

## Internal Communications Group

### Creating a positive culture change: supporting leaders to lead

19 April 2017, 15.00 – 18.00, British Red Cross, 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL

## Key notes from the discussions

### What do we mean by leader?

On the whole, it was agreed that 'leader' refers to directors; heads of teams or budget holders. However, there are people who are influencers (especially during change) who are not always included in distribution lists for comms, or invited to events.

### Leadership training programmes

- The group emphasised the merits of leadership training programmes – on one table, the majority had either recently developed leadership training programmes or were about to start.
- It is important to include content on behaviours, values and communications to help leaders support organisations both during 'business as usual' and during change.

### Leaders that sit outside of SMT

- Information and direction for leaders below the top team is key – we need to give them permission to communicate (with skills and support on messaging) and make them accountable too.
- Encourage those who would like to be leaders to become them – build opportunities.
- The bottom-up approach is a powerful message. Get employees who are confident to act as ambassadors and feed up the hierarchy. Set up forums, groups etc.

### Internal comms as part of a leader's role

- Internal comms should be part of any leader's responsibility.
- Leaders should communicate in plain English – no jargon language.
- Leaders should be open to criticism and should say sorry, if needed or appropriate.
- Leaders should share both the bad and the good. Hard issues, negativities and things that have gone wrong should be shared and not just swept under the carpet.
- Add 'communications responsibilities' to leader job descriptions.

### The relationship between internal comms and leaders

- This depends on where internal comms sits and how this can have an impact on the roles we play in supporting our leaders. Internal comms tends to sit in three different places: HR; alongside other external marketing teams; or the CEO office.
- Sometimes leaders can be charismatic but not very strategic in their thinking, or they are good at the process but don't have the appetite or vision to progress things forward (e.g. we can't start anything new until we get everything right with the current process). Internal comms can provide expertise and play a role (e.g. work with leadership on messaging, etc.)
- Internal comms can help by drafting bulletins, e-shots, presentations. Create the narrative.
- Give communications coaching to leaders and give them support and tools
- Get leaders to practice – i.e. rehearsing or answering questions – to make them more comfortable

### Ideas on how to make SMT more visible and accessible

- What leaders do needs to be visible. It can be unclear on who makes decisions due to hierarchy
- You said, we did – a chance to reflect back to staff on what they have said and what you did with that. It can make more people feel they want to feedback/help solve something.

- At one staff conference, leaders were paired with people from different teams and worked on mini presentations together. This gave both an insight into the other role and challenges and the potential to have more empathy both ways.
- Have SMT take over (on occasion) a newsletter bringing their personality out as well as sharing operational news and actions.
- Get SMT to draft their own missives, then get comms to tweak rather than write from scratch, in order to keep their voice and identity.
- Run monthly engagement meetings (either get people to self-select by signing up or send an invitation) – keep these relatively small to create informal conversation between leaders and colleagues
- Technology:
  - Yammer – allows leaders to be organic and post as they need to. It can help them feel more accessible or easier to talk to than in person, especially if in a big charity. Con of this – messages can get lost, not everyone has daily access, becomes a chore to check every day. Shouldn't be for comms to police it. Posts needs to be genuine.
  - Skype – allows a face-to-face feel so can help if you need to do a briefing and have staff based in many locations. Cons to this are connections and broadband speed, as this can cause things not to work as smoothly. Have a monthly Skype chat with leaders. Could theme the months. Help people use it effectively by giving top tips or guides.
  - Video – you can do quick films direct on a smartphone. Vlogs – brings leaders alive.

#### **Making the case to leaders that a positive culture change is needed**

- Staff surveys are effective. They provide a level of accountability and help target the 'forgotten audience' – by giving leaders evidence when they may kid themselves that everything is okay. Be honest on the results. Address the low scores by holding workshops and working on ways to improve. Celebrate the things that are working.
- Use benchmarks to compare your organisation with others. This provides accountability (e.g. "no, other organisations in this sector do not have the same problem")
- Do trend analysis over time (e.g. which areas are better/worse).
- Staff forums/leadership conferences – use them to unravel problems and give leaders a reality check – but also an opportunity to address these issues.
- These methods can reveal the costs associated with not looking after our staff/volunteers (e.g. complaints, legal fees). It puts a spotlight on areas that need focus and places leaders can do better to impact staff morale.

#### **Ideas on how to create a positive culture change**

- Use staff stories as case studies. Celebrate good work. Get staff to front new messages so it isn't always about the manager but about others as well.
- Use the word 'we'.
- Speed dating: for induction or other times, have leaders attend a speed dating style event where colleagues move around and get 5 mins to talk to them.
- Instil a find out and learn culture – make sure leaders don't spoon feed but help staff to take ownership.
- Encourage authenticity – 'live' events and web-chats where people can talk with leaders 'unscripted'. Give people facility to ask questions anonymously – but try to encourage people to be more open and ask questions in open debate. This gives people ownership of their question.
- 'Thank yous' should be given out. Some teams have annual staff awards.

#### **Establishing internal comms as a centre of excellence for managing change comms**

- Creating an SRM style relationship with directorates/divisions across the org to act as a business partner.

- Identifying and developing your key relationships – CEO and director of people/HR.
- Owning the platform when a change programme is being developed. Developing comms and cascade plans and offering solutions.
- Stakeholder management across the leadership of an organisation to ensure internal comms has a seat at the table at the start of a conversation about change rather than when a programme has been developed
- Make sure that leaders take responsibility for communications during change processes (make it clear in communications planning who is responsible for what and then stick to it)

### How to support leaders during change

- Sometimes you need to accept that your people are not going to like the change at this point and just hold the space for them. Keep talking and listening. Leaders might need to be reminded that they have already had the chance to process the change and others need that time too. Leaders and comms need to accept that we won't please everyone. What works for some staff, won't work for others.
- Lack of consistency in leaders' communications – make sure that leaders are accountable for communicating during change; that we remove the 'option' and make sure that some communications just have to be done
- Change can give leaders the opportunity to re-energise the organisation in the way they communicate about change – so setting a tone where it's clear that people are at the centre and they're delivering the work.
- Comms can help leaders deal with negativity. It is similar to media training. Staff are another stakeholder that have views and opinions. Turn questions around, ask staff what they think the solution is, explain the current thinking and how decisions are made - this can help. Give space to the quieter voices in the room rather than the colleagues who always ask questions/speak-up.
- Trust – colleagues need to feel they trust messages. Comms needs to be involved but it needs to be believed that it the leaders message.
- Personalities can impact the outcome of change/change communication – e.g. some may favour direct approach and some may favour more empathetic approach to communicating. Be sure to match the personality to communication type – so use former style to set direction of change and the later style to run Q and A sessions with colleagues
- Leaders need to make sure that it feels safe for people to ask questions – leaders need to practice how they deal with questions so that they respond openly and not defensively. 'Respect' is a powerful value to have in mind when dealing with change.