



Communications Audit

In today's rapidly changing, technology-driven environment, organizational communicators are challenged to be more flexible, responsive and innovative in meeting both the immediate communication needs of the organization and anticipating future needs. **A Communications Audit helps you address this critical, dual challenge.**

Quality relationships within groups and between groups, based on trust, commitment and common purpose, bind people together and motivate them to achieve their goals. A communications audit is akin to a medical check-up or financial audit. It is a thorough and systematic examination to determine what is functioning well and what is not. It often provides guidance and direction on how communications can be improved.

Our Communications Audit presents an objective report on the effectiveness of your internal and external communications. An audit can be widely focused, covering all stakeholder groups, or more narrowly focused on one or more groups such as members, employees, investors, the community, etc. It can also be limited to one or more specific communication programs.

In large part, the challenge falls to corporate communications to create the kind of cathartic leader/manager-led communications experiences that can generate collaboration and motivation within and between groups. This is an often-neglected or overlooked area of opportunity for internal communications groups; one that is vital to the success of the organization and one that can be measured in a communications audit. Its primary purpose is to determine the degree to which communications with specific groups are effective, useful and valuable in supporting and advancing the organization's strategic objectives. Findings of an audit may result in minor or major changes in communications strategies and in the ways in which communications are planned and implemented.

Audit methods, completion time and costs vary depending upon the audit's scope and the organization. Before undertaking your audit, we'll assess your unique communications needs, goals and climate as well as your organization's unique culture, history, dynamics and competitive and financial environments.

The audit process unfolds in several stages:

1. Planning and Design

The planning and design stage defines the audit's scope and goals, populations involved, communications and channels to be audited, audit methods to be used, timeframe and budget. The audit plan is often developed through interviews, discussions and collaboration with a variety of senior managers and the auditor or audit team.

2. Research and Measurement

Research and measurement begin with informal exploratory research and often moves to formal, scientific methods of gathering information. The two informal, exploratory research methods used most often are in-depth interviews and focus groups. The formal, scientific measurement method used most often for primary source research is a survey.

Analysis of existing databases (prior surveys, etc.) is sometimes used to add further dimension and trend information to the audit findings. This is known as secondary source research and tracking or benchmarking, in the case of benchmark data.

Depending on the audit's goals and design, research and measurement of some or all of the following may be involved: face-to-face communications and the grapevine; flow patterns among individuals, departments, divisions and leadership; publications in print, video and audio plus other audiovisuals; large group meetings and events; memos and written communications; leadership and manager-led communications; electronic communications such as e-mail, voice-mail, online bulletin boards, intranets; and feedback systems.

In addition to communications media, patterns, flow, channels, and technologies, a communications audit examines content clarity and effectiveness; information needs of individuals, work groups, departments and divisions; non-verbal communications and corporate culture issues; and communication impacts on motivation and performance.

We give significant attention to those areas upon which people can be most affected by communications: their knowledge, understanding and perceptions; opinions, attitudes and beliefs; issues, concerns and feelings; needs and preferences; abilities; intentions; and behaviours.

Leadership/manager-led communications have become increasingly important in affecting people's understanding, perceptions, attitudes, intentions, collaboration and behaviour in organizations and groups. Measuring the quality of these interpersonal communication experiences is a critical dimension in a successful communications audit.

Leadership/Manager-Led Communications

One of the most critical dimensions of organizational communications, which must be assessed, is the effectiveness of leadership/manager-led communications, the "human communications system" within an organization. This can be generally defined as "meetings," the transfer of information and interactive dialog between leaders and managers, and represents the nervous system of an organization.

An inventory of how often, where, with whom and for what purpose meetings are held needs to be acquired for leadership-led management conferences, divisional meetings, functional area meetings, work group meetings, and one-on-one meetings. The effectiveness of these meetings and the competence of the meeting leaders needs to be assessed to determine whether the "meeting nervous system" is working well in informing, focusing and motivating a majority of people in the organization.

Cascading meeting events containing important strategic information combined with ongoing meetings in which people get current information, clarify information and dialog with their supervisors at all levels has been found to be the most powerful medium to keep an organization strategically on track.

Collaborative Communications Measures

Interpersonal collaborative communications must be healthy and productive for groups to function successfully within themselves, with other groups and with other organizations.

Project teams, functional areas within organizations, joint-ventures, research alliances, sales and service organizations, distribution networks and other groups all need healthy, productive collaboration in order to succeed in reaching their goals.