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Session 4: Internal Communication

Boosting employee engagement – ‘Beyond intranet and newsletter’

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The theme of this year’s session on internal communication is **employee engagement** and the presentation will introduce the concept of employee engagement, briefly analyse its importance for a modern organisation and give examples of work being done in this field by the internal communication team at Eurostat.

Employee engagement can be described as a mix of factors, including commitment to the organisation, job satisfaction, and ‘organisational citizenship’ - a willingness to go outside one's assigned role in the organisation in order to be helpful to others.

According to a recent Gallup poll, the annual cost of **staff disengagement** for the German economy alone is 124 billion euro. The costs of sickness and absenteeism add another 3.7 billion euro to that figure. For the UK, according to the Chartered Management Institute, those figures are £59 to 65 billion and £13 billion respectively. When you calculate those costs for all other European economies you are talking hundreds of billions of euro.

Engaged employees perform better, are more innovative, their levels of absenteeism are lower and they enjoy greater levels of personal well-being. On the other hand, as documented by Gallup, organisations with low engagement scores average up to 51 per cent more employee turnover and record up to 62 per cent more accidents. Their productivity, profitability and satisfaction in the eyes of customers suffer as a result.

It follows that engaging staff more successfully should be at the top of any organisation's agenda. Employees need to feel that their voice is being heard in their organisation, they need to be given opportunities to express their views and to know that their opinions will be taken seriously. It goes without saying that management need to be actively involved in this process.

Many companies measure employee engagement and develop specific engagement strategies for their workforce. In a modern organisation, the role of internal communication in boosting employee engagement can be of major importance, even if other factors such as their working conditions, competitiveness of their wages and good career possibilities will play a primary role.

Eurostat has one of the more active internal communication sections among many different branches of the European Commission, which are called Directorates-General. It has for years been conducting internal staff opinion surveys to measure employees' satisfaction levels in areas ranging from working conditions to understanding management policies. The response rate in the last staff opinion survey conducted in October 2011 was 67.1%.

The management have recognised the importance of internal communication in engaging employees in the organisation and access to the Director-General of Eurostat is uncomplicated and fast for the members of the internal communication team.

The **internal communication section** at Eurostat is working on ways to increase the level of staff engagement in the institution at a time of a total employment freeze across the European Commission and very limited financial resources. What's more, Eurostat, together with the whole of the European Statistical System, are currently undergoing important structural changes to make them better prepared for dealing with growing competition from private data producers and increased statistical needs from users.

Given this complex background, it is more than ever important for the internal communication team to help develop strong positive attitudes among employees towards their work and their organisation. Informing staff about the future methods of production of European statistics, which will have direct impact on the way they work, takes up a significant part of the duties of the Eurostat communication team.

Although classic information sources for staff, i.e. the intranet site (called Cybernews) and a regular newsletter (Eurostat Infos) still remain the most popular ways of informing staff, other means of

communication which do not involve financial investment have also been enjoying growing popularity among Eurostat employees.

The **intranet website** is undergoing a major re-design to align it with the generic look of the Commission intranet and make it more user friendly at the same time. The new site will be launched this September. But already today, Cybernews is an interactive site, where a vast majority of news items published daily are suggested or sent in by members of staff. It also features a suggestion box, ad-hoc surveys as requested by units, and diverse daily information, such as the canteen menu and a schedule of main cultural events taking place in Luxembourg. Cybernews also regularly features interviews with members of staff promoting their work and achievements.

The **company's newsletter** has evolved from a short, purely text-centred, black and white information sheet, to a dynamic, colourful publication featuring lots of photos, personal achievements of the employees as well as informal topics, such as staff hobbies and sports activities. The format of Eurostat-Infos is flexible, which means that special events can receive extra attention in the form of ad-hoc, dedicated issues.

The internal communication team encourages the organisation of information meetings and group discussions during lunch hours. Co-organised by the internal communication team, these events often involve inviting guests from other international institutions. Other ways of staff integration involving **closer social contact and face to face meetings**, such as welcoming newcomers to the organisation, informal events held by Eurostat units as well as festive breakfasts marking the bi-annual change-over of the EU Presidency are also promoted. Photo and art exhibitions featuring work by staff members are encouraged in collaboration with a recently established section of the HR department devoted to staff well-being. The most important social event of the year is the General Assembly, which presents to employees the annual priorities of Eurostat and the European Commission. It also highlights a current statistical issue of interest as well as a jocular presentation about Eurostat prepared by members of staff.

One of the more successful recent initiatives was the opening, at the end of last year, of a well-being exercise room at Eurostat. The idea, which came from the HR department, was strongly supported by the internal communication team, who carried out a series of interviews with the organisers, class trainers and gym goers promoting the facility. Today, the exercise room, run entirely by members of Eurostat staff on a voluntary basis, enjoys great popularity and steadily growing numbers of users.

The use of **social media** for the purposes of internal communication has been recognised, as it could provide an opportunity for staff to share their knowledge, exchange best practice and facilitate social life. Twitter is currently being used by the Eurostat press office to distribute news releases and the mobile device applications developed by the IT branch of Eurostat aim at the external users only. Lack of staff also makes it difficult to establish regular video communication for staff, although video interviews with senior management were produced on several occasions by the team in the past couple of years.

Concluding, it can be said that despite its small size (three employees in an organisation with over 800 staff), and limited resources, the internal communication team at Eurostat have been making steady progress in the area of staff engagement across the institution. The value of smooth internal information flow has been recognised by the senior management, and access to managers is quick and unbureaucratic. The team's work has also been recognised by Eurostat staff, which steadily awards its efforts with high ratings in the opinion surveys regularly carried out among employees.