Social Engineering: Internal Marketing of the Company Mission & Values

This article provides a roadmap for internally marketing your organisation mission. It is based on my experience working with both commercial and not-for-profit organisations who have successfully articulated their core mission/values to an Irish audience.

Picture the scene. It's 8.15am on a cold, wet Thursday morning. You are working through an onslaught of post. The corporate logo on a bulky envelope catches your attention. Opened, the envelope spills out an official communiqué from Head Office. A Desk Top Published document describing the 'Key Management Principles' for the world-wide corporation. The covering note explains that these principles have been developed to "*guarantee competitive advantage and the future survival of the company*". You have been nominated as the 'installation champion' for the Irish operation.

A second scan of the document reveals a raft of obscure language: subsidiary empowerment, re- engineering, centres of excellence, strategic intent and paradigm shifts. You get a quick mental picture of trying to explain these concepts to Paddy Walsh in the warehouse and convincing him of his role in promoting global domination. It's going to be one of those days.

Social Engineering:
The Skills of Group Persuasion

Fiction? Many executives working in the multinational sector are given the task of 'marketing the company mission'. While communications was always part of the HR role, marketing the company mission goes beyond a simple information exchange. A central point is that many senior HR professionals served their apprenticeship in a radically different era. Success was typically based on keeping the unions 'quiet' rather than actively engaging the workforce. Consequently, internal marketing is often a new skill to be mastered. Some HR professionals have developed skills to 'win the war' but are less prepared for peacetime.

Internal Marketing: There are 7 roadblocks to excellent internal communications...

1. What? Staff do not understand the concept.

2. So What? Lacklustre commitment by the management team.

3. Soft Sell: Poor initial commitment of the mission.

4. No Way! The 'espoused values' are out of line with day-to-day management behaviour.

5. How? The organisation does not have the 'tools' to drive the process forward.

6. Constant Focus: The concepts are not reinforced.

7. How Much? Installation success is unmeasured.

The Blue Chip Approach

Intel has a very sophisticated 'Mission Installation' programme (which one cynic described as "methods to load the new software into employees"). Other companies leave the detailed installation as a local call e.g. KAO Infosystems simply distributed their worldwide statement of Key Principles and the Irish management

team decided how to dovetail these with the local culture. Whether fully prescribed or locally designed, systematic internal marketing is the key success factor. This = Social Engineering i.e. ensuring that employees see the glass as half-full and commit to installing the principles as volunteers rather than corporate conscripts.

Target Audience = Your Staff

The Competition = Every other management programme, pronouncement or communications clutter

Installation Procedure

a. Hold launch meetings/Mission Building Awareness Workshops. Explain the underlying concepts – don't just focus on what but most importantly, why.

b. If language in the mission statement is specific to a particular country (e.g. USA), explain or 'Irishise' this. Ensure that the language used in other internal programmes (World-Class Manufacturing, Total Quality Management etc.) is consistent. Acid test: Can the mission statement be understood by employees holding the most junior positions within the organisation? If not, translate.

c. Aid understanding by developing a graphic version of the mission statement, showing how the themes are interlinked. A picture paints a thousand words; graphic mission statements help to communicate the central message. There are a number of possibilities under this heading.

• Print on internal notepaper/on post-it notes/on the reverse side of business cards and issue to staff.

• Run a children's (or adults) art competition around the mission statement to energise the concept.

• Develop a set of internal cartoon characters who continually discuss the mission statement or company values.

d. Use market research techniques to test understanding of the mission concepts e.g. a questionnaire/an internal quiz. If the information gathering process reveals confusion – identify the most likely point of attack and resolve.

e. Use video clips from iconic movies (e.g. teamwork scenes from An Officer and a Gentleman or leadership clips from Dead Poet's Society etc.)[1].

[1] *Watch out for the copyright issues.*

Do Your Managers Support It?

Ensuring that managers fully understand the underlying rationale is 'mission critical' in internal marketing. Where the managers believe that the concepts are relevant and positively impact the business, the installation has some chance of success. If the managers don't buy into the mission, the likelihood of selling it further down the line is zero. A mission statement which is not supported by the management team is like a car without an engine; on the outside it looks okay, but it isn't going anywhere.

Installation Procedure

a. Do senior management believe in it? If not, the mission launch programme will end up 'bottom of the in-tray'.

b. Are the themes in the mission statement integrated with other business goals? The key concept here is alignment – all roads should lead to Rome e.g. your reward systems should positively reinforce the key mission concepts

The level of staff support will ultimately determine the success of your mission. Yet, so often we find managers and staff who are not committed to this. A range of issues are often cited to rubbish the mission ("it was forced on us", "it's an Americanism"; "it adds little value to our operation"). So many times I've seen beautifully worded mission/vision/values statements – which are simply ignored. Some things are shiny on the outside – like donkey droppings! Building support is critical.

People Don't Resist Their Own Ideas

Sometimes resistance can be explained by the fact that the 'implementers' have not had a hand in shaping the concepts. If there was a Ladybird book simplifying the key principles in psychology the first page would read '*people do not resist their own ideas*'. The best managed change programmes take account of this principle. Let's look at an example:

I was involved with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul when they launched an initiative to develop a 'new mission'. At that time the Society, celebrating its 150th anniversary, was questioning its role in modern Ireland. A major effort was made to engage the thinking of the 10,000 voluntary members. After receiving submissions from almost 400 individual conferences and publishing a draft discussion document on the key questions raised

by the membership, a new mission statement finally emerged.

While the execution process took more than 1 year, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul understood that commitment to their revised mission would be the key determinant of success rather than the speed of construction. In developing mission statements the old adage '*make haste slowly*', holds true.

For subsidiaries of multi-nationals, the mission statement is almost always imported and cannot be changed. However, if the what is preset, people can be involved in the how, scoping the nitty gritty installation details. And, if seeing is believing, doing provides real understanding. Vision and values need structure to make it happen. Olympic gold's are built on a thousand early morning swims (or half-marathon runs or practice time on court). The development of an implementation 'toolkit' is at least as important as the initial generation of the idea.

Installation Procedure

a. Ask employees for suggestions as to how they can, through their day to day activities, implement the concepts detailed in the mission. Help them to identify their role in the show. Get a couple of early successes (there is always some low hanging fruit which will get momentum behind the programme).

b. Establish an internal challenge against a sister site. Tell employees that your goal is to install the mission 'better than anyone in the corporation'. Track your progress on a visible scorecard to showcase your success.

c. Run 'Mission Challenge' sessions where people feel free to voice their opinions without the risk of being branded as cynical.

d. Ensure that the Mission is a central part of induction training (and a subsidiary part of all development programmes) for employees. Great companies manage to socialise employees – where the mission and values become 'internalised'.

e. Nominate heroes/champions in each unit and write up stories on their achievements in a monthly/annual 'Hall of Fame'.

It's Actions, Not Words

As in any change process, the strongest message is delivered by actions. Where senior executives behave in line with the mission, this offers a surer guarantee of success than the slickest internal marketing programme. Where management behaviour is contrary to the stated values, you need to see if this can be changed. If it is not possible to do this, the individual may have to be outplaced. If you ignore behaviour which is in 'violation', staff will simply dismiss the mission or values statement.

Making it Happen

a. Audit 'where are we now'? How well are the management team advancing the core concepts. Insert a new element in the performance appraisal process which measures 'conformance to the mission' or install 360 degree feedback (there is zero escape from peer reviews).

b. Develop a management game on the theme of the mission.

c. Design a recruitment test system that allows you to hire managers who 'culturally fit' with the organisation (most companies do this inadvertently; make it explicit).

d. Link your reward structure to performance against the mission.

If your company was on trial for 'living its mission', would there be enough evidence to convict you? All important issues within organisations are measured e.g. all organisations have a financial measurement system. Measurement is a key tool in keeping an organisation change programme on track. The trick is to find or develop a set of metrics which shows progress and highlights implementation gaps.

'What's in it For Me?'

a. Do the staff believe that they will benefit from the changes? Everyone asks the question: 'What's in it for me?' You cannot ignore this primary response to all organisation change initiatives. The best managed companies anticipate staff questions and are in a position to provide real answers.

b. Design a mission tracking system. Helping to keep a new system on the rails is easier than completely re-launching a major initiative which has soured. At the management level this often involves giving individuals direct feedback on their behaviour vis a vis the mission or key values.

c. Find post-graduate students from the local university and have the programme 'measured for free' as part of their fieldwork research.

Summary

While 'mission installation' may seem like a form of corporate brainwashing, managers are unquestionably in the business of maintaining a positive staff community. Internally marketing the company mission is an excellent way to communicate the idea that your organisation has a noble purpose. But, there is a potential downside. You need to give this 100%. Half-hearted attempts to 're- programme' an organisation only serve to create cynicism. What is clear is that the internal marketing of a company's mission has moved from being an esoteric technique to one of the central challenges facing senior executive teams today. Are you up for the challenge?

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