



ANGELA SINICKAS

The positive difference that an IC function has on organizational success

INTERNAL COMMS DEPTS DO MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

Good employee communication doesn't happen by itself, says Angela Sinickas. Survey results over the last 10 years prove the large impact on results that professional communicators can have.

While most companies have created external PR departments, many of them have been slow to see the value of a full-time employee communication function. This is short-sighted – my client survey research regularly shows correlations between having a formal internal communication function and better communication and business outcomes.

I first noticed this while presenting communication survey results to a client a few years ago. I pointed out that three of their business units were reporting consistently higher scores on how well employees understood key company topics and on how strong the communication climate was (accuracy, timeliness, consistency, etc.). My client explained that those were the only three business units that had full-time internal communication professionals supporting their leaders.

Worse results without communicators

While most of my survey work is for companies that do have communication functions, four clients approached me because they had no function in place and wanted our help in creating one. In these cases we conducted baseline research before many formal systems were in place.

Comparing these four organizations against the rest of the companies that had at least one full-time internal communicator, the results show that having a communication function makes a big difference:

- The companies with an internal

communicator had employees who were better informed, on average, by 15 percentage points on 11 key company topics that were included in most of their surveys, ranging from 7 to 26 percentage points for individual topics (see Figure One).

- Employees at companies with internal communicators were also 8 percentage points more satisfied with most communication climate factors (ranging from 5 to 11 percentage points on different criteria).

Improvements when functions were created

At two of these four organizations, we continued to survey employees several years after the communication function was created:

- At a non-profit, global organization, information levels on organizational plans went up 15 percentage points and understanding of the reasons behind decisions went up 25 points.
- At a for-profit, global client, information levels went up 12 points on financial results, 23 points on company plans, 26 points on how the employee can contribute to reaching company goals, and 27 points on company-wide news (see Figure Two).



Angela Sinickas, ABC, IABC Fellow, is president of Sinickas Communications, Inc., an international communication consultancy specializing in helping corporations achieve business results through targeted diagnostics and practical solutions. For more information visit: www.sinicom.com

At both of these organizations, satisfaction with climate measures went up 11 points on average. Very interestingly, at the second client, when we asked if communication had improved, gotten worse or stayed the same after the function had been in place for 12 months and again after 24 months, three-fourths of respondents noticed that it had improved during the previous year. By the fourth year after the function was created, the percentage noticing an annual improvement had flattened to 58%. However, since their climate scores at that point were all in the 90 percents, even saying that communication had stayed the same is considered a very positive response.

I have also seen correlations at clients with regional operating units which clearly showed that the regions that had the highest information levels about company plans were the most financially successful, and those with the lowest scores were in the bottom ranks of profitability.

So, having an internal communication function really does make a difference in how well informed employees are and how well they are able to contribute to their organizations' success.

Figure One: Employee information levels are much higher for companies with full time ICs

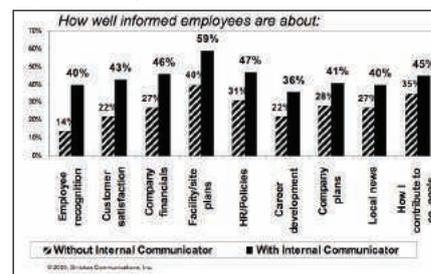


Figure Two: Changes in information levels once one company created an IC department

