

Communication

Fingers crossed that your message is getting through

Effective communication between management and employees is essential if plans are to be properly implemented. But measuring whether or not communication is successful is more difficult.

Andy Moran believes there is an answer.

When you ask for feedback how many of your managers and staff have got their fingers crossed – behind their backs? How often do you get reports that tell you planning is not cascaded down, the company vision is misunderstood or there is no interdepartmental communication?

You don't – it's only human nature to tell your boss that everything is fine. Most businesses rely on financial reporting as a gauge of the temperature within the organisation – and on Chinese whispers to communicate.

How much do you trust the reporting processes in your organisation to ensure that your vision and planning is communicated from the boardroom to the shop floor? How do you measure the success of your communication and that it is understood and acted upon?

These problems are not unique to any particular industry or business. The larger an organisation the more likely it is that messages get diluted as they are cascaded down. The maths are not tricky. But it's what people do that matters, and if you can measure what they do, you can change or improve it.

Through extensive research of 300 organisations, working with SMEs to large multinationals, we believe there are 14 attributes of resilient organisations. These findings have been used to develop a tool, 'Enterprise,' for helping organisations see where they are, and where they need to go. Despite what people say, size doesn't matter

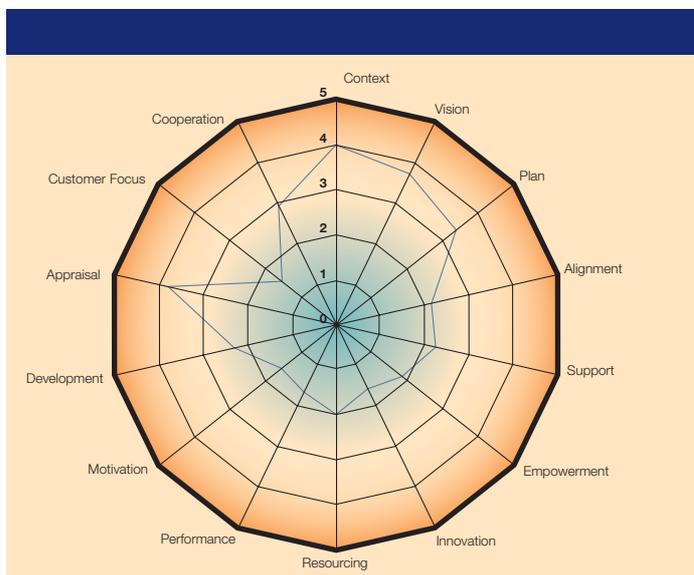
'Enterprise' is a rapid and accurate means to review the experience of working in your organisation. What it is not is a simple staff attitude survey. The tool is based on an online questionnaire that pinpoints blockages, what action should be taken and whether the organisation is open to change. The feedback is observational, not a subjective interpretation of what is good or bad.

It focuses on the key factors to consider when you want to create change, quickly and successfully, and improve business performance. It establishes a benchmark against which changes and improvements can be tracked.

To make change work staff need an opportunity to input into what needs to be changed and to have ownership of the outcomes. It is easier to persuade people of the need to change if there is a clear understanding of the starting point. If you have greater certainty about the type of change required it is simpler to target action for the maximum effect. Benchmarking provides an objective way of measuring and celebrating progress against agreed actions.

The use of an online discovery tool is essential, particularly where businesses operate globally and in virtual teams. A simple log-on procedure and questionnaire means that there is little down time. Although it is often difficult to overcome the cynicism of staff for surveys, by directing questions to easily identified issues, and involving staff at the outset, it is possible to achieve successful completion rates approaching 85%.

In each attribute, the approach, the implementation and result of any actions are questioned, using a scoring system from 0 to 5, where the lower the value the better the result. These results are recorded in an easy to interpret spider graph.



ATTRIBUTES	
Context	Understanding of the big picture and where we stand in the market place
Vision	Clarity of direction
Plan	Relevance of plans and link to individual's objectives
Alignment	Consistency of approach and messages
Support	Guidance and support in times of change
Empowerment	Ability to act and make decisions
Innovation	Creativity and innovation
Resourcing	Resources to do the job
Performance	Performance management
Motivation	Staff morale and motivation
Development	Training and Development for roles and objectives
Appraisal	Appraisal process and performance results
Customer focus	Customer focus and understanding
Co-operation	Cross-departmental cooperation and support

Analysis of this example indicates that the approach is poor and the organisation's plans are not being communicated or understood well. The implementation does not allow ownership, but the results score is better than might be expected. What this means is that staff have found ways of getting things done by bypassing the system. Staff will always develop behaviours to help themselves not the organisation.

Highlighting the problem provides certainty of the blockage and where specific action can be applied. In this case improvements in communication and involvement in

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the planning process can be used to change behaviours and improve results.

Time and money drive most decisions, an important consideration when developing this tool. The speed of reporting can be virtually immediate and results can be published within hours of the questionnaires being completed. This is highly cost effective tool with a low unit cost.

The tool has been developed in the sporting world as well as business, where it has achieved impressive results. Through implementation it has been refined to reflect cultural differences and can be translated into any language. □

Andy Moran is Senior Consultant with Catalyst.

The publication of results is confidential to encourage a high take up by the staff. The results can be split in any combination – regionally, functionally, age group, length of service, role. The breakdown of results is only governed by the size of any group that might be so small as to identify any individuals. The tool is suitable for groups of 50 to 50,000. In practice there is usually an average of 1000 staff per survey.

Feedback of individual attributes can be displayed in a dashboard format. The example below shows how this is displayed and interpretation of the summary. In the dashboard the results are displayed as graduated coloured boxes, using an easily understood traffic light style.

