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Topic (v): Future ideas in Communication

**Getting the internal right is key to getting the external right – right? A case study on Statistics
New Zealand’s staff engagement around the largest transformation programme for 40 years**

Invited Paper

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I. Introduction

1. Often internal communications is the poor cousin to external communications such as media relations, stakeholder engagement, publications, web and social media. Staff are not identified as a key audience and are expected to learn about organisational information via the occasional staff newsletter, formal managerial briefings, osmosis and water cooler gossip.
2. Thankfully, organisations are realising that communications efforts used to engage external audiences can also be applied to great effect with internal audiences too. In fact, effective internal communications is a key enabler of employee engagement and engaged employees are the most effective champions of the organisation’s external reputation.
3. This paper uses a case study to highlight the premise that effective internal engagement (getting it inside right) is a necessity, and indeed a precursor, to having any significant impact with the outside world.

II. Background

4. Statistics New Zealand Tātauranga Aotearoa (SNZ) is a government department and New Zealand’s (NZ) national statistical office. It is funded by the Government and has a government minister (the Minister of Statistics) appointed to manage its portfolio. It is governed by the Statistics Act 1975 which establishes an ability to operate independently and enables the production of official statistics that are not influenced by the Government of the day. SNZ is New Zealand’s source of official statistics and it leads the Official Statistics System (OSS).
5. SNZ’s goal is to ensure New Zealand has the statistical information it needs to grow and prosper. Statistics produced across the OSS are used to inform decisions, and monitor and understand the state and progress of New Zealand. The government uses this information to grow NZ’s economy and well-being so that all New Zealanders can enjoy greater prosperity, security, and opportunity.

6. SNZ aims to tell the story of NZ through statistics that are relevant, accessible and trustworthy. To do this, it is vital the public has trust and confidence in the collection, production and dissemination of statistics.

7. For almost 100 years, SNZ has been producing official statistics. Currently there are almost 1100 staff working in offices in Auckland, Wellington (head office) and Christchurch. SNZ is headed by the Government Statistician and Chief Executive (CE) and eight Deputy Government Statisticians make up the organisation's Board and executive leadership team.

III. Reason for change

8. By early 2009, to operate sustainably into the future, SNZ knew it needed to change. It could not meet the country's statistical requirements of the future unless significant changes were made. This was the harsh reality and catalyst for being serious about significant transformation.

9. In parallel to SNZ's need to transform, the NZ government sector was in the middle of a large transformation. Clear expectations were set for government agencies - be more efficient and deliver more for less.

10. Within the context of future sustainability and clear government expectations, there were four key drivers for change within SNZ:

- Resources were stretched, IT platforms were old, incompatible and obsolete. SNZ needed more efficient and sustainable ways to collect, manage and disseminate data/information. This required significant IT investment and integration.
- A large cross-government initiative 'Better Public Services' was pushing all government agencies to work more collaboratively and provide more efficient, 'one stop shop' services to and for NZ
- SNZ needed to move from having an internally focused 'production shop' mentality to be credible, influential leaders of the OSS, who focused more on meeting customer needs
- The organisation needed to grow its people and the skills, behaviours and leadership to help carry out the change.

IV. The vision

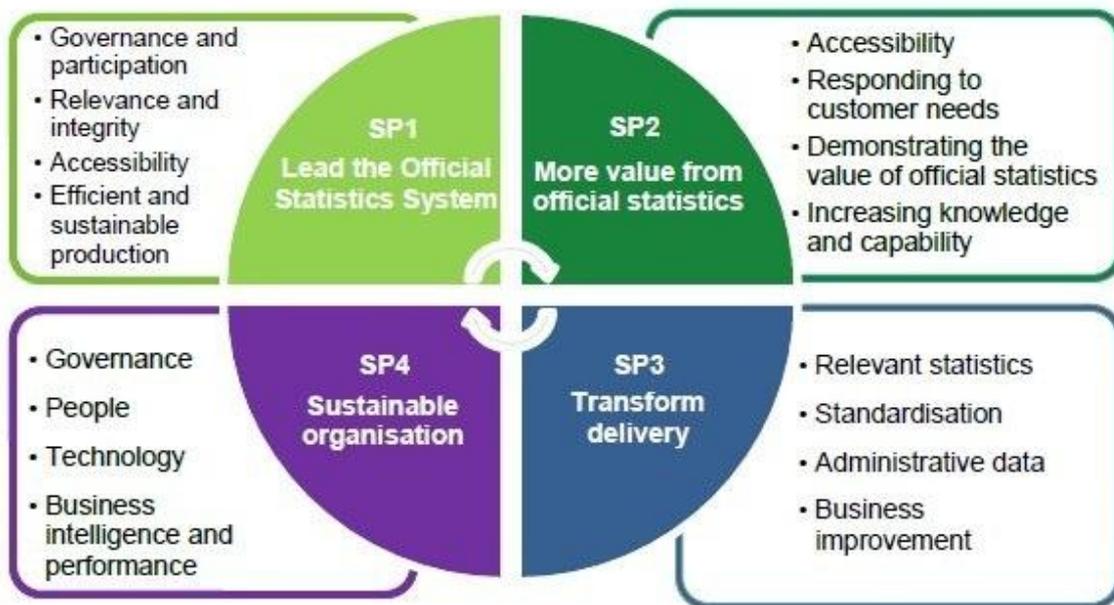
11. SNZ put together a comprehensive transformation case to government to fund system, process and capability changes. In late 2009 the business case was approved and SNZ was granted additional funding in 2011. In total the organisation received an additional \$138m. As well as this, the organisation agreed to invest \$131m of existing funding - for a total transformation budget of \$269m over 10 years.

12. The vision (and the name of the transformation programme) is '*Statistics 2020 Te Kāpehu Whetū*'. Its outcome is to ensure NZ increasingly gets the information it needs to grow and prosper.

13. The ten year transformation programme will transform everything at SNZ including:

- the way it works
- how it collects and shares information
- who it works with and how
- the systems, tools and processes used
- the skills, attitudes and behaviours staff need for success.

The transformation work is grouped under the one of the four strategic priorities for the organisation:



14. In Maori¹ culture ‘Te Kāpehu Whetū’ is a navigational system for ocean going vessels (known as waka) using knowledge and practice from the past and the present to plot a course toward the future. This name was selected as it aligns closely with the nature of the transformation that needs combined knowledge and effort to plot a course for the future. Using a Maori name for the programme also reflects SNZ commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi². It also reinforces the organisation’s aim to be more responsive to Maori, and that this behaviour is something staff are expected to develop and demonstrate too.

V. Communicating the need for change

15. SNZ has \$269m of tax payers’ money to invest over a ten year period to transform the organisation. It is vital that staff understand what the funding was going to enable and understand the part they would play in making the transformation project a success. Unless staff are engaged with the transformation story, it would be next to impossible to engage effectively with stakeholders, deliver the changes needed, show the investment was worthwhile and highlight where it would be utilised.

16. SNZ staff had not undergone significant organisational change for almost 40 years. They were used to making do, focusing on the immediate job at hand, and producing what they had always produced. Delivering a large transformation programme was going to be a challenge and getting staff acceptance and engagement was key.

¹ Maori is one of three official languages of New Zealand. English and NZ sign are the other two.

² The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 by representatives of the British Crown and various Maori Chiefs.

VI. Getting the inside right

17. As communications professionals will know, most organisational challenges cannot be solved by effective communications alone. There needs to be a ‘cake’ underneath the communications ‘icing’. Developing and delivering an effective internal communications plan to support *Statistics 2020 Te Kāpehu Whetū* had to be done in close conjunction with the Board, the Transformation Office (TO), Human Resources and Culture and Change teams. It needed to support the overarching business plan for transformation. A senior communications staff member was embedded in the TO to ensure a close and smooth linkage, and ensure that the vision and transformation was reflected in all organisational communications channels.

18. The Culture and Change team, closely supported by communications staff, developed four key priorities to enhance staff engagement and understanding:

- **Creating a story** that staff could understand, engage with and re-tell
- Supporting **champions** across the organisation who could advocate for change
- Developing tools to help make the transformation **real and sustainable**
- Creating an internal environment that **enabled the external story**.

A. Creating a story

19. The story began well before funding was approved. Staff had to be convinced of the need for change and, most importantly, what it would mean for them. Initial messaging focused on the reason for change, establishing the vision, and setting out the steps that the organisation would need to take to achieve it. This was put into a simple ‘roadmap’ that set out the four key priorities and set those out in three yearly blocks. A copy is attached.

20. Utilising the Maori language and the story that of Te Kāpehu Whetū proved very successful in creating an understandable and relatable analogy for transformation and it resonated with a multi-cultural workforce.

Key messages included:

- We are all in the waka (canoe) and we all must paddle to get where we need to go
- We can all see the stars (our strategic priorities) and we must follow them to get where we need to go
- Our path may change on the way to our destination, but we all know where we are going, how we must get there and why.

21. Maori symbolism was used to produce a compelling visual picture to support the transformation story – showing how SNZ is changing and why.

22. Staff were invited to input into the development of the visual. This was a strong example of allowing staff to create their own story and it was an extremely collaborative, challenging and rewarding process.

23. The transformation visual was finalised and developed into an animated online picture (housed on the corporate intranet), as well as being printed into large A1 sized posters. A copy of the transformation visual is attached.

24. The channels used to convey the story were as important as the story itself. A dedicated transformation section was established on the corporate intranet (itself restructured to better convey transformation). The section contains the transformation story, copies of the corporate documentation, FAQs, an overview of the project management team, strategic priorities, and a large interactive section where staff could post their own stories, ideas and thoughts. Staff were encouraged to visit the page for updates and to refresh their knowledge.

B. Champions

25. Many transformation programmes focus on changing processes or IT systems. While SNZ's transformation programme includes these, it also includes projects aimed at building peoples' capability in both managing the change, and the skills needed for the future. This cuts to the heart of the enormity of the transformation – change involves all aspects of how staff think, engage and work.

26. It was important for SNZ to identify the culture it wanted to create, the behaviours required and the values that would underpin all staff actions. The Culture and Change team set out to develop 'champions' for change. Three key projects the team, with strong communications support, focused on were:

- Establishing a stable of 'culture coaches'
- Targeting the types of behaviours the organisation needed to support change
- Creating opportunities for discussions and storytelling to help reinforce core behaviours the organisation needed staff to deliver to demonstrate the change required to create change.

27. Culture Coaches. 60 staff volunteered to become 'culture coaches'. Communications support included preparing for and co-hosting workshops where new resources are shared, ideas and issues discussed and additional training and coaching is provided.

28. Behaviours. A 'Spotlight on Core Leadership Behaviours' programme highlights core leadership behaviours each month with events, activities and messaging promoted on the intranet.

29. Discussions and storytelling. Talking about change with staff is a high priority that starts at the top. The CE and Board host face-to-face 'Engaging Together Workshops' regularly throughout the year. These are collaborative sessions where all levels of staff refocus on SNZ's vision, discuss questions or issues, identify changes in the organisation's environment, and learn new skills in managing change. These sessions are very popular and well attended.

30. Telling stories that highlight new ways of working at SNZ has also proven to be a good communications tactic in engaging staff. Currently under development is a storytelling project where staff will choose to interview their colleagues about their roles and their views on the transformation. Another way of connecting and engaging people.

C. Real and Sustainable

31. Initiating a communications programme to deliver large organisational transformation is perhaps the simplest part. Ensuring effective and enduring communications initiatives to support the change momentum and reinforce the developing story is the challenge. A number of initiatives were implemented to keep the transformation story real, relevant and top of mind:

- SNZ added an animated version of the transformation visual to the induction process for all new staff. This was done because it had quickly become apparent that while existing staff understood the transformation story and continued to follow its progress, new staff did not. Thus the organisation had a range of staff with different understandings of the change

journey. New staff are now also invited to ‘coffee clubs’ where they meet members of the Board and discuss the organisation’s transformation in a casual setting

- Updated transformation messages (particularly highlighting and celebrating project success) are continually transmitted through all internal communications channels with a focus on CE communications (weekly messages and monthly live staff video broadcasts).

D. Enabling the external story

32. SNZ knew that if staff did not buy into the journey, it could not be told effectively (and with conviction) externally. When the organisation was able to accept the case for transformation, help develop and reiterate the change story, and engage around the behaviours, culture and values required to drive change, it would be time to ‘open the doors’.

33. While the organisation must continue to reinforce transformation messages across all internal communications channels, SNZ is confident that in a relatively short time space, staff are engaged around the transformation. How can it tell? Staff engagement survey scores indicate an increasing understanding of the common purpose the organisation, the language staff use regularly includes references to the vision, the transformation intranet pages are well utilised, and staff continue to participate fully in transformation activities. Staff are proud about working for SNZ, and encouragingly, they tell others that too.

VII. Telling and selling it outside

34. It is important to externally communicate for a number of reasons, but key is to ensure that the public of NZ felt confident about investing their tax dollars into SNZ so the organisation could continue to produce the statistical information the country needs to grow and prosper. If there was no support or understanding of official statistics, then SNZ’s position as an important government agency and the leader of the OSS becomes untenable and the future uncertain.

35. A range of communications tactics have been developed and implemented to assist external audiences understand the transformation journey:

- Encouraging staff to **engage externally**
- Establishing a **strategic stakeholder engagement** programme
- Bringing the **outside in**
- Utilising **external channels** regularly with consistent messages

E. Engaging externally

36. Encouraging and supporting staff at all levels to engage externally was strongly endorsed by the CE. Communications staff created a range of fact sheets that provided easy to use information and key messages about a wide range of organisational information (linked to the transformation journey). Examples included staff taking opportunities to present at conferences and taking the opportunity to be part of professional bodies and formal networking activities. There is a series of events currently being developed that will see a range of high profile speakers take part in themed discussions about the future of statistics. The organisation has achieved success in a range of formal awards with transformation project entries. These initiatives all help ‘spread the word’ across a range of audience groups in compelling ways.

F. Strategic stakeholder engagement

37. Engaging with key stakeholders in a purposeful way to help advance key strategic priorities is a high priority. It was vital to create a programme that had a clear purpose, is linked to achieving tangible and measurable outcomes, and was simple to deliver and manage. This is a very effective way to talk directly to influencers, help create champions and convince the non-believers. While this work is on-going, there is a clearly defined set of key stakeholders (government, non-government and private sector) that senior SNZ staff engage with regularly. They are provided with key messages and key themes and their discussions are documented and fed back into the organisation.

G. Outside in

38. While staff are encouraged to ‘get out’, it is also important to invite the outside in. For example key note speakers are invited to address the senior leadership team with subsequent discussions linked to our transformation and professional bodies are invited in to learn more about SNZ. Again, this is helping spread the message in a subtle but effective way.

H. External channels

39. SNZ has a range of external channels including publications, a website, social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube), and a regular programme of information releases and a proactive media engagement strategy. It is vital to ensure that all these channels were co-ordinated and carry consistent messages about the transformation programme where appropriate. The messages need to link back to internal messages too.

40. SNZ’s CE recently resigned to take up a role in another organisation. The vast majority of external comments acknowledged the huge role he played in moving the organisation forward to embrace an increasingly external focus. This was a useful platform (and mandate) to establish a range of communications initiatives to help ‘tell and sell’ the transformation story externally. It was an opportunity to leverage the announcement to reinforce the vision and plan for transformation, and while the CE was departing, the organisation knew exactly where it was going and how it was going to get there.

Conclusion

41. Organisations that focus their communications efforts externally at the expense of their internal audiences will face significant challenge. The internal audience must be convinced about the path the organisation is taking and believe in the common purpose before external audiences can be convinced. Positive and engaged staff are any organisation’s best advocates. Communications plays a significant role in achieving this.

42. SNZ had to transform or face an unsustainable future. Gaining staff understanding, acceptance and engagement was key to affecting positive change. As an organisation that had not undertaken significant change for 40 years, for many staff, change was a foreign language.

43. Communications needed to be closely linked and coordinated with the areas of the organisation responsible for transformation. Embedding a senior communications advisor with the TO and supporting the Culture and Change team helped provide that connection and continued to prove vital.

44. Establishing key communications priorities that support the change plan must be done early. Having buy-in from the top down is essential to getting staff at all levels engaged in the change. So too is ensuring that messages are coordinated across all internal communications channels and every opportunity is taken to reinforce key messages.

45. Encouraging and empowering staff to participate in defining the story was successful. The whole organisation had the chance to actively contribute in a tangible way to the transformation visual. The visual has been instrumental in telling the transformation story.

46. Knowing when an organisation is ready to tell the story externally is important. For SNZ, the staff engagement survey played a key role in confirming that people felt they understood what the organisation's common purpose was and that they were engaged with it.

47. External engagement must be purposeful with a clear focus. In the case of SNZ it was, and continues to be, important to ensure the public of NZ understand and support almost \$270 million dollars being invested in ensuring they get the statistical information required to grow and prosper. External messages must link with messages staff are receiving to ensure credibility and consistency.

48. While it is early days in a transformation programme, internally the communications effort has been successful. Externally, anecdotal evidence certainly points to an increasing awareness and acceptance of SNZ's role now and into the future. SNZ staff are frequently being asked to lead and participate in major government initiatives. Our reputation is growing. More work will continue to be done in this area – but with the confidence that the organisation is engaged and fully supportive.

Attachments:

1. Statistics NZ's Te Kapehu Whetu Roadmap (Plan on a Page)
2. Statistics NZ's Te Kapehu Whetu transformation visual