post-pandemic, there is no

doubt that we can't continue to operate in the same way we did previously. Needs have changed, technologies evolved, and staff expectations have transformed like never before. However, what has stayed the same is the constant need to communicate accurately, consistently and authentically. I offer version 2.0 of the Internal Communications Framework that puts stakeholders at the heart of the communication as well as provides a line of sight on organizational success. Throughout this book, I refer to elements from Framework 2.0.

This book addresses current issues that organizations face and focuses on practical solutions that leaders can implement to improve their clout, delight their stakeholders and make their communication credible and complete. It covers topics such as manager communication, leadership presence, social media networks, culture, communicating with diverse workforces and the future of the function.

What is Inclusive Internal Communications?

Inclusive Internal Communications is more than just a buzzword or a trendy phrase in the corporate world. It is a powerful tool that can help organizations achieve their goals and create a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation. The concept of Inclusive Internal Communications is all about involving and engaging staff, inviting them to share their ideas and feedback, and making communication accessible and intuitive. By doing so, organizations can build trust, increase productivity, and enhance their internal brand and reputation.

To achieve Inclusive Internal Communications, internal communicators must be willing to let go of control and focus on providing autonomy and choice to staff. This means creating a culture where staff feel empowered to share their ideas and feedback, and where communication is seen as a two-way dialogue rather than a one-way information flow. Internal communicators must also be open to new ideas and tap into the power and potential of employees as ambassadors and advocates of change.

The pandemic has brought about many changes in the workplace, and the role of internal communicators has become more important than ever. As organizations navigate through uncertainty and change, internal communicators must provide clarity, reassurance, and support to staff.

They must also be able to adapt to new technologies and tools, such as natural language processing and artificial intelligence, to stay ahead of the curve and continue to scale their impact.

Inclusive Internal Communications is not just about the here and now, but also about the future. It is about creating a culture of continuous improvement and learning, where professionals can assess, analyze, and assert their authority. This book offers valuable guidance, tips, and tricks for internal communicators, as well as students, prospective communicators, and academicians who are interested in the evolving function of internal communications.

INCLUSIVE Framework

The INCLUSIVE Framework emphasizes the importance of involving staff, partnering with employees, and crowdsourcing solutions for communication and business effectiveness.

I - Involve all staff: It's important to involve all the staff in your communication strategy, not just senior leaders or managers. This means creating opportunities for all the staff to provide input, feedback, and ideas, and actively seeking out their perspectives and insights.

N - Nurture partnerships: Building partnerships with employees is the key to creating a culture of inclusivity and collaboration. This involves establishing open channels of communication, seeking out employee input and feedback, and creating opportunities for employees to contribute to decision-making processes.

C - Co-create solutions: Co-creating solutions with employees can lead to more effective and sustainable outcomes. This involves crowdsourcing ideas and solutions from employees, inviting their participation in problem-solving, and valuing their contributions to the process.

L - Leverage employee insights: Leveraging the insights and expertise of employees can help organizations make better decisions and achieve better outcomes. This involves tapping into the diverse skills, knowledge, and experiences of employees and incorporating their insights into decision-making processes.

U - Use inclusive language and actions: Inclusive language and actions are essential to building a culture of respect, equity, and belonging. This involves avoiding language and behaviors that are discriminatory, exclusionary, or insensitive, and creating an environment where all employees feel valued and included.

S - Share stories of employee contributions: Sharing stories of employee contributions can inspire and engage others, and help to build a culture of collaboration and innovation. This involves recognizing and celebrating employee achievements, sharing their success stories, and showcasing their contributions to the organization.

I - Invite ideas and feedback: Inviting ideas and feedback from employees is essential to creating a culture of continuous improvement. This involves creating channels for employee feedback, actively seeking out their ideas and suggestions, and valuing their contributions to the organization.

INCLUSIVE Framework

V - Value employee talent: Valuing employee talent means recognizing and leveraging the unique skills and expertise of each employee. This involves providing opportunities for employee development and growth, recognizing their contributions to the organization, and creating a culture of continuous learning.

E - Evaluate and evolve with employee input: Evaluating and evolving your communication strategy should involve input and feedback from employees. This involves tracking progress, soliciting feedback and ideas, and making adjustments based on employee input and insights.

By refining and improving on the INCLUSIVE Framework, leaders and internal communications professionals can create a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation that leverages the talent and insights of all employees to achieve better outcomes for the organization.

In essence, Inclusive Internal Communications is a crucial aspect of any organization that seeks to create a culture of inclusivity, collaboration, and innovation. It is about involving and engaging staff, making communication accessible and intuitive, and tapping into the power and potential of employees as ambassadors and advocates of change. With the guidance and insights provided in this book, internal communicators can continue to scale their impact and reclaim their position of authority in a world that thrives on chaos.

Why this book?

Internal communication continues to evolve as a function and my last book in 2012 touched upon relevant key themes then – basics of internal communications, building and coaching a team, measuring value, crisis communication, employee engagement, social media, leadership communication and messaging.

Today, five generations are working side by side in organizations and this brings with it challenges and opportunities for leaders and managers. Internal communications play a key role in influencing how organizations of the future will operate and what will inspire and motivate employees to go the extra mile at work. The reason this book is called 'Inclusive Internal Communications' is because organizations that invest in listening, involving and partnering with staff while conducting internal communications will be more successful than those that haven't. Unfortunately, issues of fear of losing

control, a lack of trust and the inability to truly understand employees and their needs are preventing organizations from harnessing the potential of this paradigm shift. Command and control don't work anymore. Employees are co-owners of brands and have significant clout to influence them. The ability of internal communications to transform from within is understated and probably undervalued. This is what the book helps uncover.

How can you leverage this book

This book provides practical checklists, plan templates and more to help internal communicators manage the complex world of work and the workplace. It discusses pertinent issues such as internal reputation, the influence of managers, the value of employee involvement, and the appeal of communications in the future.

Each chapter delves into the specific topic followed by an Internal Communication Hack segment, an interview with a leading professional from around the world and a reflection to give you food for thought. The Internal Communications Framework 2.0 navigates you through the essentials needed for appreciating this evolving domain.

As an internal communication professional, you will benefit by referring to the research-led insights and action plans. If you are a leader, you will gain from strategic reasoning and real-world scenarios and if you are an academician helping students understand internal communications better, this book will enable you to better equip them with a deeper understanding of the subject.

You can use this book as a reference to steer conversations, spark a debate or instill a sense of appreciation for what internal communicators, leaders and staff encounter and manage at the workplace.

You can leverage the resources – such as checklists and interviews at the end of the book to implement solutions at your workplace.

As always, you are welcome to visit my blog Intraskope (*www.aniisu.com*) which has over 800 articles, case studies, interviews and checklists and share perspectives on any of the chapters so that other readers can benefit from your point of view.

As you browse the book and you want to share your thoughts, do feel free to share a comment on my blog or drop me a mail at *aniisu3@gmail.com*

The Inside Story

The evolution of internal communications from a fledgling domain to one of the fastest-growing functions in the corporate communication and public relations realm has been fascinating, to say the least. In this chapter, I reflect on the milestones, challenges and opportunities for the function.

The Inside Story

When I started my career many years ago, the best example of internal communications was the CEO calling everyone on the floor for an impromptu meeting or a status conversation on client billing. The notice board at the reception area allowed all staff to get updates while strolling past it. It also helped that we had just a handful of team members to communicate with and meeting people in person served well. Those days, making calls meant using a fixed line rather than a hand-held device, which was highly-priced. Connecting to staff on the move meant 'paging' them and waiting for them to call you back!

After I moved to the client side, I realized that organizations struggled with getting staff on the same page due to locational, time zone and generational differences. Cascading the CEO's message meant having a group of traveling executives connect in person when they visited far-flung sales and customer-facing offices. Packaging the content on a *compact disc* and hoping it played right when the leaders finally descended at the sites left a lot to chance. The thought of having a central intranet and a newsletter in print meant identifying site champions who doubled up say extended communications resources to solicit local content and the eyes and ears on the ground. The intranet was slowly getting more mainstream at companies that had many employees to reach and share common resources and harness knowledge. In one of my earlier organizations, a person was hired to focus

on knowledge management and make the portal a way of life. The function was gaining visibility as an important role and due to the paucity of talent in the market professionals from advertising, public relations, media and event management firms contributed to the initial batches to enter the corporate communications teams. The hope was that they would learn 'on the job' and figure out things. Leading multinational companies planted their key leaders to handhold and guide teams as they evolved.

Investing in growing skills and competencies

The lack of core skills meant that investment in training and development in teaming and writing, presentation among other aspects got attention. With the rise in competition among organizations hiring top talent created opportunities for employer branding experts who straddled the worlds of human capital and employee engagement. The media department got an impetus with funding and headcount. Integration was talked about in passing although there were few examples to demonstrate holistic communication with stakeholders. Employee events were mostly viewed as fun stuff for keeping the morale of staff and little thinking existed on connecting the dots with experience and measurement. Employee annual surveys were a way to gauge the pulse of the organization.

As organizations matured, engagement with stakeholders increased and technology communications got more integrated, the risks in terms of information security, social media mishaps and briberies soared and more investment in governance and standards appeared. Which also meant having specialists in risk, legal and information security matters to avoid reputational damage to the brand. Academic institutions began engaging with industry professionals on guest lectures and creating much-needed courses to churn out freshly minted communications professionals with an understanding of events, media relations, engagement and digital media.

Tackling newer challenges

This time is when start-ups began out-performing the market with salaries that were envious to those in the media organizations attracting communicators in hordes. To gain speed and implement time-to-market strategies organizations looked to creative and boutique agencies to turn

around solutions that internal teams were unable to comprehend. At some point when the account manager in the agency gained sufficient experience and expertize, the person moved in-house to integrate with the team.

With videos and social media getting hotter the skills needed to create effective content became the need of the hour. Issues that organizations faced were attrition and oversized ambitions. CEOs and leaders realized the importance of engaging staff and connecting them to the purpose rather than just throwing benefits and perks.

The future of the function and communicators

From active listening and interventions to using Artificial Intelligence[2] to detect unrest and message dissonance before they become full-blown crises; from tapping analytics to coach managers and leaders on personalized communication practices to seamlessly integrating internal and external communications, there are many opportunities ahead for the team. The role of communication will be at the intersection of technology, marketing, company culture and engagement. The communicator will evolve to be a prolific connector (if not already), community facilitator, conscience keeper, advocacy champion and culture curator.

Internal Communication Framework 2.0

To be able to get the most out of internal communications, it is important to have a strong communication culture within. A framework that allows organizations to focus on aligning with the strategic priorities and for internal communicators to progress the corporate narrative through a systematic approach.

This framework can help internal communication professionals and leaders build a strong communication culture where employees are engaged, and they are committed to the organization's strategic goals.

The framework is divided into multiple segments – an appreciative approach, an evaluation approach, an implementation approach and an assessment approach.

To appreciate the current state of internal communications, the professional needs to assess where the team and organization are, what are the leading factors and what indicators will improve the current

status, The professional can draw from insights from existing or ongoing studies, focus groups or research reports that provide an understanding of the communication team and organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Adding to these insights is an assessment of the current set of channels and communication content. Based on this, the leader or communicator will need to either invest in better resources or training so that the team is in a good spot to manage budgets and expectations. The assessment of the audience will also help you know how satisfied employees with the communication are and how involved are they with the messages – two good measures to give a sense of what interventions are needed.

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To appreciate the current state of internal communications, the professional needs to assess where the team and organization are, what are 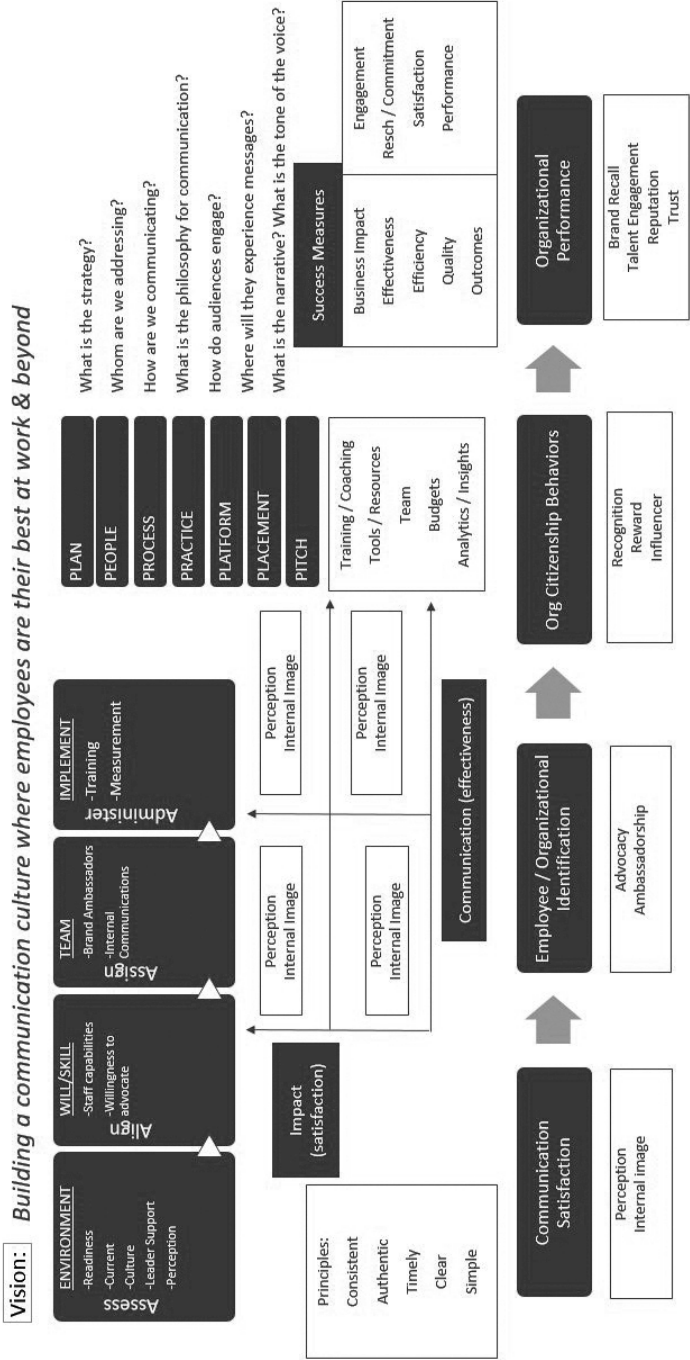the leading factors and what indicators will improve the status, The professional can draw from insights from existing or ongoing studies, focus groups or research reports that provide an understanding of the communication team and organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Adding to these insights is an assessment of the current set of channels and communication content. Due to this, the leader or communicator will need to either invest in better resources or training so that the team is in a good spot to manage budgets and expectations. The assessment of the audience will also help you know how satisfied employees are with the communication and how involved they are with the messages – two good measures to give a sense of what interventions are needed.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK 2.0

Vision: *Building a communication culture where employees are their best at work & beyond*

What is the strategy?
Whom are we addressing?
How are we communicating?
What is the philosophy for communication?
How do audiences engage?
Where will they experience messages?
What is the narrative? What is the tone of the voice?

PLAN
PEOPLE
PROCESS
PRACTICE
PLATFORM
PLACEMENT
PITCH

Success Measures

Business Impact	Engagement
Effectiveness	Resch / Commitment
Efficiency	Satisfaction
Quality	Performance
Outcomes	

Organizational Performance

Brand Recall
Talent Engagement
Reputation
Trust

Training / Coaching
Tools / Resources
Team
Budgets
Analytics / Insights

Org Citizenship Behaviors

Recognition
Reward
Influencer

IMPLEMENT (Administer)
- Training
- Measurement

TEAM (Assign)
- Brand Ambassadors
- Internal Communications

WILL/SKILL (Align)
- Staff capabilities
- Willingness to advocate

ENVIRONMENT (Assess)
- Readiness
- Current
- Culture
- Leader Support
- Perception

Perception / Internal Image

Communication (effectiveness)

Employee / Organizational Identification

Advocacy
Ambassadorship

Impact (satisfaction)

Principles:
Consistent
Authentic
Timely
Clear
Simple

Communication Satisfaction

Perception / Internal image

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Figure 1: Internal Communication Framework 2.0

As a professional, some principles for communicating internally are universal– to be consistent, authentic, timely, clear and simple. The internal communicator needs to then rely on the 7Ps of internal communications – have a **Plan**, consider the **People** (audiences), know the **Process** (how to communicate), appreciate the **Practice** (the context of the communication as well as the culture), decide the **Platform** (which mediums to use), focus on the **Placement** (know how to get the message across and how the experience will be) and lastly, the **Pitch** (the narrative that will be most suited for the audience).

From a practice standpoint, when employees are satisfied with the communication they receive, they are positive about the internal image of the organization. This leads to their identification with the organization at large, exhibiting ambassadorship and advocacy for the brand. When this happens, the employee is also demonstrating extra-social and contextual performance (over and above their role) that helps the organization more than expected. At this stage, they are influencers and can make a larger impact on the organization in terms of performance. The reputation and trust of the organization improve when employees go the extra mile leading to positive sentiments in the networks these employees advocate the brand.

As you go through this book, you will be able to reflect on the principles, apply this framework and bring it to life at your workplace.

Internal Communication Hack
Building presence: The internal communication function can gain credibility by conducting outreach practices. Get a slot in the company's orientation program and catch up with new hires. Talk to them about their interests and also about how they can add value as communicators. Provide examples of how other employees have made an impact. For example, in my earlier workplaces, creative staff came up with ideas to build the company's virtual tour that enhanced how prospective candidates perceived the brand. In another firm, employees (along with the communications team), created, curated and communicated a channel of their own making – a podcast series that was well-received and served as one of the most important channels to communicate updates.

Reflections

Setting Your Gold Standard for Internal Communications

How do your stakeholders view the function and how do you view internal communications benchmarks? While there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach for internal communications it helps to step back and ask the following questions:

1. **How do you want your stakeholders to perceive your team and you?**
    Competent? Capable? Thought leader? Predictable? Creative? Problem solver? Change manager? Partner?

2. **If your organization didn't have an internal communications function but wanted one what would be the drivers for your business case?**
    Keep employees informed? Aligning staff to organizational goals? Build and manage infrastructure and channels? Create capabilities in the organization? Coach leaders, to be effective communicators? Support managers in their role as communicators? Improving reach? Ensuring consistency? Enhancing quality? Upholding brand standards?

3. **How will you know if you are successful as a function?**
    Knowing the value you add? Measuring the value? When stakeholders acknowledge the value you add? If there is growing interested in your services and offerings? If leaders seek more support?

    When I mulled over these questions it became increasingly apparent that setting a gold standard meant thinking of internal communications in the larger context of the organization's goals and understanding industry benchmarks.

From an organizational context, I believe it hinges on the following parameters:
*   The organization's position in its journey to be a top player in the industry
*   The organization's stand on internal communication
*   The various partners that support the delivery and excellence of internal communications
*   The willingness to adapt to change
*   The openness to accept feedback from staff

In the context of industry standards:
*   The team's skills and capabilities
*   The leadership's openness to build competencies
*   Knowing the current level and strengths of the team
*   Having an internal communication strategy and plan
*   Supporting the team with requisite budgets and resources
*   Building infrastructure to support the team's effort

————————— Interview —————————

Communication Alignment | Zora Artis – GAICD, SCMP | Brand & Communication Strategist, Mentor and Strategic Adviser

How important is connecting the dots within organizations? In what ways can we get employees to gain organizational clarity? I had the opportunity to pose these questions to Zora Artis, a globally acclaimed communications brand and marketing leader and the 2022 Chair of the IABC World Conference and past Chair of IABC in the APAC Region. As an award-winning communicator and Australia's leading Alignment Strategist, she has worked with leaders, executives and boards for over three decades to ensure their organization's structure, leadership, people, brand, communication and culture, synchronizes to support their strategy and purpose. Her goal is to unlock organizational value, create professional alignment, and build personal connections.

▶ You can also watch this interview on YouTube.

I invited Zora to address the need for communication alignment and what it takes for leaders and organizations to get there. She also shared her thoughts on the evolving communications function and why communicators must invest more in gaining alignment.

"It's all about organizational clarity and bringing people together around a shared purpose and values to achieve better results for an organization so an aligned organization is a high-performing organization. I mean it does deliver on its promises to its people, to its customers, to the broader community and to stakeholders overall. So, it's not just about the bottom line, when we're talking about alignment with corporate strategy," says Zora.

1. **A lot is spoken about communication alignment with corporate strategy. What does it mean and what does it take?**
    I think you must go back to what alignment is all about. And to me, it's all about organizational clarity and bringing people together around a shared purpose and values to achieve better results for an organization so an aligned organization is a high-performing organization. I mean

it does deliver on its promises to its people, to its customers, to the broader community and stakeholders overall. So, it's not just about the bottom line. When we're talking about alignment with corporate strategy, it is about ensuring that our people get what we are about, so they understand our purpose and our story, our corporate strategy that aligns to the purpose and they get it, they buy into it. They're prepared to share, and they ultimately live it on a day-to-day basis. So not only do they understand what the strategy is, what you're trying to achieve, how it how it's going to be achieved, but they also understand what their role is in that and they enthusiastically are part of that whole process. I don't believe that you can look at alignment from the perspective of "it's a one-off exercise." We can't just do this as a project and achieve it and then move on to the next thing. It's an emergent thing – it happens over time, and you can consistently have to work on it.

2. **Why is it important for communicators to 'connect the dots' inside and outside the organization?**

I genuinely believe so. I come from a background in marketing and brand and business before I stepped into the comp space. So, I've always had this holistic perspective, that it's important to have a good overview of what's happening around you whether it's externally or internally and then look at how the two mesh together. There's an analogy that I like to use that I picked up last year because I am passionate about alignment. I did a program through Oxford's Said Business School on strategic alignment. Last year, we were talking about different analogies and one of the analogies that we were using is the dance floor analogy. So, if you're busy on the dance floor, you're dancing with a partner or other people you're immersed in that. Imagine that you take a step back and you're up on the balcony observing the dance floor. You get a completely different perspective. You can see much more you can see what's happening. You can see where the opportunities are and then you're able to connect the dots. So, when you're looking outside, you can have a better appreciation of risk, in that case, the risk is not always negative. It can also be an opportunity. You can see what the trends are. You're not being insular, so you don't fall asleep at the wheel and from a competitive perspective. You can take advantage of the opportunities that are out there or trends that are happening. You can see what's

happening in other sectors and bring that back into the organization as an opportunity for your organization. It's about learning as much as possible beyond your immediate parameters. So, being curious, be curious about not just what's happening in your organization, but what's happening outside in your market but also in the areas that impact the market that you're in or impact. Maybe substitute areas that could potentially have an impact on your space. So, it's not wanting to have that view completely.

3. **Please share an example of an organization that has done 'alignment' well and the benefits you have observed.**
    One of the standouts to me is an engineering and design thinking firm called Aurecon. They're based across Australia, New Zealand and Asia. They used to be in the Middle East and Africa also and they have about 6000 staff and they're they've been recently voted, Australia's and New Zealand's most innovative company. They're outstanding when it comes to strategic alignment. So, they're very progressive in terms of their approach in terms of how they put together what they call their DNA. It's their purpose, their values and their vision. They all understand what that is. They have clear goals that they've set up. They have three key pillars of the company strategy that all staff completely understand, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Early on, as the pandemic spread, because of their footprint in Asia, they're also looking outside. They work with lots of different types of industries. They had a sense of what was happening. So, they were well positioned for COVID and knew how they were going to approach it. Their priority was looking at the health and safety of the well-being of their employees and the well-being of their employees. They understood the inherent risks of switching from communicating a crisis response to building abroad, much broader resilience. They have also shifted from, you know, to communicating in that remote working space but reimagining how that future of work is for them now and later. And then they recognize their people through that whole process. So, they have a lot of focus on the experience the employee experiences within the organization but also the client experience. They put a great deal of emphasis on that and making sure that people within their organization

understand where they're going and what their part in that process or that journey is there in terms of their results. They maintain their employee engagement through last year. They said that most of their employees that were well supported through the pandemic. And they achieved and delivered on a budget in terms of their financial year. And they're also ahead for this year. They went forward. They got the most innovative award as well. So, they managed to completely change and adapt to the situation and adopt what we would call the future of work into today and now that's how they are working. So, they're an amazing organization.

4. **How can communicators get better at gaining alignment and providing a line of sight to staff?**

I think it's about being quite transparent and open. I recently wrote a blog post after being quite privileged to be involved in a conversation with Sally Sussman, the Executive VP and the Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at Pfizer. And they only recently redid their strategy about a couple of years, just maybe two years ago now. They redid the strategy with the new CEO coming on board in that same period, Albert Bourla who has been with the organization for a couple of decades I believe. However, the CEO role is new to him. And the communications team was integral in redefining their purpose statement. The purpose is still the same, but the purpose narrative in the statement has altered how they communicate their strategy. This formed the core of what they did. And they are constantly sharing and telling the story about their work. They're challenging their people. They're sharing progress. They have put the term transparency has now become commonplace in their organization. However, if you've worked with pharmaceutical firms, and I've worked with different ones over the years, they don't necessarily share a lot of information openly. This situation has completely flipped that on its head because they've had to end. It's benefited their organization. They're listening and looking for innovation. They're challenging their people to live their values and you know, live that purpose genuinely. So, you know, it's about allowing the employees to participate, to engage and to help them co-design.

Allow them to test new ideas to occasionally fail but remember to reflect on what did they learn from that sort of stuff? So, observation pays and having a look at what's happening in the organization comes naturally. Identifying those gaps and opportunities that exist for alignment. It's one of those things that you constantly must be on the lookout for.

There's a process that I do which is looking at gaps in terms of alignment. There's a diagnostic tool that I use in the facilitation process. And that looks at alignment in teams, whether it's executive, senior or functional teams, and you go through and understand if there are gaps. In understanding a purpose, values, strategy, team behaviors, cohesion, psychological safety and a whole series of different things. And after you go through that you wonder, what's missing? What's important to us? How do we address that? So, there's a whole range of different ways that communicators can get involved and make sure that the organization is as aligned as it can be. So, communication is the thread through alignment and alignment needs to be owned by the CEO. But it's the communication professionals who are the ones who enable it to happen. They help the leaders and they help the middle managers. Everyone understands what's going on.

5. **What signs tell a communicator that there is misalignment and chaos?**
   You'll find that if you look at the understanding of strengths to understanding of the strategy, for example, you'll have the executive leadership team and the senior leadership team will have high scores and then everyone else will drop off. And that will show that's an obvious pace that it shows you that there's a misalignment in the organization. It shows you that people don't understand it. But you will recognize misalignment when you say that your teams are performing or they're not achieving the goals and objectives that you're wanting them to achieve or perhaps, they're working. They're working in silos as well. So, there are obvious signs there or you see that people aren't necessarily putting their hands up to get involved. They just don't feel that they should. They're not feeling connected. There are clear signs of misalignment but generally, it's underperformance. You're not achieving the right goals. You're not hitting the targets or you're hitting

the wrong ones. It is about looking at the numbers but also looking at the behaviors that are around you.

6. **What are your tips for communicators to be viewed as credible and trusted advocates to leaders?**

My number one tip would be to understand the business and the market that the company and its competitors are in. It is about understanding how the business delivers on its purpose and delivers. And what's the impact that you can have? So, you need to understand the numbers. You need to expect the same language as the executives and the senior leaders. They say that you're speaking in the same way that they are. You're able to interpret the complexity of a situation and simplify it more easily. Tell it in simple, everyday language that people can understand. Be comfortable about putting together a business case in a way that you understand not just the bottom line impacted understand risk. And I don't mean just reputational risk. I mean strategic risk and operational financial compliance through a whole range of different things. I remember being asked to do some work for a public company here in Australia which asked me to go in and do stress testing and validation on a whole series of different brand scenarios for their organization. They had nine different scenarios. And it was an organization that was about to undergo its next five-year transformation plan. What I did with these brand scenarios directly impacted the transformation plans. They had worked on it for six to eight months, and then they asked me to come into it. As soon as I started talking to them about risk and risk appetite, they said you're the right person for the job because you understood it. For example, if an organization is saying "we want to be very customer-focused and very customer-centric – currently looking at where you sit now, how would you define where you sit now? What's your risk appetite, on a scale from one to 10 where 1 is low and 10 is high? Where would you be? In this case, the organization I was consulting with. Doesn't do very much in terms of having a public stand. I asked them: so, how would you define where you sit if you if something happens when you go public? How would you define that from a risk appetite perspective? And in a scale of 10, most of them said that if you're then going to be customer-centric, you would need to take a

few actions. So, in that case, where do you need to be on the scale from a risk appetite perspective? And they said, seven. I said, so if you need to now change from two to seven, that means you need to act on certain aspects. What would be the level of preparation for that?

You are providing your customer with advice that considers things that they might not have thought through. Then, your job is to try and make sure that they understand what that means and what those implications are. And sometimes it's beyond just the communications remit.

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