

## **Internal Communication as a strategic tool**

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### ***Abstract***

What happens inside a statistical institute in a period of organizational changes? Statistical production must go on anyway and the staff has to rapidly understand the new framework and, first of all, the rationale of the changes. Who is in charge of informing the staff? The answer is easy: this is the task of the Internal Communication. Therefore, IC may have a strategic role because paying attention to staff information and motivation has a positive influence on organizational performance. This paper will explain the experience of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) in the last two years: problems, strategy, efforts.

What has been done in Istat so far? First of all, the organization structure has been changed by putting IC in such a position which empowers its strategic role, and therefore becoming one of the available tools for management to communicate and explain changes.

Secondly, we have realized both a completely renewed Intranet site, and short-, middle- and long-term plans with several objectives: 1) to increase sense of belonging to the Institute; 2) to explain organizational changes and the new production structure through story telling; 3) to increase dialogue with staff in different ways; 4) to give more and more information on Institute's life and on its new statistical projects in a friendly and easy accessible way.

Finally, we have published a monthly newsletter, currently at its 11th issue. The newsletter gives the opportunity of both deepening institutional information and vision, and giving space to informal communication – special talents of staff, curiosities and social activities. All the issues of the newsletter are available on the Intranet to be read and read again.

### **Internal Communication as a strategic tool**

What happens inside a statistical institute in a period of organizational changes? Statistical production must go on anyway and the staff has to rapidly understand the new framework and, first of all, the *rationale* of the changes. Who is in charge of informing the staff? The answer is easy: this is the task of the Internal Communication. Therefore, IC may have a strategic role because paying attention to staff information and motivation has a positive influence on organizational performance. This paper will explain the experience of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) in the last two years: problems, strategy, efforts.

#### **2016: a sort of revolution.**

A new organization was released in April 2016, based on the Business Architecture defined in the last few years at international level to modernize national and international statistical institutes.

As a consequence, many people had to move from a division to another, changing their work habits, being in a condition of changing the way of thinking about their job. Many people had to physically move from a building to another. Even if the management had prepared the employees with information during a long period before the changes, when the new organization took place, many seemed not to expect it. The management expected, instead, a bit of confusion and a bit of disappointment and the IC represented a fundamental tool to manage both confusion and disappointment and, above all, to communicate and explain the changes. That is the reason why in the new organization IC is in a position that empowers its strategic role.

Where was IC placed in the organization hierarchy before? It was one of the offices of the Directorate for Communication and Dissemination; now IC is a part of the Directorate General. It means: to be higher in the organization chart . The new position has made of the IC staff a tool for the very top management to talk directly to the employees. A small tool, but quick, agile, completely dedicated.

As soon as the new position was decided and the staff defined, the IC prepared a short-, middle- and long-term communication plan.

These the principal objectives:

- ✓ to clarify the meaning of the modernization and to give more and more information

about the life of the institute;

- ✓ to increase the sense of belonging to the Institute, reinforcing the pride to be a part of it;
- ✓ to improve the dialogue between management and employees;
- ✓ to create a sense of community to minimize conflicts.

A new Intranet site, completely renewed and realized according to objectives of sharing and inclusion, has been the principal tool for the IC tasks. Every morning, the Intranet is the first contact with the life of the Institute for employees: this is the reason of its importance; therefore the Intranet deserves a particular attention by IC.

### **A central newsroom, but a spread editorial staff.**

The new Intranet has been outlined with a central editorial office - the IC staff - that is in charge of all the daily news about what happens in the Institute. At the same time, there are editors in all organizational structures: each structure has its own private Intranet area in which to share work, archive documents, manage the schedule of commitments (meetings or something else). Therefore our Intranet has parts dedicated to all employees and other parts dedicated exclusively to those who belong to a specific organizational structure. All the people belonging to that structure can read the contents of the reserved area, while the editors, appointed by the head of the structure, have the right to intervene on contents. This makes our Intranet a shared tool, to which different parts of the Institute contribute in different ways.

Furthermore, next to the Institute news, single departments (for example, the President's office, the Department for statistical production, etc.) have the opportunity of publishing their own news that are displayed in a special part of the home page. Also, in our Intranet site there are specific parts of competence of the Human Resources Department, others of the IT Department, and others of the training office; this means that the home page of the Intranet is like a newspaper written by the different components of the organization, and this is an important aspect: if we write together a newspaper every day, we are a community and being a community is important in a period of changes because it gives more strength to the organization.

### **A new style**

In addition to structural aspects, the graphics and writing style of the Intranet are also completely new. Through the Intranet, using a new style of writing, the IC staff have been able to

give more and more information on the Institute's life and on its new statistical projects in a friendly and easy accessible way, in order to be as inclusive as possible. The change of the "tone of voice" was indeed one of the objectives of the new Intranet site and we paid a lot of attention to the writing style; that is why three of us are registered journalists.

Moreover, what makes the new Intranet friendlier than the previous one is the possibility to personalize one's own home page: you can put in evidence the tools that you more frequently use, for instance the institutional Twitter, the press review, the announcements from the Administration, but even your own appointments.

### **The interviews.**

Instead of explaining the tasks and the rationale of the new organizational structures, through the Intranet we have given voice to their leaders, i.e. the top and middle management. We have chosen a narrative and warm style to explain the aims of each new division. But it was important to show the employees' point of view too; it was essential to let employees telling their part of the story. Anyway the IC staff could not choose the people to interview, in order not to be subject to an accusation of partiality, so we have rather chosen some criteria for the interviews to be carried out: the younger woman, the younger man, the less young, the more recent hired and so on.

Finally, we pay special attention to people about to retire. Every year we have decided to interview a man and a woman close to retirement to tell their professional experience in the institute. This narrative style has helped bring attention to the contents of the Intranet and the Intranet itself.

### **"Us", our newsletter**

Less than a year from the start of the reorganization we began to publish a monthly newsletter. The name, "Us", was chosen to suggest the idea of a magazine about ourselves. In fact, the newsletter has a magazine layout, even if it is not printed, but it is exclusively published on the Intranet. Our newsletter is currently at its 12th issue. It gives us the opportunity of both deepening institutional information and vision, and giving space to informal communication – special talents of staff, curiosities and social activities. Furthermore, the newsletter has a column dedicated to answers to questions from employees. All the issues of the newsletter are available on the Intranet to be read and read again.

### **More dialogue between management and employees**

To promote dialogue between management and employees, we organized meetings in every structure. The IC attended each meeting to take note and report to the management both the most frequent difficulties and the strengths exposed by the employees in relation to the new organization, so that the management could take it into account in their strategies.

### **“Kids in Istat”: a special event**

Explaining our work to our children is important; doing it in a pleasant way is effective. In the month of May of this year, our Institute opened its doors to the children of employees, creating a special event in which the youngest and the oldest of them, in a different way, could touch the working environment of their parents. IC organized for the youngest children quizzes with prizes, surveys on favorite games and favorite foods, reading of stories with a statistical background; for the oldest ones a seminar on aspects of statistics and the use of statistics in the different jobs. This was a way to bring together family and job, personal life and professional life, reinforcing the sense of belonging to the Institute. We have offices all over Italy and it was a hard work to organize this special event in 7 buildings in Rome and 17 different locations throughout the country, but it was worth the effort.

### **Results**

- Intranet site's users are increasing and the Intranet is considered the first tool to know what's on in Istat.
- Colleagues have started recommending topics for the newsletter
- More than 700 children (plus 300 relatives) attended the "Kids in Istat" event.

### **Difficulties on our path**

The very close relation between IC and the top management is very useful on one hand and extremely “dangerous” on the other. The position of the IC staff next to the “control room” means to reach immediately the relevant information to be spread; however, IC runs the risk to be perceived as the “master's voice”: in other words as a partial communication. So, a very important task for the IC staff has been to gain credibility among colleagues, increasing a sincere relation

with all of them. We try to be available in helping them in finding out every kind of useful information to live their daily life in the Institute.