

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

UNECE Work Session on the Communication and Dissemination of Statistics
(13-15 May 2009, Warsaw, Poland)

Topic - Improving internal communication: working better together

STATEC'S PROGRAM TO IMPROVE INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Submitted by <STATEC - Luxembourg>¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In 2003, STATEC set up a currently well running Intranet. This was the beginning of a new era in internal communication. In 2007, STATEC started an ambitious program including training courses, regular hierarchical dialogues, staff meetings and forums.
2. STATEC's Intranet is a fairly complete web-journal but has also a binding status. Information and instructions published on the Intranet are considered as to be officially known by the entire staff.
3. The HR unit, the communication unit, the quality team and the Association of STATEC's employees (AFES-Association des fonctionnaires et employés du STATEC), organise events to improve the internal communication (seminars, training courses, information sessions and recreational activities).
4. These efforts led to a new awareness of the importance of internal communication, but also generated rejection, scepticism and indifference. Today we can say that the internal communication has improved; staff is better informed about what is going on at STATEC and more involved in the decision making process. But the program continues and it is necessary to convince everyone that the efforts are worthwhile and will lead at long term to a better working atmosphere.

II. TOOLS

A. The Intranet

5. STATEC was one of the first public services in Luxembourg to have a complete and daily updated Intranet. It inspired other administrations to follow the same direction. The decision to create an Intranet was not easy to take for different reasons:
 - - it is necessary to invest in adequate software
 - - the technical maintenance has to be ensured
 - - the resources to manage content and up date it regularly have to be found
 - - It is necessary to find a motivated and skilled administrator.

¹ Prepared by [Guy Zacharias, guy.zacharias@statec.etat.lu].

6. To gather these resources, it is vital to have a consensus on the utility and importance of this tool within the management.

To ensure that the Intranet keeps its utility, the staff has to accept it and supply it daily. It must be made highly attractive for the personnel.

7. An important factor that facilitated the operation was the unconditional support of the director general. He declared that the Intranet has a compulsory status and that everyone is supposed to know its contents. It is essential to check it everyday to avoid missing important instructions that come from the management. Therefore it was decided that the default welcome page of the browser is the homepage of the Intranet.

8. Information and training sessions were organized to explain the functioning and the advantages of the tool.

9. In order to facilitate the update, several teams having the right to publish contents, were created:

- the administrator/main editor
- the association of STATEC's employees
- the secretary's office
- the secretary of the "planning meetings"
- the human resources unit
- the "quality" team
- the team responsible for organizing the economic seminars

10. To maintain a good ergonomics and accessibility, a working group meets periodically to evaluate the tool and to recommend modifications. This is necessary because the content tends to increase gradually and sometimes in an uncontrolled way.

11. On one side the Intranet contains a more coercive and official part like:

- - memorandums,
- - instructions (data-processing guide-lines, instructions concerning the external communication, templates etc.)
- - legislative and methodological texts
- - meetings reports
- - the press review
- - new publications
- - the organization chart with job descriptions

On the other side, the most attractive parts are the practical information and some management tools.

12. By “practical” information is meant: information about new staff members (with photographs), leisure activities (excursions, feasts, sports tournaments etc.), the restaurant’s menu, telephone directories, weather news and links to interesting websites (like InSite of Eurostat).

13. The most common management tools are the network agenda, the informatics helpdesk, the tool to book conference rooms, a tool to complain about working conditions, eLearning etc.

14. The Intranet of the STATEC is well accepted due to its large content and daily update. It can be considered as the “company’s newspaper” as well as an archive of important information. The Intranet became an inevitable tool for internal communication.

B. The Network Calendar

15. An internal web calendar gives e.g. the members of a certain unit, an overview of the scheduled activities of their unit. Thus everybody is informed on time about important dates, holidays, meetings, tasks etc. The calendar tool allows also to send a notification to a group of persons, to invite them for a meeting or to notify an important event.

The calendar is easily accessible via the Intranet.

16. The compulsory use of that tool might be somehow burdensome at the beginning, but after a test period, everybody agreed on the fact that always knowing what is happening in his unit, provides a feeling of being perfectly informed and involved in all the activities of the unit. It prevents the constant worry to forget or miss important events.

III. ACTIONS

C. Organization chart

To understand the communication tools and the flow of the different actions, it is necessary to know roughly how STATEC is organized.

Director general			
Division A General services	Division B Social statistics	Division C National Accounts, Economics, Enterprises	Division D International Economic Relations Statistics
6 Units	4 Units	4 Units	4 Units

Many of the communication actions described below refer to the communication flows which exist between the different levels of the hierarchy.

D. Personal development interviews (PDI)

17. *“In our modern world, where the employees have to face an increasingly constraining environment, it is necessary to have an adapted organization. The role and mission of each employee must be clearly defined. It is up to the leaders to train themselves being capable to support and to motivate all the staff members. There is no distinction to make between important work and ordinary work; all the wheels must turn well to ensure an optimized service. The message is not to maximize the productivity of the staff, but to help it to do its daily work in a conscientious and rational way”* (abstract of the SIGEP guide lines).

18. Within the framework of the national masterplan of the modernization, the promotion of quality and the development of staff management (SIGEP project) in the public administrations, STATEC launched a pilot project in 2006 which aims at organizing, at annual intervals, personal development interviews between senior staff and the members of their units. These talks aim to identify the degree of satisfaction of the personnel in the following fields:

- their relations with the senior staff
- their tasks
- the working conditions
- the relations with their colleagues
- their career objectives for the future.

19. During these meetings, an analysis of the training requirements is also made.

20. These talks take place once a year, with a fairly harmonized questionnaire. They have a duration of 30 to 60 minutes per person.

21. The head of unit draws up a summary report of the meetings (organization, contents, follow-up) The anonymized versions of these reports are centralized by the human resources department.

22. The advantage of this type of exercise is that the fixed topics are discussed systematically and bilaterally between the chief and the different members his unit. With the help of the questionnaire, the employees can prepare the meeting in advance. These circumstances are not given during spontaneous talks on an isolated subject or staff meetings.

23. These personal development interviews have not been welcomed by everyone. Some people regard it as drudgery and as excessive bureaucracy. They think that occasional discussions are largely sufficient and that there is no need for compulsory procedures. Although these talks and the related reports are obligatory, they are not carried out by everybody.

24. Nevertheless, the utility of systematic PDIs is recognized by the majority of the agents of STATEC.

E. Working together

25. In 2005, STATEC set up a project entitled “Working together”. The goal was to make the management aware of the needs and expectations of a modern Administration.

26. As STATEC can hardly hope to increase its human resources in the coming years, it will have to learn how to mobilize the staff and to improve their competences. These changes can be realized by the development of managerial competences, communication and relational skills of the team leaders.

27. In this framework, STATEC worked out a two-year action plan with several axes.

28. In a first phase, after a training course given by an external expert, a platform of exchange and reflexion was created by the heads of units. The subject of these workshops is to reflect on the various means and channels of communication used within the office. An improvement plan was worked out and set up. The aim of this action was to encourage the communication between the various hierarchical levels and to strengthen the co-operation in the daily work.

29. The second phase consisted in organizing reflexion workshops at employee level. These workshops were animated by an external consultant. The goal was to propose tracks of improvement concerning collaboration, the dialogue or the exchange with the hierarchy or colleagues. The conclusions of the workshops were presented by the team to their head of unit.

30. The results of these actions led, to a certain extent, to a broadmindedness of the management facing criticism and complaints by the staff members.

F. Economic seminars

31. In order to promote knowledge and communication concerning research and work carried out by STATEC, the economic studies unit regularly organizes economic seminars in order to present new results to the staff members and to internal and external experts, before the official release.

32. STATEC organizes approximately ten sessions per year. One session lasts more or less 1 hour. The average audience is about 25 persons.

IV. ORGANISATION

G. The annual planning meeting

33. During the annual planning meeting, the director general, the secretariat of planning, the heads of divisions and units review the activities and the problems encountered in the past year, and present the program of work and the strategic objectives for the coming year.

34. In order to prepare the annual planning meeting, the heads of units and divisions prepare a working paper as well as a synthesis for the oral presentation.

35. The discussions on the work program finish at midday. The afternoon is reserved on general subjects like working conditions, computer security, human resources etc.

36. The report of the planning meeting is used to draw up the annual report on the Luxembourg statistical system which is published within the framework of the annual governmental reports. It is also used to prepare the working paper for the meeting of the Higher Council for Statistics.

37. The minutes of the planning meeting are disseminated via the Intranet.

H. The Management Committee

38. The Management Committee (the director general, the four heads of division and the head of Human and Financial Resources unit) deals with budgetary and personnel issues. It ensures that urgent matters are attended to. As the subjects treated in this Committee are partly confidential, no detailed report is produced, but the director general informs the monthly planning meeting about the subjects treated and the main decisions. The Management Committee usually meets every week on Friday.

I. The monthly planning meeting

39. The Heads of Unit meet monthly in order to manage common projects, information exchanges, follow-up of day-to-day issues and to implement and monitor the annual programme.

40. The minutes of the monthly planning meetings are also disseminated to the whole personnel via the Intranet.

J. Division meetings

41. Once a month, the division director invites his heads of unit to a 1-2 hours meeting in order to discuss problems and opportunities regarding the daily work and the agenda fixed for strategic objectives. These meetings normally should take place before the monthly planning meeting, in order to prepare the topics which are on the agenda. The division meetings are also meant to inform the heads of unit about decisions taken by the Management Committee.

K. The staff meetings

42. It is recommended to the heads of unit to organize regularly staff meetings, in order to coordinate the work, to inform on decisions taken at the higher hierarchical level, and get him/herself informed on the work in progress and the problems which have occurred.

43. Unfortunately, only part of the units organizes staffs meeting systematically, though this type of meeting is largely appreciated by the staff. It is considered that they make circulate information in a dynamic way. The unit in charge of communication holds its staffs meeting, with some rare exceptions, each week, the same day at the same time. Short minutes summarize the covered subjects, the decisions taken and the person responsible for the implementation.

44. During the personal development interviews, the members of the unit used to express themselves very favourably to staff meetings as an internal tool of communication. The experience shows that the personnel of the units who hold regular staffs meetings are, in average, better informed and motivated than their colleagues who do not have this opportunity.

L. Heads of Unit Forum

45. During the training cycle in management, which took place within the framework of the "Working together project", the board of the heads of unit stated that the communication with the Management Committee required improvements. They felt not enough implied in the decision-making process and that many ideas did not find their way to the "Belle Etage". In order to improve this situation, they created a Forum of discussion which meets once a month to discuss subjects of general interest, in order to make recommendations to the Management. The Forum is animated alternately by the different chiefs of unit. The organizer is responsible to convene at the next assembly, to define the agenda and to animate the debates.

46. The conclusions of the Forum are subjected to the monthly Planning meeting for discussion.

47. After a little more than one year of operation, one can conclude that, even if some of the heads of unit do not take part in the Forum for unspecified reasons, this initiative reinforced solidarity among them. It contributes to the innovation and progress of the working methods and improves considerably the communication between the units.

48. The heads of unit feel less isolated with their problems. They hear that their colleagues have the same type of problems and can contribute to solve them together.

M. The AFES (Association of STATEC's personnel)

49. The AFES's aim is reinforcing the links of solidarity between its members and in particular to ensure the professional representation of STATEC's personnel and to take initiatives to preserve the material, the moral and the social interests of its members.

50. Among its role as a kind of "trade-union", to represent the personnel in face of the management, the AFES carries out a series of other activities:

- It organizes visits of companies, excursions, Christmas parties, wine tasting, charity actions etc.
- It undertakes satisfaction surveys of the personnel.
- It defends the interests of the personnel in face of the owner of the building (problems of air condition, equipment, catering etc.)

51. Each year, during the annual planning meeting, the president of the AFES submits a report on the activities and the degree of satisfaction of the members.

V. FUTURE CHALLENGES

STATEC made many efforts to optimize internal communication. In regard to its staff size (160 persons), this performance was not easy to do.

But we still have a long way to go if we want to reach the fixed objectives. There are still too many colleagues who have to be convinced of the utility of some (maybe time consuming) actions.

The use of the Intranet, the Economic Seminars and the Planning meetings is well accepted.

Even though everybody agrees that Division- and Staff meetings are of highest utility, some members of the management are slightly negligent in that field.

We notice a similar attitude concerning the participation in the Forum's meetings (heads of unit). Approximately 60% of the members are participating regularly. Among these 60%, everybody acknowledges that the Forum is a very important communication tool. So there is still some work to do to convince the other 40% to join the Forum.

There is also a need for persuasion regarding the management training and the Personal Development Interviews. A reason of this reluctance might be that most of the management members are largely involved in the production of statistics and have not enough time to fulfil their management tasks sufficiently.

Despite some minor problems, the ongoing program for internal communication has raised a new awareness of the importance of a good internal communication: communication has been improved!