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**INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION TOOLS
FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

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INTRODUCTION

Internal communications enable an organization to share its vision, goals and priorities with employees, and to provide information on new initiatives and changes affecting their work. For internal communications to be effective—to move beyond basic dissemination or exchange of information—active listening, observation and collaborative relationships are key. Internal communications become effective when they facilitate day-to-day operations and help implement strategic initiatives.

To communicate effectively, either within or outside an organization, relevant information must reach the right audience, in the right way, at the right time. Statistics Canada has developed several internal communications tools that allow the organization to quickly disseminate information, thereby facilitating consultation and fostering a common understanding of the organization's priorities within its workforce.

Various committees, working groups, staff meetings and information sessions help develop and maintain collaborative relationships among employees, supervisors and managers. Statistics Canada has established feedback mechanisms, which are used by operational-level employees and managers to share proposals, comments and ideas with senior management.

This paper provides an overview of the context in which Statistics Canada has used complementary internal communications methods and tools to carry out a project known as Innovation 2.0.

INNOVATION AT STATISTICS CANADA

Innovation is at the heart of organizations that define the way of the future. Statistics Canada is no stranger to innovation and has long been considered a world leader for its statistical methods and for the ways in which it supports the national statistical system.

Over the past 20 years, the organization has made its mark on the international scene with, among other things, its innovative survey methodologies, data dissemination, and collection methods. Statistics Canada was one of the first statistical organizations to introduce an Internet response option for its Census of Population in 2006, responding to the requests of many Canadians who were interested in completing their census forms online. Also, in 2011, the agency liberated its output database by adopting an open license for all its web products.

INNOVATION 2.0 – The Context

At Statistics Canada, innovation is not an afterthought: it is a component of the business model of the organization. The organization management structure is fundamental to its ability to innovate.

In 2011, an Innovation Task Force was created. The group's mandate was to determine how organizations foster an innovation culture among employees. Research was conducted and findings were shared broadly. To move forward on that research, the Innovation Forum was created, with representatives from across the organization.

While innovation was not new to Statistics Canada, emerging technologies facilitated exchanges in new and far-reaching ways and, in turn, created exciting possibilities. In short, the time was right for a broader embrace of innovation. The organization was ready to add new dimensions to its statistical programs so the Innovation Forum developed Innovation 2.0.

The objective of the Innovation 2.0 project is to foster innovation at all levels. Senior management embraced and supported the idea: understanding the project and accepting its risks. The organization wanted to empower employees to find fulfilment in a workplace that supports creative thinking. Statistics Canada was also hoping that Canadians, in general, would benefit from the positive impact of innovation on the relevance and quality of its statistical programs. To achieve these goals, specific tools were created for changing how the organization fosters innovative ideas.

The tools grew from a constructive exchange of ideas among a broad contingent of employees. The formal consideration of their ideas was leveraged on existing governance mechanisms, which had already proven successful for Statistics Canada's management of general statistical programs.

While confident that these tools would support innovation, Statistics Canada needed to consider other factors when introducing new ways of doing things. For example, would innovation be as effective if it imposed additional strain on an already full workload? In any organization, there is not much room for employees to reduce focus on their primary projects. The organization chose a path to support transformative projects by guiding employees in researching options, preparing detailed project plans, and implementing, or contributing to the implementation of, their new projects.

Senior management's support was critical in introducing new ideas, products and ways of doing work. With well-defined expected outcomes—consistent with the organization's mandate and objectives, and communicated clearly throughout the organization—, Statistics Canada could reasonably expect to see positive changes in the foreseeable future.

TOOLS TO GENERATE INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Over the past few months, Statistics Canada has piloted several tools and processes in the context of Innovation 2.0. The organization has been monitoring how ideas are generated in the workplace and has been following their life cycle.

A communications plan was developed to achieve the project's goals. There were three objectives for the Innovation 2.0 communications activities:

1. support the creation of a work environment that is conducive to innovation
2. engage, motivate and encourage employees to participate in Innovation 2.0
3. encourage communities to contribute innovative ideas.

These objectives would be met by delivering specific messages to selected audiences through

- all-staff emails from the Chief Statistician or from the Innovation Champion
- articles in *@StatCan* (the internal newsletter for employees) describing success stories and tangible examples of innovation projects being proposed
- town hall meetings to explain Innovation 2.0, with senior staff present to show Statistics Canada's commitment to the initiative, and to answer questions from participants
- a lunchtime conference on Innovation with a former senior public servant as the keynote speaker
- videocasts of related events
- an Innovation 2.0 page on the Internal Communications Network, with frequently asked questions
- examples on the portal of how we have been innovative over the past 100 years.

In particular, two major internal activities were planned for this year: the 'Big Ideas Conference' and the development of an internal collaboration tool called 'The Innovation Channel.' Both were supported by a wide array of communications products and activities to foster buy-in at all levels.

The 'Big Ideas Conference'

The StatCan Young Professionals Network, in conjunction with the Innovation Forum, hosted a 'Big Ideas Conference' in April 2013. The conference tagline was 'Small ideas can be big!' The goal of the conference was to collect innovative ideas related to a variety of topics, from organizational efficiency to wellness.

To build a momentum in preparation for the 'Big Ideas Conference', the StatCan Young Professionals Network organized 'Idea Jams,' which were brainstorming sessions where employees could share their ideas on ways to shape the organization. Sharing perspectives—an element vital to innovation—inspired the workforce to submit over 145 ideas to improve Statistics Canada's programs, workplace, and the way work is done. The Network chose the top 10 'big ideas' from among the proposals and presented them during the conference. The two best ideas were selected for implementation.

There were strategic considerations related to this activity. The StatCan Young Professionals Network 'brand' had to be clear, consistent and obvious. Reactions to a 'big ideas' conference could have ranged from strong support to 'innovation weary' and cynicism but the energy of the Network—along with the strong support of senior management—pulled employees toward the supportive end of the spectrum.

'The Innovation Channel'

The ‘Big Ideas Conference’ was successful in drawing out fresh ideas and in demonstrating that not only would innovative individuals be heard, but their contributions could become reality. Senior management wanted to sustain the momentum of the conference and not lose any of the ideas generated by employees. To that end, a collaboration tool called ‘The Innovation Channel’ was created to reside on the Internal Communications Network and to encourage employees to submit their innovative ideas. It was launched in April 2013.

Collaborative tools and platforms allow the organization to sustain innovation and the employees to exchange innovative ideas in real time. This promotes

- collaborative ‘polishing’ of ideas
- the creation of a supportive governance structure to sponsor promising ideas
- the sharing and storing of ideas over the medium and long term.

Such an environment ensures the organization-wide continuity of Statistics Canada’s culture and desire for innovation.

Senior management wanted to engage Statistics Canada employees and to give them an opportunity to share, exchange and collectively enhance innovative and creative ideas. Three areas (communications, information technology and the Innovation Forum) are responsible for developing, maintaining and supporting ‘The Innovation Channel’ portal.

Communications Division worked with subject-matter areas and the information technology group to coordinate the development and the implementation of The Innovation Channel – a crowdsourcing application. Since this initiative must be consistent with various internal policies, principles and best practices, Communications monitors and moderates the discussions on the portal, on a daily basis, according to an approved protocol which identifies standards and contingency procedures. Monthly reports are provided to the Innovation Champion – an Assistant Chief Statistician.

The information technology group is responsible for customizing the tool according to predetermined functionalities, providing technical support and assisting staff in using the portal while the Innovation Forum is providing direction and support.

The employees must register in order to publish their ideas or comment on the ideas of others. This can be done in the official language of their choice. The ideas submitted by the participants are placed in a queue for the moderator to accept or remove. Those ideas that comply with the rules of engagement are translated and posted permanently. Although comments are displayed immediately after submission, they can be removed if they do not comply.

Employees’ ideas are compiled into monthly reports and submitted to the Innovation Forum, which analyzes the ideas submitted, identifies the governance and other mechanisms to support ideas, and refers them to the appropriate areas for review/implementation. The Innovation Forum also reports to the organization’s Policy Committee on the progress, results and overall success of The Innovation Channel.

CONCLUSION

By using established and proven communications channels, Statistics Canada has been able to effectively introduce new approaches to support, foster, and manage innovation. All the steps were orchestrated to raise interest, encourage participation and create momentum for innovation to be integrated into the frameworks, processes and culture of Statistics Canada.

The Innovation 2.0 project promotes a culture of creative thinking and professional originality. Employees are being offered the opportunity to address challenges in a positive and contemporary way. They can steer change and own solutions. And, in the end, innovation will contribute to the achievement of Statistics Canada's objectives and mandate—meeting the information needs of Canadians.

Internal communications is a key component of Statistics Canada's strategy for introducing and managing change. Working within the context of the government-wide communications policy and the organization's tradition of open dialogue, we have had the opportunity to optimize internal communications. It was a strategy that has proven effective and, with continual improvements and new developments, should continue to be effective for future initiatives within the organization.

Finally, internal communications will continue to be strengthened by developing other online collaborative tools adapted to various needs. Innovation is a crucial element in our work.