Six key metrics for managing global-local communication
Opinion: Angela Sinickas, President, Sinickas Communications, Inc.

When global communicators review their department's performance with executives, they're often asked, "Can you break it down to six key indicators?" So here are suggestions for those six key metrics, but also quite a few more measurements that need to be tracked in order to know what to do to achieve better numbers the next time.

1. The average level of information on a fixed list of key global topics that will be measured repeatedly

At the global level, we're not responsible for just one topic to track, but usually several. These could include subjects like mission/vision, values, company goals, financial results, ethics/compliance, computer security, and safety. Regular surveys should track overall information levels on each topic on the same scale so that the results can be averaged together for a single metric to track. However, to increase the average requires focusing on the specific topics that make up the average (see graph opposite, top).

So what could a communicator do to increase scores that are too low? This is where it helps to research other aspects of communication in order to develop the right action plans. For example, it would be worth tracking how much content on each topic is being communicated. Often the topics with the least amount of content end up having the lowest levels of being understood by the audience. Another similar "observational" measure would be to track how easy to understand the writing is. If it is written above the reading level of your audience, no amount of content will help employees feel better informed.

Other related measures that should be part of your surveys in order to know how to increase overall information levels would include:

- **How interested employees are in those same subjects.** This will provide guidance on which topics need to be "marketed" to employees to show them why they are relevant to them. Otherwise, no amount of

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additional information on those topics will break through their filters.

- **Current and preferred sources for each topic.** Sometimes information levels are low not because of a lack of content, but because the content is being pushed through the wrong channels currently. Employees' preferences for information vary greatly by topic, and also by country (see table, right).

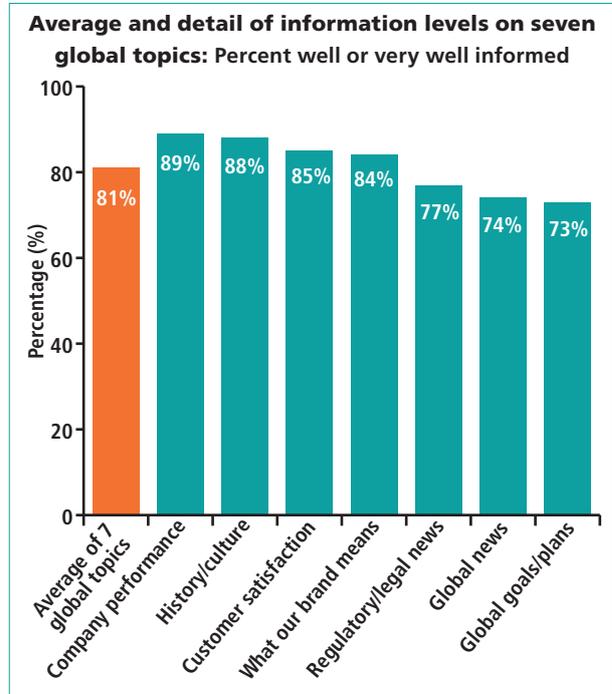## 2. The average level of access to key global communication vehicles

3. The average level of usefulness for the same key vehicles

Relatively few internal communication vehicles are managed globally: the intranet, a flagship publication, and any channels sponsored by an organization's leader, such as webcasts, blogs, and facilitation of Town Hall-type meetings with employees. Access to these channels should be measured by survey because technical access, as your IT department might define it because of the number of people with a password to the intranet, is rarely descriptive of reality. For example, in a recent client survey where only 4 percent of employees said they did not have access to the intranet, 34 percent said they had no access to Yammer – even though anyone with access to the intranet could actually use it. Based on write-in comments, many of those who didn't have access didn't know where to find it.

Once you exclude those who don't have access, you should find out how many would describe each vehicle as useful to them, either helping them with their jobs or providing useful information they want to have for other reasons. Averaging the usefulness of these channels provides a measure of how robust the global channels are in being able to reach your audience with your important messages (see graph, page 156).

Again, however, these measures alone won't help you know what to do to improve any scores that are lower than you'd like them to be. Additional survey questions and focus group research can provide the clues needed to make changes that eventually will improve the overall usefulness scores; for example:

- **Preferred frequency:** Sometimes channels would be more useful if they were more frequent and timely.
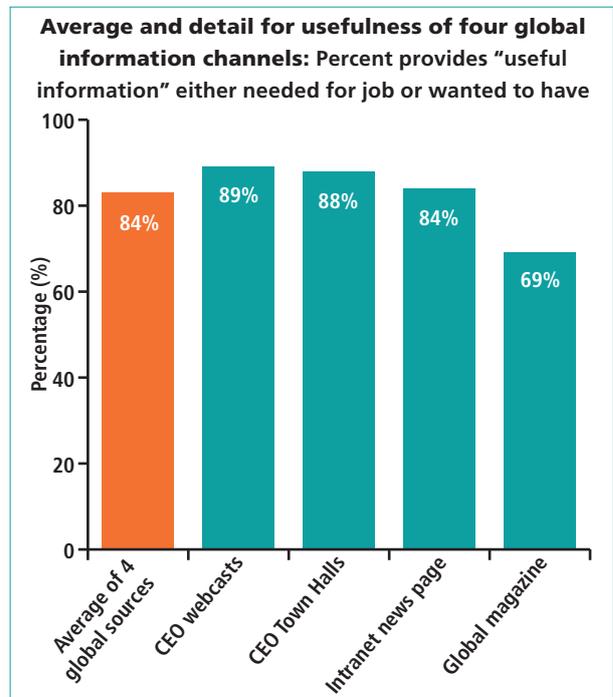
Average and detail of information levels on seven global topics: Percent well or very well informed

Bar chart (Percentage %) — Average of 7 global topics: 81%; Company performance: 89%; History/culture: 88%; Customer satisfaction: 85%; What our brand means: 84%; Regulatory/legal news: 77%; Global news: 74%; Global goals/plans: 73%

Variation in ratings for usefulness of XYZ Co.'s communication channels by region and language survey was taken in

Type of channels surveyed at XYZ	Rated higher than average	Rated lower than average
Printed channels	Asia/Pacific	French speakers
Electronic channels	Asia/Pacific	Europe French speakers
Face-to-face channels	Europe Asia/Pacific French speakers German speakers	
Audiovisual channels	Asia/Pacific	French speakers

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- **Appropriate volume:** Questions about whether employees feel there are too many or too few channels of a particular type, such as electronic or face-to-face, can help determine where to expand certain channels or to consolidate others, making the remaining mix of channels more useful overall.

- **Usability of channels:** Survey questions could identify issues getting in the way of effectiveness, such as bad navigation and an incoherent search function on a website, or insufficient question-and-answer time at Town Hall meetings. Focus groups can also identify potential problems with the way headlines are written or graphics are used when we ask people to describe why they read certain items and skipped other ones.

- **Online usage:** We can track how many employees use specific webpages that lead to desired behaviors our communications are trying to encourage. We can scan social media comments to harvest feedback that can help make adjustments to our communication programs.

Average and detail for usefulness of four global information channels: Percent provides "useful information" either needed for job or wanted to have

4. The average level of senior leader communication behaviors
Global communication leaders often act as coaches to help senior leaders be as effective as they can in their communications with employees. Coaching can include presentation skills training before they start taping webcasts, or providing tips on how to adjust Town Hall agendas and scripts to match different countries' cultural norms.

An organization can develop a list of key communication competencies it expects of senior leaders, and then ask employees to rate them on how frequently they exhibit those skills appropriately. An average of the key skills for the executives supported by the global communications function can be used to track the effectiveness of communicators' coaching.

5. Some aspect of the communication function's infrastructure
In addition to measuring how our audiences perceive the value of our work, we need to focus on our own function's internal structure and processes to make sure we are using our time and other resources as efficiently as possible. The specific metrics might be ones that are very important to senior leaders and are used for all departments; for example, staying within the annual budget or keeping employee turnover rates in the department under a certain percentage.
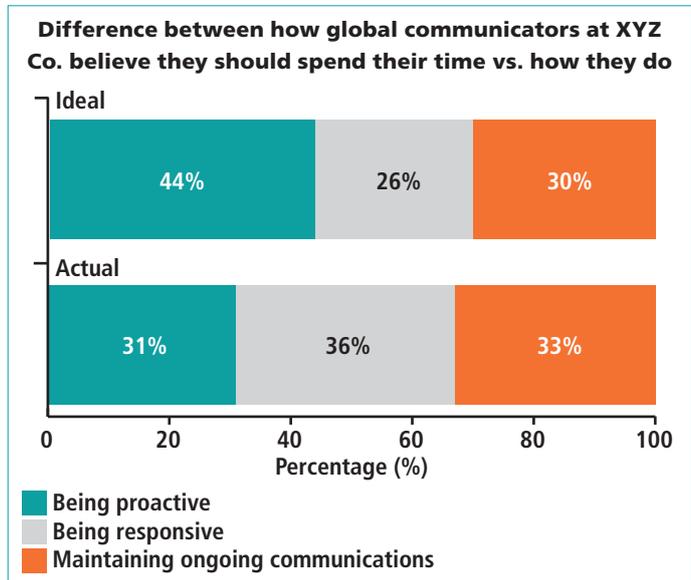
However, the key metric might be focused on how the communication leader's time, or the time of other staff, are put to use. One communicator I know tracked how much of her time in the past two months had

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been spent on supporting the corporate leadership team vs. providing support to each of the four business units. The results surprised her because they had little to do with the importance of the projects to the company's success, and a lot more to do with the neediness of various executives and the lack of sufficient local communicators to provide the support they needed.

For other clients, we have tracked what percentage of the different levels of communicators' time was spent on proactive or strategic work vs. tactical or maintenance activities (see graph, right). When the resulting numbers seem out of balance, key performance targets can be established for a better mix of time spent, and the time can easily be tracked as consultants do for their different clients.

Difference between how global communicators at XYZ Co. believe they should spend their time vs. how they do

Ideal: Being proactive 44%, Being responsive 26%, Maintaining ongoing communications 30%

Actual: Being proactive 31%, Being responsive 36%, Maintaining ongoing communications 33%

Percentage (%)

■ Being proactive
■ Being responsive
■ Maintaining ongoing communications

6. Return on investment

I strongly recommend that each year one campaign focused on some type of behavior change be used as an opportunity to demonstrate a return on investment for communication. Most behaviors have a financial value, so it's easy to calculate the total value of a change based on the percentage of employees making the change. The amount of credit the communication function can take can be calculated through survey questions or by conducting a pilot/control group study. Then the arithmetic of dividing the credited financial value by the cost of your communication is simple.

Aligning global and local KPIs

Global communication leaders may set KPIs for these six aspects of communication management, but if the numbers are lower than desired, one of the best ways to improve those numbers is to focus on local operations with the lowest scores and try to adapt best practices from other operations with higher-than-average scores on those same metrics (see table, page 158). This means that at least some of the metrics for local communicators need to be on the same issues as the global leaders, although their target levels will vary based on their current starting points.

However, in order to obtain reliable data at a local level, survey administration needs to fulfill a number of requirements:

- Enough employees at each site need to be invited to participate.
- The surveys need to be translated into local languages and made available on paper for those without good online access.
- Local management needs to support the survey to deliver enough respondents for a relatively small

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margin of error. If a local communicator's KPI is to increase a particular score by 5 percentage points, and if the margin of error is +/- 5%, an improvement year-over-year of 5 percentage points would not be enough to show a definite change since the results could be off by as much as 5 percentage points due to a too-low response rate.

Global support for local KPIs

Even though global communicators may care about only global issues, they also have an opportunity to provide local communicators with localized survey results on issues or channels only they care about. Providing opportunities to localize the survey content will also help to engage local communicators in supporting the survey administration. Providing this localization doesn't need to be onerous either. It's fairly easy to add topics like "My country's goals and plans" and "How my country is performing against targets" to a survey. Although these topics would be the same in surveys around the world, breaking results down by country would provide numbers on the unique goals and performance of each different country listed in the demographics questions.

Conclusion

So, it is possible to distill many different types of metrics into six key performance indicators, which might seem a good use of time and energy. However, without deeper metrics to understand what drives those results, we shouldn't expect to see much change in those measures year after year. After all, isn't one of the definitions of insanity, "Doing the same things over and over, but expecting a different outcome"?

Identify countries with statistically better (in green) or worse (in red) scores than the company's global average to find best practices and places to apply them								
	Average	**Australia**	**France**	**Germany**	**Italy**	**Japan**	**Mexico**	**Spain**	**UK**
Immediate Supervisor…									
Clearly explains the direction the company is heading	55%			68%					
Provides clear direction and priorities	66%			78%					
Communicates what I can do to achieve goals	51%			68%					
Really listens	70%			81%				78%	
Is truthful	77%		65%	86%		68%	59%		86%
Provides information in a timely manner	64%			76%					
Explains reasons behind decisions	61%			75%		50%			