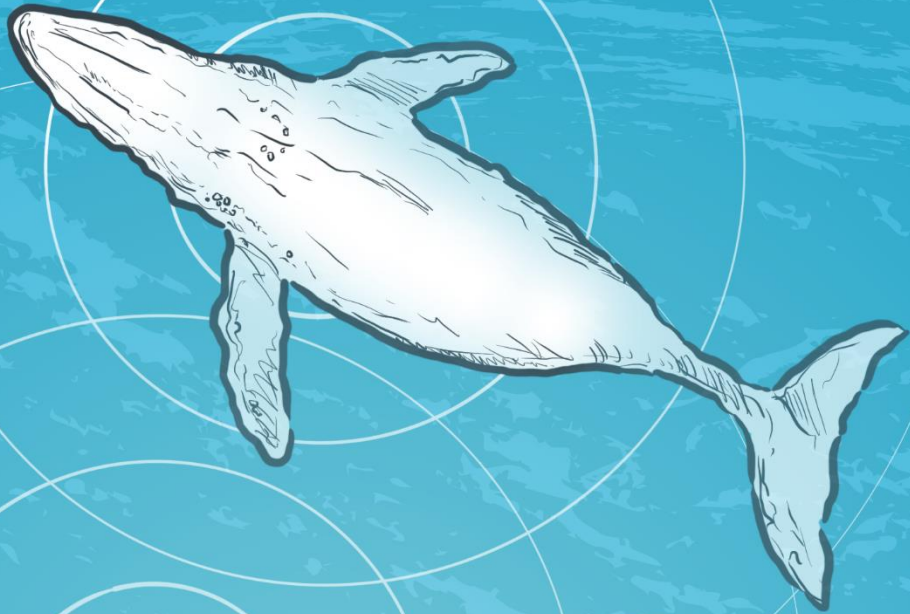Creating insight and
ideas, and then
communicating these
with others, lies at
the heart of influence.
Stories connect
people. What songs
can we sing to tell
our story?

Chapter 10:
The Influencing Organisation

10

The Influencing Organisation

"You can never leave footprints that last if you are always walking on tiptoe."

Leymah Gbowee

This chapter outlines different aspects of communication and influence, from thoughts on how best to create a communications culture, to analysing the key elements within your communications strategy, and how you can effectively influence on a personal level. This chapter also gives suggestions on how you can learn from various communications initiatives as well as highlighting the importance of what to do when something goes wrong in the communication process using the "connected communication" model.

The External Environment

"When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful." Malala Yousafzai

It is often stated that communication is the means to achieving influence. Paul Watzlawick (1921-2007) was an Austrian-American psychologist, communication theorist and philosopher. One of his most cited observations is that "*one cannot* **not** *communicate".* Every behaviour is a form of communication. And because behaviour does not have a counterpart (there is no anti-behaviour!), it is impossible not to communicate. Even if communication is avoided, that is a form of communication.

This applies to both people and organisations. Organisations cannot accomplish their goals if they don't communicate effectively and therefore fail to influence their people to do what is required. And their people can't do what is required – whilst also feeling that they are a *valued part* of the higher organisational purpose – if they can't communicate successfully and influence what goes on in their organisations.

However, when individuals and organisations *do* communicate effectively and influence one another, then that's when the best mutually successful outcomes can be achieved.

As organisational hierarchies and managerial layers diminish, developing personal influencing skills has become an essential ability in today's workplace. Successful outcomes can only be achieved through, with and from others. Being able to communicate well and influence without formal authority is now an essential skill for those wishing to make an impact.

Organisational communication is also important because it significantly impacts three very important areas: staff engagement, client satisfaction and public perceptions. All three areas are critical to sustainable influence and success and we'll look at each in turn.

Firstly, employee or volunteer engagement. This is how willingly and enthusiastically an organisation's staff members or volunteers focus not only on their own tasks, but also their organisation's wider objectives. Going beyond dedication to their role, which can be related to obligation, engagement is directly connected to how valued individuals feel. And one of the best ways to help them feel valued is through communication.

Given that any organisation comprises many different individuals, all with their own personal "style" of how they operate, it's worth asking some basic questions: does your organisation recommend a preferred "tone of voice" when communicating companywide? What kind of language is used? Is it informal and friendly or authoritative and detached? Is the style collaborative, or dictatorial? Do organisational messages empathise with the recipients explaining the "why" behind the message, or do they simply inform? Are the timings of communications considered? It might suit the sender to email early in the morning or late into the evening, but will the recipients want to engage with those communications during "family time" at home? Establishing a consistent and positive communications approach is a crucial component of staff engagement and forms an important part of an internal communications strategy.

Secondly, client satisfaction. This is how satisfied people are with an organisation, be it service related, product related, or just their interactions with the organisation. It is a matter of fact that client satisfaction is critical to sustainable organisational success. An organisation can have a brilliant product or service, but if a client feels that they aren't valued by that organisation, then the chances are that they'll start dealing with a different one. Once again,

how well an organisation communicates with its clients is critical, as that determines how valued they feel.

Clients are satisfied when they feel they are listened to and empathised with, and that their experience matters. They're satisfied when their organisational interactions leave them feeling valued which, as research has demonstrated, can override any poor customer service or product experiences that they have had. Service and product faults will inevitably happen, but how an organisation deals with the issue will ultimately determine client satisfaction. Therefore, this needs to be an important element within an external communications strategy.

Thirdly, organisational perception. This is how people see your organisation, not how you see it yourself. It's what people outside your organisation think that you stand for: your ideas, your vision, your reputation, your experience and your professionalism. Even though there are probably countless organisations that you've never done business with, the chances are that you still have an opinion about them, for better or worse. What's interesting about how we develop these perceptions is that it's not necessarily based on any direct experience. It's often based on the stories we've heard, the articles we've read, the advertisements we've seen, or the social media sites we've visited.

These are all forms of second-hand information and yet they are equally as powerful as direct experiences. We have an emotional response to what we've heard, or read, or believe to be true.

Apart from advertising or news articles, all this second-hand information is usually based on the direct experiences of those passing this information on.

Now that the internet is part of everyday life, there are vast numbers of people constantly giving their own opinions about everything through, for example, Facebook, Twitter etc., and there are very many websites dedicated purely to this activity such as Trip Advisor, Amazon Reviews, Trustpilot, etc. But it's worth noting that it is far more likely for people to share negative experiences that they've had with an organisation than positive ones!

So, it goes without saying that if an organisation's communication (in any of its many forms) is creating poor direct experiences, those direct experiences will negatively impact how the

organisation is perceived by potential customers, clients, or employees. This, in turn, certainly impacts the organisation's ability to grow and thrive.

The Observatory

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." John Quincy Adams

Developing and strengthening organisational influence is really all about creating insight and ideas and then connecting with people to get those insights and ideas across.

It's about understanding your personal and your organisation's place in the world and then communicating that effectively to other people. It's about appreciating what's important to the people that you're talking to. It's about discussing shared goals and shared objectives. It's about engaging with other people's concerns or disagreements in a constructive and open way. It's about agreeing a preferred communication "style": the language used and the tone of voice. And it's about not being afraid to be creative in how you get your message across.

However, from the outset, it's important to understand how to communicate effectively with others, and therefore influence others, both internally and externally to your organisation.

When you are trying to engage people to support an idea, it's always best to *inspire* them, rather than just *inform* them. A good way to achieve this is through storytelling. Stories connect people. With storytelling, you create vivid images that are memorable and engage people's emotions. In addition, the language that you use is very important. Using "*what if we were to*....", and then encouraging feedback, engages people far more than just telling them what you want them to do. Good leaders tend to spend as much time requesting information and ideas, as they do imparting them!

A simple but powerful model for how leaders inspire action is Simon Sinek's Golden Circles. This involves starting with the "Why?" – the long-term vision, moving to the "How?" – the process and culture, and ending with the "What?" – the result and evidence. If people understand the purpose behind your idea this usually has a greater chance of eliciting their support. When all three are in balance, other people will say, with clarity and certainty: "We know who you are and we know what you stand for." Whether they realise it or not, all great

and inspiring leaders and collaborative organisations, think, act and communicate with these principles in mind. This is what distinguishes them and enables them to achieve greater influence.

If you are communicating to a wide audience, we often recommend structuring it around the four rooms of the Caplor House (read Chapter 3 to understand more about his model). This involves starting your communication in the observatory (vision, big picture), then sandwiching it with information from the Library (evidence and rationale), Kitchen (process and detail), and Family Room (how it affects and benefits people) and then finishing off with Observatory again (excitement). This should help you to reach all audiences effectively. However, if you know that your audience has a preference for one room of the Caplor House you may wish to sway your communications more heavily towards this room in order to get through to them on a deeper level. As described later, targeting your communication to your audience is the key to success.

Finally, as recognised by Stephen Covey's (2005) 8th Habit of highly effective people, a key characteristic of successful leadership is to "find your voice and inspire others to find theirs". He believes that once you have found your voice, you can inspire others to find theirs through fulfilling four roles:

- Modelling – setting a good example, demonstrating integrity, honest and good habits
- Pathfinding – ensuring that the vision is shared and wholeheartedly embraced at all levels of the organisation
- Aligning – creating structures, systems, and disciplines that bring your vision into reality
- Empowering – igniting your team's passion and trusting them to use their initiative to achieve the vision you have created together

For so long, the choice of leaders has been based on mental intelligence (IQ) – the quickness of mental comprehension, but that has proved to be inadequate. Nowadays we talk of Emotional Intelligence (EQ), which is self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management (the ability to inspire, influence, and develop others). In today's turbulent and unpredictable world there is plenty of evidence that leaders achieve more sustainable success by enabling their team members to achieve their potential. This is a more

distributed form of leadership and legitimates and encourages the idea of influencing upwards.

The Library

"If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." Albert Einstein

Gaining influence can be made more effective by thinking through a detailed approach that helps you to set expectations, measure outcomes and derive insights.

This ensures that you are reaching the right people, at the right time, to get your key messages across. It requires an analytical approach and, like any good strategy, it begins with research. While you might be able to guess the general audience of whom you want to get your message across to (and thereby influence), you may be surprised to find additional groups of people or market segments to tap into.

Once you've completed the research, it's time to get down to the detail of your strategy. This can be as simple or as complicated as you want to make it; however, it should have five basic components:

- **Identifying the Audience**: *Whom are you going to communicate with?* Perhaps there are multiple audiences for either the same or different messages; however, identifying your audience is the first step in your strategy.

- **Determining the Goals and Objectives**: *Why communicate? Why is it important? What do you want to achieve?* All too often, people communicate for the sake of communicating. Your communication efforts should always be in support of your larger organisational goal. Never lose sight of this goal when communicating.

- **Evolving the Key Messages**: *What do you need to communicate? What is it that really matters? What will resonate with your audience? What will make them not only understand your key messages, but also believe them and want to pass them on?* Develop clear and concise messages that communicate, in simple, easily digestible language why you're doing what you're doing, what you do and how you do it. These messages need to remain consistent and be communicated regularly – when you keep them fresh in everyone's minds, they usually create a greater impact.

- **Developing the Strategy**: *How will you communicate, to whom and how regularly?* The blueprint should include a linear strategy for reaching your goals. An outline that shows how various communications tactics support various communication strategies, and how these strategies support your goals. This will include establishing, in detail, the content for the various communication channels that you intend to use (website, social media, publications, news releases, email newsletters, etc., etc.).

- **Identifying Measures of Evaluation**: *How will you know if you're getting your message across?* Metrics are important. Unless you know where you are, you can't improve.

Whether or not you've reached your various organisational objectives should be fairly easy to determine, but applying metrics to determine if your communications were ultimately successful, and what role they played in reaching (or not reaching) your organisational goals, can be more difficult. There are, however, various options for capturing this data, especially in digital communications where analysis is regularly provided by the site. For example: How many people opened your weekly newsletter? What level of response did you receive to online campaigns? How many people visited your website last week? What activity has there been on your Facebook or LinkedIn page, etc.? Where possible, try to apply outcome metrics instead of output metrics and use all your networks to constantly get feedback.

Whilst by no means all-encompassing, the above five basic components should be included within any communications strategy and regularly reviewed. When planning any specific organisational communication, it's important to first understand what the precise purpose of the message is and make this very clear.

By keeping your communications simple, this helps to ensure that the people whom you're talking to "get it". We often encourage organisations to keep any communications to one page, for example a "Strategy on a Page" or SOAP for short, and to use the "elevator pitch" concept. These tools encourage clear, concise, memorable communication that gets key messages across to people in short bursts.

The Family Room

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Maya Angelou

A key component of creating a positive communication culture is building trust. As Stephen Covey says, "When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective." Well thought through communication builds trust, whereas poor communication leads to mistrust. With this in mind, all communication needs to be consistent, transparent and truthful. Good communication provides the reasoning for any decisions, or intended actions, and it ensures that all important information is shared quickly, in a language that can be easily understood. When leaders fail to communicate in a timely fashion, people will always fill in the gaps with assumptions, distorting the intended message.

A common mistake that many management teams can make is not sharing key information throughout their organisation. Concerns about "information overload" is almost always unfounded, when compared to the negative impact of certain people or groups feeling "left out" and therefore undervalued. Sharing information throughout your organisation creates an environment of trust and a feeling of "all being in it together".

When taking on new staff or volunteers, make sure that you have communicated the organisation's values and beliefs to them and taken time to discuss these. The sooner people understand *why* your organisation does what it does and support the organisation's purpose and vision, then the sooner that they can feel that they are also part of a purpose, greater than just the responsibilities of their role. Communication is fundamental to relationships and relationships with your staff are how you fulfil your purpose.

Within your strategy always have a communications process for dealing with people's concerns and anxieties in an open and honest way. It's important to openly communicate what's not gone so well and the learning derived from this.

And remember to always support your values, purpose and vision by leading by example. What you do and how you do it is far more important, and believable, than what you say. Remember, you cannot *not* communicate!

The Foundations

"Leaders accept feedback. Good leaders welcome feedback. Great leaders demand feedback." Matt Dunsmoor

Liz Wiseman (2014), an American author and business management expert, suggests ways to review the learning from our personal interaction with other people, as well as the learning from various communications initiatives:

- **Constantly monitor what is new, what is happening and what is possible** – This is a call for leaders to be constantly scanning their environments and contexts. It requires leaders to polish their antennae and be open to new and different interpretations of what they see and feel around them and then communicate this in an authentic way.

- **Keep an open mind and do not be afraid of asking questions** – Leaders often adopt an "expert mindset" that prevents them from opening their minds to new possibilities and alternatives. Leaders have traditionally been reluctant to ask questions and to learn from subordinates and colleagues in case this should be construed as weakness or ignorance. Many leaders feel that they are expected to know more than their staff and often feel that they must demonstrate their expert knowledge at all times. This is a futile aspiration in today's world. The challenge we all face is not finding information but dealing with the excessive overload of information available and then deciding what is relevant and how best to communicate what really matters.

- **Push the limits of what is possible** – The idea of "expert leaders" can often be self-limiting. These so-called experts can become trapped within the boundaries of the knowledge and assumptions that have served them well in the past, and this can limit our creativity and innovation. Learning leaders, by contrast, are future focussed, willing to try new things, push their boundaries and communicate their ideas in compelling ways.

- **Seek out the advice and guidance of others, to learn and innovate** – Leaders who are learning and future-focussed do not work in isolation. They continually connect with others by building and reinforcing communication networks both inside and outside their organisations. They seek to link themselves and their organisations with others.

These different networks can then produce greater resilience to the volatility and uncertainty in the environment through shared knowledge and enlightened collaboration.

- **Ask questions** – Think for a moment about the leaders you have known. Did they ask the right questions, and did they ask them often enough? When *you* communicate, do you yourself ask enough questions of the people around you?

- **Ask for feedback** – Self-awareness is a fundamental requirement for leaders. But how can we learn to know and understand ourselves? Of course, developing self-awareness on our own is a very long slow process without the help of others. How do we really know how others see and perceive us? How do we know how we make them feel? Even the most empathetic leader can only guess at the answer to this question without asking directly for feedback. Learning leaders give and seek feedback often, build trust in this process, and see the feedback they receive as a vital source of data and learning. It is a fundamental part of how they communicate and influence. Learning leaders not only seek to really understand themselves and others, they also seek to understand how their actions affect others, and then try out different communication strategies for modifying and reviewing their behaviours.
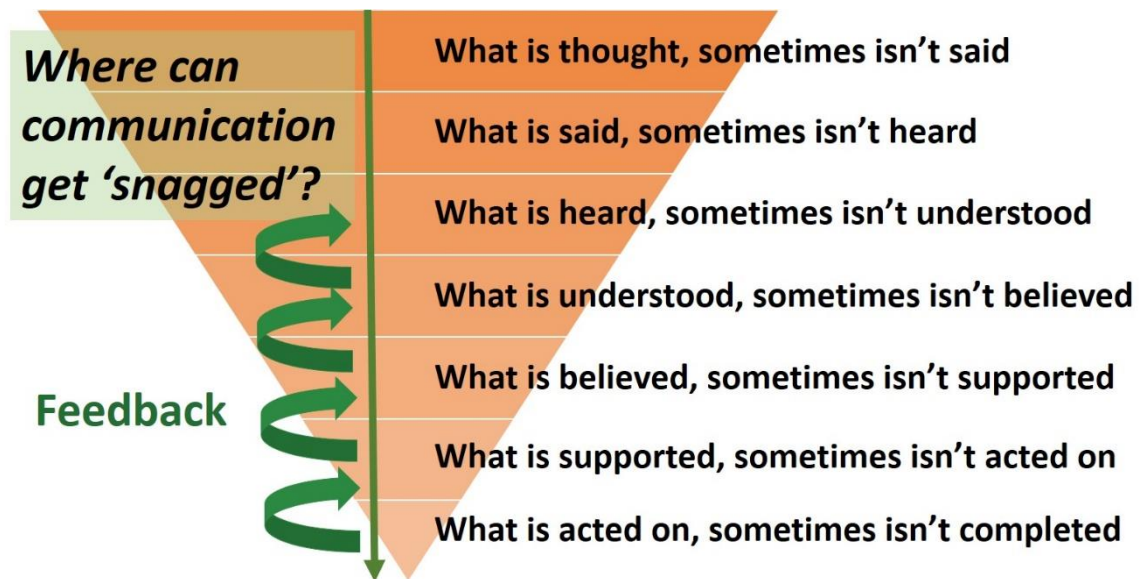
The Roof

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place."
George Bernard Shaw

At the outset of this chapter, we suggested that communication is the means to achieving influence. But what happens when something goes wrong in the communication process? You thought that you'd communicated an idea and yet nothing happened. Where might your communication have got "snagged" and therefore failed to influence an outcome?

A communication model, developed by Len Creswell, Jon Davidge and John White, asserts that to enable a successful outcome, and thereby achieve sustainable influence, there needs to be "connected communication". This connected communication model sets out seven sequential stages where communication can get "snagged", preventing an action happening or an idea taking root:

Where can communication get 'snagged'?

Feedback

What is thought, sometimes isn't said

What is said, sometimes isn't heard

What is heard, sometimes isn't understood

What is understood, sometimes isn't believed

What is believed, sometimes isn't supported

What is supported, sometimes isn't acted on

What is acted on, sometimes isn't completed

Connected Communication Model

You might have thought that you told somebody something, but perhaps you didn't. You might have thought that the person you were talking to had heard, but perhaps they hadn't. Even if they did hear, maybe they didn't understand what you were saying. And if they did understand, perhaps they didn't believe you. If they did believe you, then there is still a possibility that they didn't support what you said. Even if they did support what you said, they might still do nothing about it. And, finally, if they did do something about it, they might still not have completed what you wanted them to do.

If your communication snags at any one of these stages, this results in a failure in the communication process and therefore a failure in your ability to influence.

The best way to prevent any of these snags occurring is to develop a communication style that incorporates a "back-brief". This involves asking the person, or people, with whom you're communicating to give you a quick synopsis of what you have just either told them, or asked them to do, at each of the different stages. This two-way interaction helps to determine whether your communication has been heard and also whether or not it's been understood, believed, supported, acted on and completed.

How you attain the back-brief, depends largely on your method of communication. If you're talking to a single person, or people, you can simply ask them. If you're emailing, you can ask for a response and follow-up. If you're an organisation, trying to get your key messages across,

then you can ask for active feedback. Any of these methods will help to identify whether or not your message has been heard, understood and believed. Most importantly, though, it will also confirm whether or not your message is being supported, acted on and any actions achieved (completed).

In summary, then, communication entails the transfer of ideas, thoughts and feelings from one person to another, or one organisation to another, or a mixture of both. In any organisation wishing to achieve a sustainable influence, its communication strategy plays a vital role and needs to adopt a simple, direct and precise approach – whether the communication is internal or external, oral or written.

And it's especially important, within the global world in which we live, to take into consideration the gender and cultural variations in terms of how we communicate.

The Kitchen

Practical steps to becoming an influencing organisation

- **Build trust** – Influence is most often and easily achieved through trust. Only when someone trusts you will they be open to your influence. The simplest way to do that is to be open and honest, no matter what. State your opinions, disclose your apprehensions, and don't keep secrets. It's as simple as that.

- **Cultivate confidence through consistency** – Inconsistency is the fastest way to make others doubt you. Consistency, on the other hand, reassures people. When you demonstrate a consistent style of leadership, this conveys reliability and dependability.

- **Be flexible** – Flexibility is important. Being too stringent or adamant in your beliefs may work against you. People could come to see you as intransigent and incapable of believing in anyone other than yourself. Instead, work actively to show your flexibility whilst holding firm on your beliefs. Negotiations and compromises are often the best ways to do this. Work with others to find a mutually acceptable solution.

- **Be personal** – A little personality goes a long way, especially when you're trying to build influence with colleagues or partners. If you go out of your way to have personal exchanges with others, then your level of communication increases, and people tend to respond positively to that.

- **Focus on actions** – If you try to build influence using just words your success will be limited. Remember the old adage "actions speak louder than words"? Walking the talk and consistently demonstrating your ideas through your activities gains influence.

- **Listen to others** – Finally, remember that influence is a two-way street. To build constructive relationships, you first have to listen. Encourage people to speak up, especially if they don't often voice their opinions. Take time to respect and acknowledge everybody's ideas, and let people know that you value them. The more you believe in the people around you and incorporate their ideas into your vision, the more they'll believe in your ideas and incorporate them into what they do.

Key messages

- Communication is the means to achieving influence. Organisational communications significantly impact three very important areas: staff engagement, client satisfaction and public perceptions. All three areas are critical to sustainable influence and success. The key component of creating a positive communication culture is building trust. All communication needs to be consistent, transparent and truthful.

- Simple, direct and concise communications are the most effective. In order to do this, it's always good to start with the "why", rather than the "what" or the "how". If people understand the purpose behind your idea, not just what the intended outcome is, or how it's going to be achieved, this usually has a greater chance of eliciting their support. When you're trying to engage people to support an idea, it's always best to inspire them, rather than just inform them!

- Sometimes communication can get "snagged". To ensure this doesn't happen, and thus to achieve greater influence, there needs to be "connected communication" that incorporates a "back-brief".

Reflection questions

- What is your organisation's communication approach? Does it effectively engage with the right audiences at the right times?

- How can you embed your values within your internal and external communications?

- How can you ensure that your communications are sensitive to cross-cultural differences?

Action and impact questions

- What will make your audience not only understand your key messages, but also believe them and want to pass them on?

- How can you make sure your communication doesn't get "snagged", thus preventing an action happening or an idea taking root?

- How will you know if you are getting your message across and successfully influencing people?

Further reading

- **Caplor Horizons (2020)** *Cross-cultural communication*. Thought Leadership Paper. Online

- **Wiseman, L. (2014)** *Rookie Smarts: Why Learning Beats Knowing in the New Game of Work.* New York: HarperBusiness.

- **Covey, S. R. (2005)** *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness To Greatness*. New York: Free Press.

Chapter Ten: The Influencing Organisation

Caplor Horizons (2020) *Cross-cultural communication*. Caplor Horizons: Thought Leadership Paper. Available from https://voyage.caplorhorizons.org/

Wiseman, L. and McKeown, G. (2010) *Multipliers: How the best leaders make everyone smarter*. New York: HarperBusiness.

Wiseman, L. (2014) *Rookie Smarts: Why Learning Beats Knowing in the New Game of Work*. New York: HarperBusiness.