

ENGAGING
EMPLOYEES ON
WHAT MATTERS

SUSTAINABILITY

FROM WITHIN



Black Sun

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATIONS

Sustainability reporting has historically been driven by external stakeholders, such as investors and community groups. This explains why sustainability professionals have sometimes fallen short of recognising employees as a target audience for communications. When polled at the GRI Conference in 2016, only 9% of the participants believed employees would be the biggest consumers of sustainability information over the next 5 years.

Employees are an essential contributor to an organisation's ability to create value. Therefore, informing and engaging them on important ethical, social and environmental issues is an opportunity to improve performance and achieve sustainability objectives, as well as to promote organisational values.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

In September-November 2017, we compiled a survey and then ran a roundtable to validate the results.

The target audience for the survey covered UK and European companies with global operations. These were:

30

RESPONDENTS FROM DIVERSE INDUSTRIES, OF WHICH:

83%

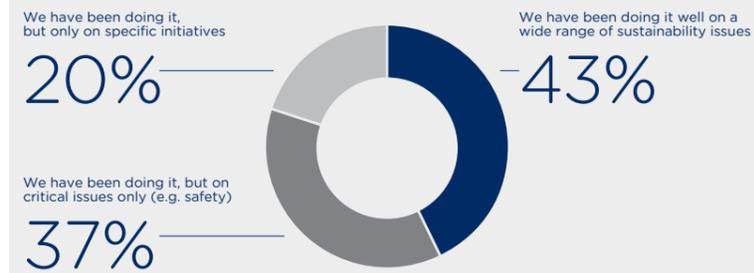
OF RESPONDENTS WORKED IN CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

70%

OF RESPONDENTS HAD GLOBAL REMITS.

All of our respondents communicated on sustainability with employees to some extent. 43% of them said they did it well on a wide range of issues.

TO WHAT DEGREE DOES YOUR ORGANISATION COMMUNICATE WITH EMPLOYEES ON SUSTAINABILITY?



The survey questions were structured around five themes:

1. business case,
2. ownership,
3. strategy,
4. process and effectiveness.

We are delighted to share the survey results to help you better understand and identify areas for improvement.

CONTENTS

Megatrends	4
Business case	4
Engaging CEOs	5
Decentralised ownership	5
Channels: intranets and newsletters in the lead	6
Key barriers: understanding of audiences, management support, infrequent communications	6
Change wishlist	6

MEGATRENDS

To frame the broader context of our research, we identified five megatrends that are likely to impact the ways companies engage their employees on sustainability.

1. Lack of trust

Audiences now consider that official company voices lack credibility. 'A person like myself' has emerged as the most trustworthy source of information⁽¹⁾.

To promote sustainability messages internally, companies should consider using peer-to-peer communications.

2. Corporate activism

Facing a polarised political climate and science denials, organisations are starting to 'take sides' and become advocates for social and environmental issues.

Companies and CEOs shouldn't be afraid to 'take a stand' on issues that matter to them, and engage their employees in the process.

3. Blurred boundaries

Employees are empowered to share what happens within the organisation. Boundaries between external and internal communications are blurred.

As sustainability and social responsibility have become key drivers of talent attractiveness, companies should leverage employee engagement activities on sustainability issues in their external communications.

4. New technologies

We are seeing an uptake in new forms of internal communications, both in formats and channels

Companies can explore the possibilities of VR and AR to communicate with their employees on sustainability. They can also crowdsource content directly from their employees, using smartphone videos for instance.

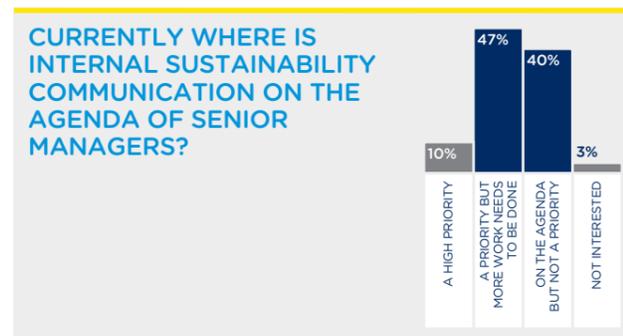
5. Flexible working

The rising demand for flexible and remote working creates new challenges for employee communications.

Dematerialised workplaces require companies to reinforce their values and create a feeling of belonging. Engaging employees on sustainability initiatives can help achieve this, as long as appropriate communications formats and content allow to cut through the ongoing 'noise' of internal channels.

BUSINESS CASE

For a majority of our respondents, internal sustainability communications is considered a priority for senior managers, even though more work may need to be done. However, a sizeable minority (40%) report internal sustainability communications is not a priority.



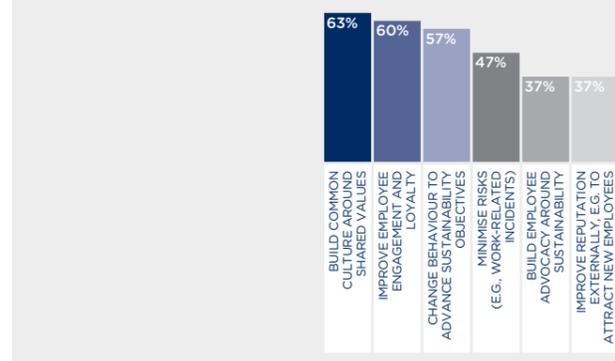
This highlights the need for a clear business case to get buy-in from managers across the organisation.

During our roundtable, participants agreed that identifying hard KPIs on sustainability communications is a difficult exercise, as they are unique to each company and its goals. However, placing tangible value on it has a transformative impact when it comes to building the case with senior managers.

“Quantifying sustainability performance is difficult, but it really helps you build the business case. Example metrics for us are employee retention, position in DJSI. Having numbers helps you prove things to management and investors.”

Our survey respondents identified the key drivers for communicating internally on sustainability as culture, engagement, and behaviour change.

WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION, WHAT ARE THE TOP THREE DRIVERS TO COMMUNICATE INTERNALLY ON SUSTAINABILITY?

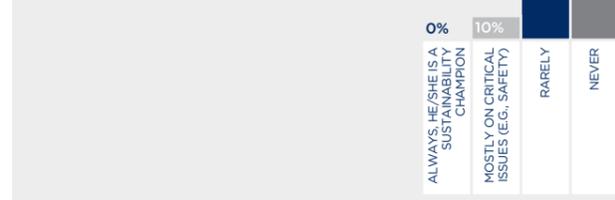


To build the business case, sustainability communicators should focus on clearly articulating 'reasons' or drivers for doing it, and harnessing a set of quantitative and qualitative KPIs to the chosen drivers.

ENGAGING CEOs

When engaging employees on sustainability, CEOs mostly focus on critical issues, such as health & safety.

DOES THE CEO DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY TO EMPLOYEES?



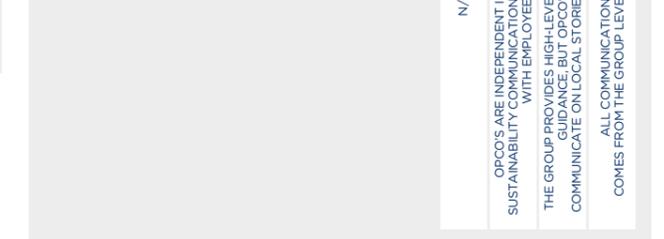
Our roundtable participant had different ways to engage their CEO on sustainability communications. Some simply ensured that sustainability has its place in the CEO's public agenda, committing them to give talks about sustainability-related topics. Others focused on getting the CEO's "second tier" on board before presenting a project for sign-off. Finally, one participant highlighted the importance of communicating views from employees to the CEO as a means of getting engagement at the most senior level.

“We are currently updating our sustainability agenda, and are taking this opportunity to put the CEO front and centre. It gets her involved.”

DECENTRALISED OWNERSHIP

A majority of respondents report that their organisations adopts a decentralised approach to sustainability communications, providing OpCos with high-level guidance, but leaving them freedom to implement locally.

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GROUP AND OPERATIONAL COMPANIES IN REACHING OUT TO EMPLOYEES ON SUSTAINABILITY?



Participants at our roundtable acknowledged the difficulty in devolving communications to local entities while ensuring alignment with global sustainability priorities.

One participant mentioned how sustainability materials get modified without appropriate fact-checking by the sustainability team.

“Building consistency is very important to us. We need to have consistent messaging across the business.”

To limit the risks of inconsistencies, one participant mentioned using a 'less is more' approach: focusing on fewer issues, and making sure that there is in-depth understanding of them across the entire organisation. The same person nevertheless insisted on the importance of devolving sustainability communications: "Materials are more impactful when they are sent from the right person."

Another participant mentioned using infographics with key data and messages as an internal communications tool. This allows everyone locally to select the most relevant points to communicate to their audience, while ensuring they all work with one consistent story.

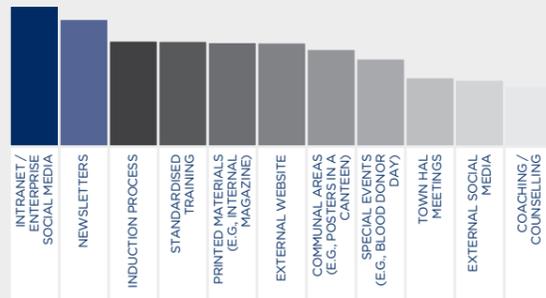
Finally, a participant suggested a co-creation approach: "Work with each operating company to ensure that the materials being created are the best possible for them. It becomes "their" materials, not just yours."

(1) Edelman Trust Barometer, 2017

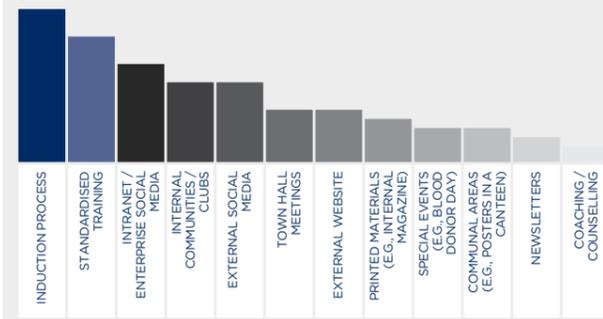
CHANNELS: INTRANETS AND NEWSLETTERS IN THE LEAD

Intranets and internal newsletters are the most common vehicles for internal sustainability communications. Training and inductions are used to a lesser extent, but respondents would like to use them more.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHANNELS USED TO DELIVER THE ORGANISATION'S SUSTAINABILITY MESSAGES TO EMPLOYEES?



WHICH OTHER THREE CHANNELS WOULD YOU CONSIDER UTILISING MORE?



Our roundtable participants agreed that a varied channel mix is the best way to achieve communications goals when audiences are diverse, and there is already a lot of 'noise' in internal communications.

Creative use of channels included a gamification experience for one of the respondents, which cut through the noise and educated employees about specific sustainability issues.

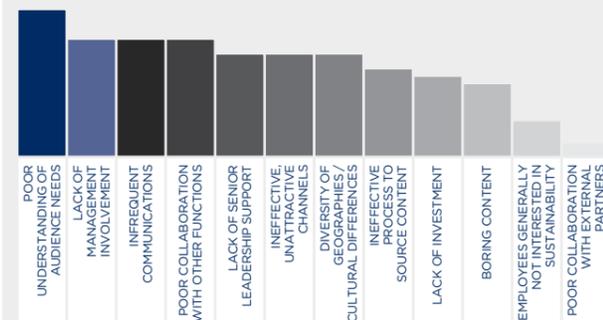
For others, the channel mix was constrained by the fact that a large part of the workforce doesn't have internet access on the job. In those cases, a 'back-to-basics' approach was used, focusing on posters and print materials in key places.

“Our challenge is that we have dispersed employees, with no email address. So we are focusing on branded posters with our key priorities.”

KEY BARRIERS: UNDERSTANDING OF AUDIENCES, MANAGEMENT SUPPORT, INFREQUENT COMMUNICATIONS

A poor understanding of audiences, lack of management support and infrequent communications were identified as the top barriers to meaningful engagement of employees on sustainability.

WHAT ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO BETTER INTERNAL ENGAGEMENT ON SUSTAINABILITY IN YOUR ORGANISATION?



One of our roundtable respondents acknowledged that “it is very time consuming to segment groups and target messaging.” However, internal audience segmentation is also the best way to get return on communications efforts. Her advice was to focus on well-defined communications priorities and fewer messages delivered to the right audiences.

CHANGE WISHLIST

When asked what they would like to change in their organisation about internal sustainability communications, our respondents concurred that engaging content, better resourcing and a strategic approach are the most pressing needs.

During the roundtable, participants also emphasised the importance to make better use of employee voices in sharing sustainability messages, both internally and externally. “We are trying to implement a social media strategy for employee communications using Instagram,” said one participant. “People trust other employees more than 'official' company statements”.

Others pointed out that social media is also a way to source sustainability stories from different parts of the business.

“Twitter is useful for working out what's going on on the ground.”

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE IN THE WAY SUSTAINABILITY IS COMMUNICATED TO EMPLOYEES IN YOUR ORGANISATION?

1 More engaging content

“I would like to make it more accessible and easy to understand. Engaging and simple.”

2 Better resourcing

“The major challenge to better communication with employees is the resource available to do it well. This includes employees' time in sourcing the story and dedicating a portion of their job function to it.”

3 More strategic approach

“A commitment to establish a clear strategy which is implemented.”

4 Direct employee involvement

“More time to be spent with employees talking about sustainability”

5 Inter-departmental collaboration

“An easy way to encourage more of an internal culture of well informed joined up peer to peer communications.”

6 More rigorous planning

“Develop a planned calendar of communication and put sufficient senior management weight behind it.”

HOW WE CAN HELP

Strategy

Audit of existing internal sustainability communications

Advisory on messaging and channel strategy

Digital

Intranets, employee apps and social networks

Platform to shape and manage engagement through social media

Videos, banners, interactive features and other assets to be used across internal channels

Print and ambient

Internal brochures, guidelines, posters, banners, notice boards, personal items

GET IN TOUCH



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