

Hybrid Work Models Demand an Evolution in Communication

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Communication is the backbone of any business, yet most business problems break down to ineffective communication, and companies are experiencing a significant backlash. With remote and hybrid business models firmly taking hold, businesses across the United States are losing as much as \$1.2 trillion per year due to communication breakdowns. To remain competitive, firms recruit top talent from across the globe, offer hybrid or remote work models, and invest in tech-driven tools and cyber protections to compete and allow their employees to work quickly and safely from anywhere. Planning, policymaking, and training for effective communication must be top priorities for today's leaders to drive an organization into a successful future.

“We have grown significantly in the past three years,” said Heather Oden, COO at Ball Janik LLP, who helped her firm open a fourth office this year. “It can be challenging to keep up with this growth and ensure our people collaborate and communicate effectively. We’ve realized that driving our firm’s communication practices is an evolutionary practice that we must constantly focus on. We also have to be mindful about the threats we face in our interconnected world and have been able to leverage cybersecurity insurance and training to help protect our organization.”

With remote and hybrid working models come new business truths: Communication planning and collaborative planning need to be pushed to the forefront of all business models and not seen as an afterthought. The most successful businesses understand this and implement communication practices at every level—from the top down.

“According to the Association of Legal Administrators’ new 2022 Benchmarking Survey, by fall of 2021, 22% of attorneys and 16% of staff worked remotely on scheduled days,” says ALA President Sarah Evenson, JD, MBA. Three out of five respondents expected their remote working levels to remain about the same in the future for both attorneys and staff. So remote working is here to stay in legal, and legal organizations need to adapt their communications accordingly. Firms have many options—intranets, social media channels, instant messaging video—to keep people connected. While there are many choices, how you use them counts. The right combination will provide for communication that is consistent, transparent, and authentic.”

A new study by Harris Poll and Grammarly, which surveyed 251 business leaders and over 1,000 knowledge workers in the United States, reported that 96% of business leaders agree that effective communication is essential for delivering business results. According to the report, business leaders estimate their teams lose 7.47 hours per week to poor communication (almost a full day in the workweek!). Additionally, 1 in 5 business leaders (22%) estimate the value of business lost due to ineffective communication is \$10,000 or higher per employee annually.

According to the 2022 Grammarly State of Business Report, nearly 9 out of 10 business leaders have experienced the adverse impact of poor communication at work, including increased costs (45%), missed deadlines, or increased time to resolution (39%), and eroded brand credibility or reputation (34%).

Here are three steps businesses can take to enhance their communication practices effectively and become successful.

Bridge the Gap Between Tech-Tools and Effective Communication

Too often, it is thought that investment in technology alone will improve communication and collaboration. However, this mindset can drive inefficiency and create frustration amongst employees. Poorly thought out and executed technology rollouts leave people confused about

using new tools, their purpose, and where to turn with questions. As important as the technology businesses implement is communicating with all stakeholders and groups that will use these tools. A corporate communication representative or team should be part of technology projects from inception to rollout. Continuous communication helps create evangelists who promote the use of tech tools within their groups. This drives adoption and use, leading to successful implementations and improved efficiency.

Provide Guidelines Around Effective Communication

While every business is different, each must focus on its priorities and goals by providing more guidance around where and how teams collaborate. Forming communication policies and plans woven into the fabric of company culture is a powerful way to drive effective communication. Studies have shown that without direction, people take it upon themselves to find methods of communication to get their work done. This can lead to a lack of continuity and disjointed communication culture that leads to problems obtaining and retaining customers and employees. Conversely, companies that implement communication plans and policies drive forward with a united brand that the marketplace rewards.

Prioritize and Practice Exceptional Communication

Businesses that practice effective communication and prioritize their experience will be able to gain top talent and make a significant impact on employee retention and career development. Business leaders from companies both growing in revenue or declining prioritize employee satisfaction and retention. Communication is a critical component of the engaged and satisfied workforce. Good communication practices and policies must permeate all levels and departments of a company to be successful.

Define a Clear Path for New Employees

Critical to the hiring process is a solid onboarding process for new employees. Communication plans should be provided during the onboarding phase. Some companies go a step further by developing mentorship programs. Research has shown that a newly hired employee who has not been given communication guidance will likely flounder and ultimately leave a company where ambiguous communication practices abound. Today's employees expect to be quickly folded into a company's cultural fabric to be impactful. Communication planning is a critical building block needed to meet this expectation.

While the workplace evolves at a staggering pace, communication is the keystone that holds together people in every location and level. It drives new hire success, technology implementations, security awareness, and profit and loss statements. Communication planning is a constant process that helps with employee retention and satisfaction. It may not

always be easy to measure the impact of communication planning but ignore it, and you will lose market share and may ultimately perish. The data suggests it is well worth the time and effort.

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