

ABSTRACT: 2013 ELAM Institutional Action Project Poster Symposium

Project Title: Communication Ambassadors: A Strategy for Critical Communication

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Collaborators:

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Background, Challenge or Opportunity: Critical communication is central to the workings of any organization. Academic health systems are increasingly faced with organizational change to meet new regulatory standards and to keep pace with rapidly changing political landscapes. Communication is essential to align faculty and staff with the strategic vision and mission of the institution. Effective communication networks may encourage collective decision-making and improve organizational output, morale, and member satisfaction. Within our health system, faculty and staff have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction about communication with senior leadership. This factor, coupled with recent needs to relay information regarding financial challenges within our institution, has spurred interest in improving the communication structure.

Purpose/Objectives: The objective of this project is to create a strategy for communicating critical internal information that ensures: 1) delivery of accurate and targeted messaging to all organizational members; 2) a method and process to permit faculty and staff to respond to messaging; and 3) a mechanism to triage and review member responses and provide distilled feedback to the organizational leadership.

Methods/Approach: An important part of the early phase of this project has been building consensus amongst the senior leadership and key collaborators in the Office of Finance and the Department of Public Relations and Marketing Communications. The Communication Ambassadors Program will provide a communication structure that will complement the traditional flow of information along organizational charts. The primary users of this program will be the senior leadership of the UMHS. Ambassadors will be apprised of and educated about a critical message and given supportive materials. They will disseminate information and seek feedback from pre-defined faculty or staff members using an on-line communication portal. Administrative fellows will help to distill and summarize member responses which will be reported back to the leadership. Outcomes of interest include: 1) faculty, staff, and senior leadership satisfaction measured by existing surveys and brief message-affiliated surveys; 2) timeliness of messaging and member feedback; and 3) communication portal usage assessed through web metrics.

Outcomes and Evaluation: A task force is currently being organized to consider the operationalization of this effort, required resources, and relevant metrics of success. A business case will be created to articulate a meaningful return on investment. The business case will be developed in the context of a planned pilot to educate the faculty and staff, through a series of communications, about upcoming strategic institutional actions that will better support our financial goals. An Executive Summary of the project and its intended pilot will be presented to the CEO of the University Hospital and his executive cabinet in the summer of 2013. Project implementation is targeted for the fall of 2013.

BACKGROUND

- In response to the Affordable Care Act, the recent recession, and sequestration, academic health systems have undergone tremendous and rapid change. As a result these systems face greater risk.
- Communication is essential to align faculty and staff with the strategic plan and vision of the institution and to bring awareness to priority shifts.
- Within our health system, faculty and staff are moderately dissatisfied with communication with senior leadership.
- Effective communication networks may encourage collective decision-making and improve organizational output, morale, and member satisfaction.

OBJECTIVES

To create a strategy for communicating critical internal information that ensures:

- Delivery of accurate and targeted messaging to all organizational members
- A method and process to permit faculty and staff to respond to messaging
- A mechanism to review member responses and provide distilled feedback to the organizational leadership.

METHODS

The approach to this communication strategy follows John Kotter's model for organizational change. ¹

- Recognize and articulate the sense of urgency for effective communication
- Create a team of credible leaders (Figure 1)
- Develop a vision and strategy
- Articulate a clear vision to get "buy in."
- Identify and remove barriers
- Create quick wins through a relevant pilot
- Address resistance and continue to move vision forward
- Infuse this strategy into the Health System culture

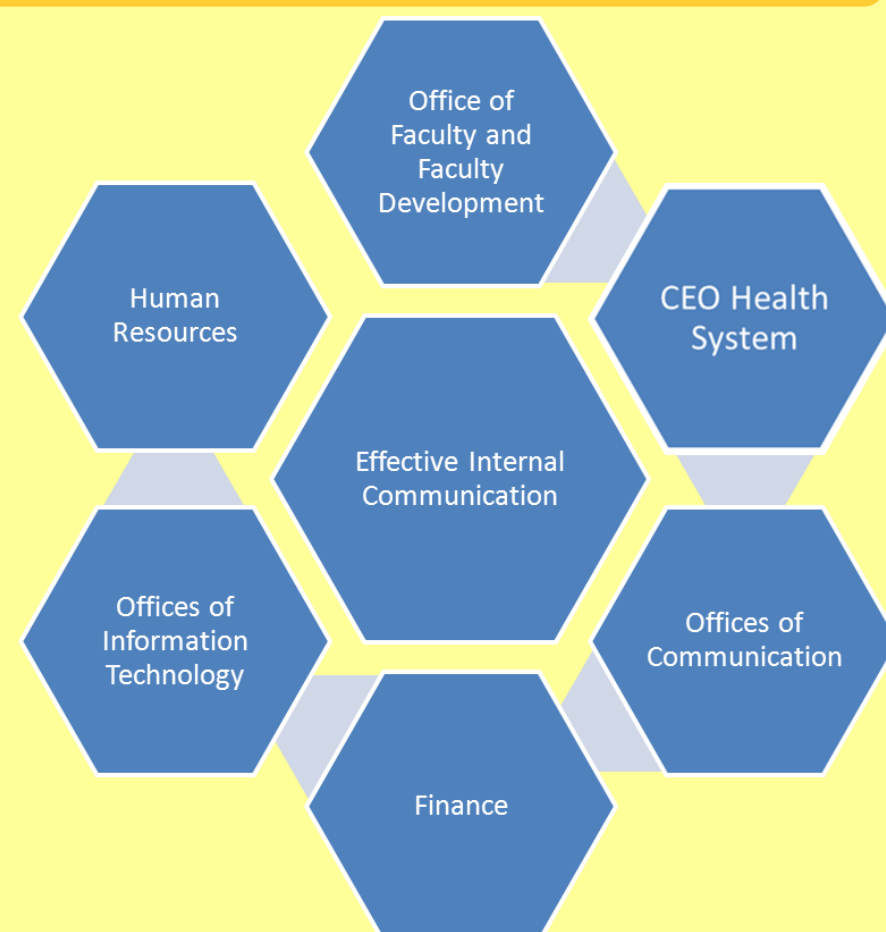


Figure 1. Building Broad Organizational Consensus

THE STRATEGY

- Historically, two-way communication was more accurate, but significantly slower, than one-way communication.²
- Mobile devices and social networking have created a framework for expedited messaging. Yammer is an internal "Twitter" network.
- Figure 2 summarizes our strategy for circular two-way communication designed to engage the organizational base and inform executive leadership.
- This complementary strategy employs several types of message delivery (Figure 3). Ambassadors distribute information via stakeholder units.
- In addition to verbal communications with Ambassadors, alerts about existing critical messages are made available through Yammer, email, or text messaging, based on individual opt-in.

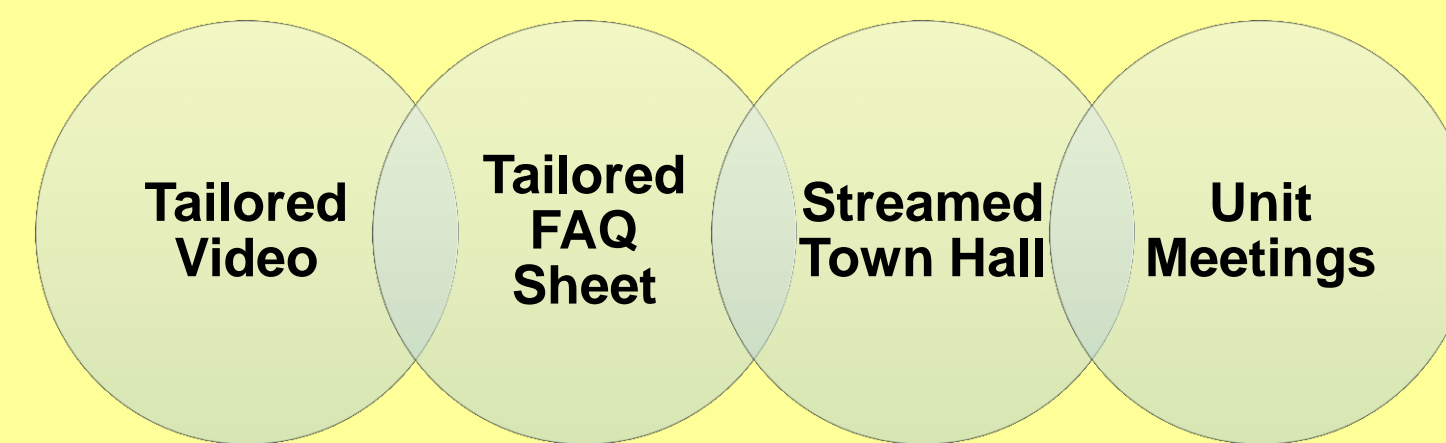
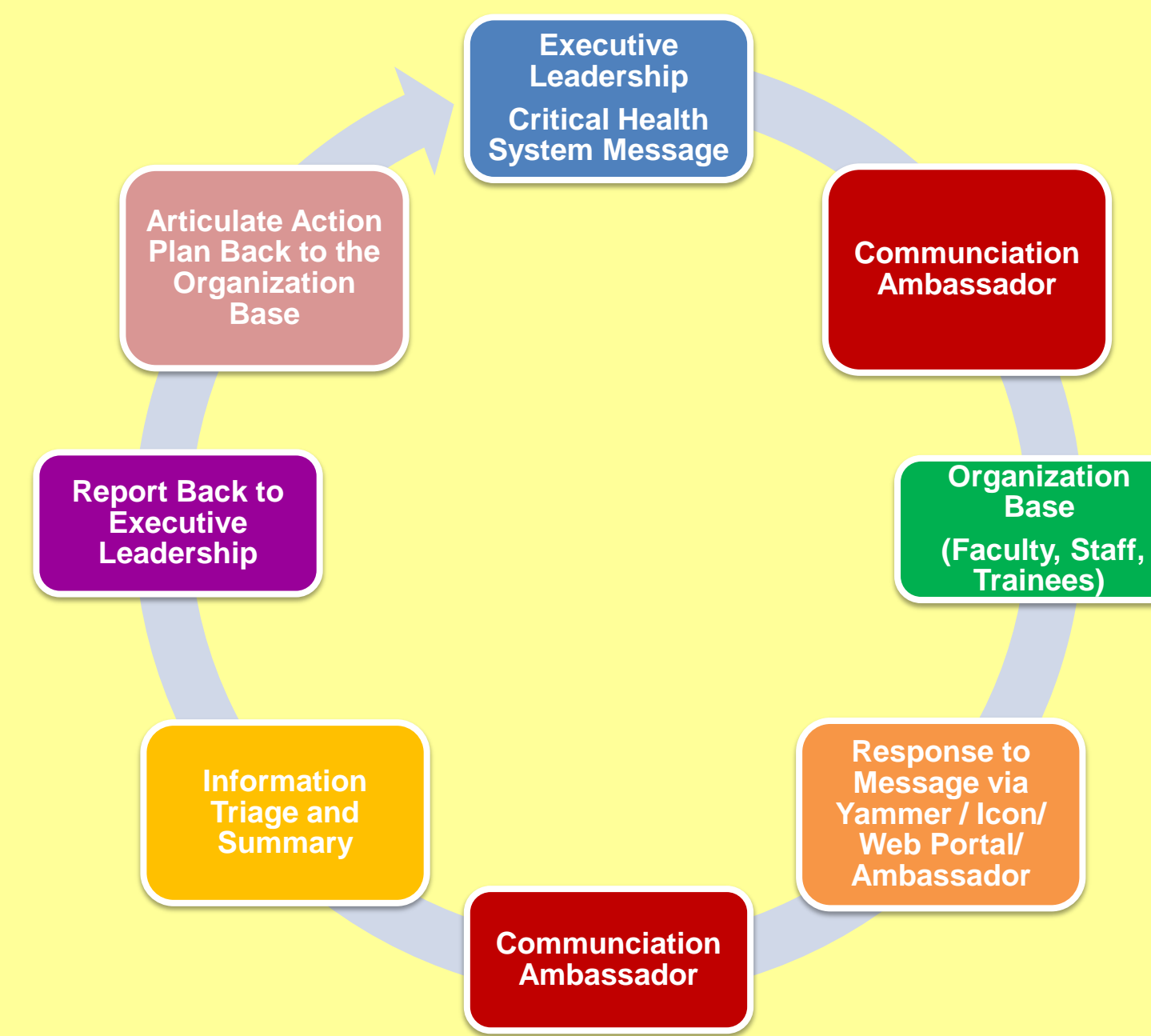


Figure 3. Methods of Message Delivery.

Outcomes of interest:

- Faculty, staff, and leadership satisfaction
- Timeliness of messaging and member feedback
- Communication portal utilization
- Global use of internal social networking

Figure 2. Strategy for Two-Way Communication



- Ambassadors receive information from several sources (Figure 4) that is triaged and organized by Administrative Fellows.
- The Office of Communications then summarizes the response which is provided to the leadership to inform an action plan.
- The leadership must complete the message cycle by informing the base of the action plan.

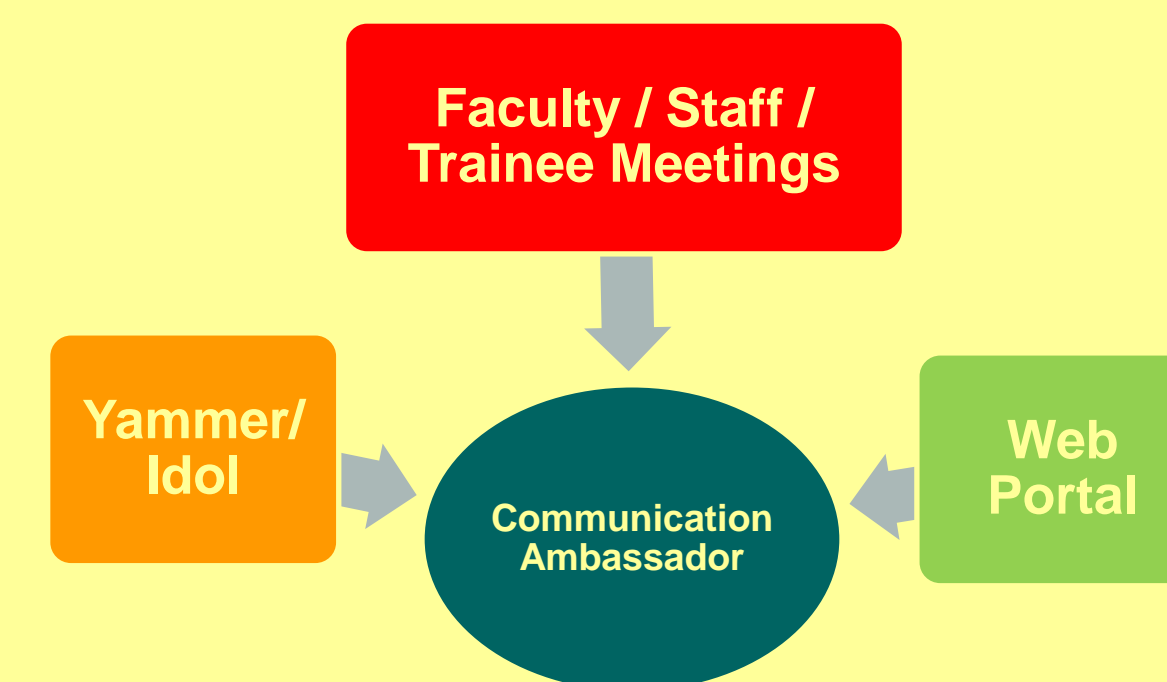


Figure 4. Feeding Back. The organizational base will have opportunities to provide message feedback to Ambassadors using a variety of strategies.

DISCUSSION

- Effective internal communication is essential for organizational health.
- Multiple variables may influence the effectiveness of communication.
- Critical health system communications must be diverse in form and ideally targeted to stakeholder groups.
- Communication Ambassadors can facilitate the delivery of messaging and the receipt of associated feedback.
- The complexity of two-way communication may be reduced through social networking.
- An informed executive leadership is better equipped to develop institutional action plans that maintain member satisfaction.

PROJECT TIMELINE



Figure 5. Timeline

REFERENCES

1. Kotter, John P., Leading Change. Harvard Business School Press, 1996.
2. Leavitt, Harold, Managerial Psychology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp 118-128. 1958