



ACCESS IS KEY: INFORMATION ADEQUACY AND FLOW

RESEARCH BRIEF | K20 CENTER

The climate and culture of an organization is the sum of its parts, and its parts are the employees. Thus, employee engagement sits at the center. When employees are engaged positively, the culture and climate are positive. In order to engage, employees require access to organizational information that helps them meet organizational goals and informs their role in reaching those goals. In addition, they need to feel supported and heard within the organization (Walden et al., 2017). To better understand how information access contributes to a positive work culture, it helps to understand four key facets:

(1) **channels**, (2) **adequacy**, (3) **flow**, and (4) **interaction resonance**.

1. Choose Channels Wisely

As it has been famously said, “The medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964). How information is transmitted is critical to how it is received. With every communication, it is essential to consider how the channel used facilitates the meaning of the message and how it supports the relationship between the sender and the receiver of that meaning (Bashir et al., 2022). Some examples of channels are instant messages, email, letters, meetings, 1-1 conversations, word of mouth, newsletters, social media, memos, etc. Face to face should be a primary channel of communication of all kinds. As social beings, we receive more than just the message when we are in the presence of others. Conversations enable non-verbal communication and 2-way flow, and, as a result, more easily convey a sense of transparency that helps to build relationships and engender trust (Mishra et al., 2014). There are, however, other channels for sharing information. These channels have evolved for practical reasons and can be used to effect change. For example, written communications preserve details in a form that can quickly and consistently be referenced over time. This information channel is beneficial for communicating contracts, policies, and project management details (Mishra et al., 2014).

2. Reflect on Adequacy

Adequacy of information refers to the relevance, quantity, and quality of the information being communicated (Walden et al., 2017). In terms of content, the kinds of information considered the most important to employee engagement include information about organizational goals, the expectations of the job, and feedback on job performance. As a result, employees feel supported and connected to the organization (Walden et al., 2017). It’s also essential to consider that the perceived amount of information is not overwhelming (Bashir et al., 2022). When there is more than the appropriate amount of information, details vital to the work and understanding how to use the information get buried. Therefore, employees must be purposeful about cutting non-essential details and about making the intended use of the information clear and its relevance for that purpose becomes evident in every communication.

3. Embrace the Flow

Flow refers to the movement of information to all the relevant stakeholders in the organization. While the details and intended use of information can vary for different audiences, information should flow freely in all directions, top-down, across teams, and from bottom to top (Walden et al., 2017; Men & Jiang, 2016). The quality of the flow of information is judged in different ways depending on the direction of the flow. For example, when employees receive top-down information, they scrutinize it for transparency. This doesn’t mean that perfection or completion of information is expected, but the expectation is that these communications be made with sincerity and good faith intentions (Men & Jiang, 2016). In terms of the bottom to top, this flow depends on each employee having an appropriate avenue for expressing ideas and concerns upwards that feels safe (Men & Jiang, 2016). In all cases, flow is dependent on trust, and

trust is dependent on relationships. When information access is adequate and freely flowing, this strongly influences how committed employees feel to their organization and how engaged they are in their relationship with their employer (Walden et al., 2017; Mishra et al., 2014; Men & Jiang, 2016).

4. Design for Resonance

Resonance increases when interactions with information are designed to build cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement from the audience. This can take the form of structures, processes, and relationships with people that generate a sense of meaningfulness around the information (Bashir et al., 2022). Intentional design for interaction resonance can be accounted for in meeting activity design, communication management plans, stakeholder mapping, and through diverse working groups across the organization so that information gets shared to many from multiple perspectives (Bashir et al., 2022; Mishra et al., 2014). Another factor of resonance is repetition. How many connections do you have to the information, how many times have you encountered that information and through how many channels? The greatest promoters of interaction resonance are relationships with people. These emerge between collaborative working groups and close peers who repeatedly interact with each other around the work and through information about the work. Through these predominantly horizontal pathways of information flow, the differences and complexities of the information are more meaningfully synthesized and put together to effect action on organizational goals (Walden et al., 2017; Bashir et al., 2022).

References

- Bashir, H., Nangoli, S., Musaasizi, Y., Nakajubi, F., Basemera, M., & Ayibo, C. (2021). Information adequacy and strategic behavioral change communication as a pandemic management tool: The mediating role of interaction resonance. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 59(2), 242–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884211027545>
- McLuhan, Marshall (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. ISBN 81-14-67535-7.
- Men, L. R., & Jiang, H. (2016). Cultivating quality employee-organization relationships: The interplay among organizational leadership, culture, and Communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(5), 462–479. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118x.2016.1226172>
- Mishra, K., Boynton, L., & Mishra, A. (2014). Driving employee engagement. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 51(2), 183–202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488414525399>
- Walden, J., Jung, E. H., & Westerman, C. Y. (2017). Employee communication, job engagement, and Organizational Commitment: A Study of members of the Millennial Generation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 29(2-3), 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726x.2017.1329737>