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This booklet is reprinted in memory of the designer,
James Dunford. Much missed by all at AB for his
humour and humanity



**Good Thinking Guide No.1
For your new role in internal communication**

KAP OW!

Make a positive impact from day one in your new job in employee communications. Need some ideas? Our booklet has 22 of them...



A new role in internal communications?

If so, what's the plan? This is a handy guide for newly recruited leaders in internal communications. It contains 22 tips drawn from our experience of working in internal communications for more than 50 years.

This is not a guide to management. It's a guide to internal communications – how to drive it forward inside your new organisation.

If you would like to discuss our ideas further, please get in touch.

Good luck in your new role.

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An illustration on a red background. On the left, a man in a black suit with a blue tie stands with his right hand on his hip and his left arm pointing towards the right. A white speech bubble with the word 'TALK!' in bold black letters is positioned above him. On the right, two men in black suits with red ties are seated in brown chairs. They have sad, downward-curving mouths. The bottom of the image has a yellow horizontal band.

TALK!

Question your team

End the inevitable speculation about you and your new role fast by meeting each member of your team individually, as well as en masse. To get to know what and how each member of your team thinks, ask them to ponder a question before your meeting: “If you could change one thing about internal communications inside the organisation, what would it be?”

If you don't have a team, do the same with the key stakeholders in your business – HR, IT, leadership etc. Try to speak to one person from each department.



Get every view on everything

In your first few weeks, you will be asking some fundamental questions about your new organisation: What is its competitive advantage? Where is tomorrow's growth coming from? What are the trends in its market sector? You'll need different perspectives on all aspects of the business to give you the most rounded picture. So don't reserve your questions about marketing solely for the marketing director, or only ask the head of finance about the financial side of the business.



Find out what's keeping the CEO awake at night

Your preference will be for a face-to-face meeting with your new CEO. Explain that you need it to understand better the strategic priorities of the organisation and the issues at the top of his or her agenda. This will demonstrate from day one that you see internal communications as a tool for improving business performance and addressing barriers to success.



Do the AB Acid Test *Audit Part 1*

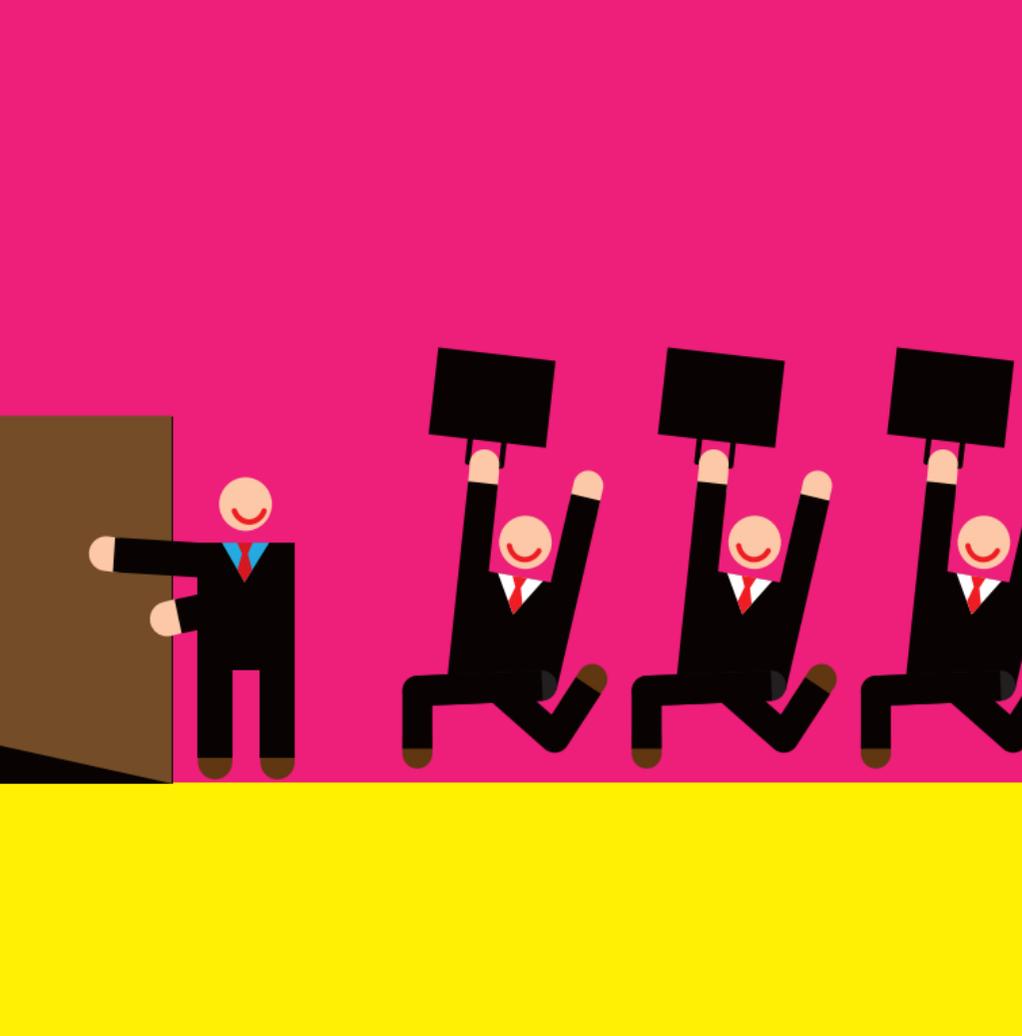
AB Acid Test is our way of finding the gaps in understanding across each level of a business. It will give you a privileged peek inside the minds of those running and working for your new organisation.

Prepare a list of thought-provoking questions. What does success look like for the organisation? What are the obstacles to success, both internal and external? How can internal communications contribute to delivering success? Get responses from everyone you meet, from the CEO to those working on the frontline.



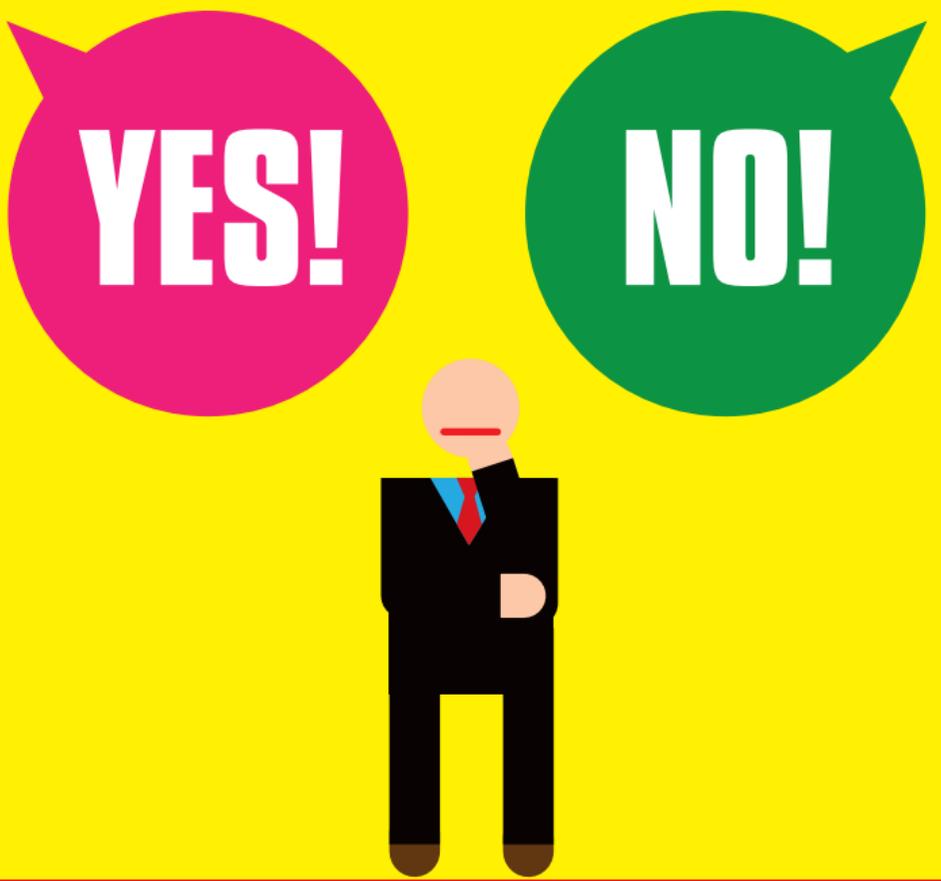
Get some personal pollsters

We once met a CEO of a vast multinational who told us he had a secret weapon hidden in his bottom drawer. Curious, and slightly nervous, we peered over his desk. The secret weapon was a list of employees. These were men and women from all corners of his company, he explained, who shared his vision and passion. He phoned them regularly to find out what was really going on. Get a similar list of pollsters to do the same sense check on communications for you.



Let the outside in

Your new organisation probably retains a number of agencies that help to manage external communications – PR, marketing and investor relations. Arrange meetings with them for a fresh perspective on communication issues and to understand how internal and external messages can become mutually reinforcing.



YES!

NO!

Do the AB Acid Test Audit Part 2

Once you have met a good variety of people at every level of your organisation, compare their responses to your Acid Test questions. Do any startling discrepancies emerge – both in what people say and how they say it? Your role is to find gaps in understanding and help fill them. If you need help, email hello@abcomm.co.uk and ask for more information on running an Acid Test.



Find the quick fix

Is team briefing failing because line managers do not know there is a notes section in the PowerPoint presentation? Is there one recurring acronym on a key slide that no one understands? Would giving a member of your team password access to certain information increase their efficiency? Look for the simple improvements that will create a sense of momentum and purpose.



Do the AB Acid Test Audit Part 3

If knowledge is power, shared knowledge is nuclear. Share what you have learned from your Acid Test Audit in a team-building session with your direct reports. Discuss the challenges you have uncovered and debate how internal communications should respond. Include the answers to that initial question you set them (see *Tip 01*). Use the output from this session to start creating your communications plan.



Write your manifesto

Co-create your communications plan with your team. Think of it as your manifesto for the coming 12 months. As with all great manifestos, it needs to be clear, persuasive and everywhere. Try to capture it on one sheet of paper – use a diagram rather than words. Post this one-pager everywhere – the intranet, the canteen, your office walls. Send it to your stakeholders.



Know the numbers

OK, you did not get into internal communications because you like reading balance sheets. However, if you understand why there are swings in the share price, and how this influences decision-making in the business, then frontline employees have a much better chance of understanding this too.



Gatecrash a few meetings

You will not always know the most valuable meetings to attend until you are sat in them. Under the guise of learning about your new organisation, invite yourself to meetings that sound useful. Start with the media relations team and marketing, but think beyond this to other departments – strategy, finance, operations and sales.

**...SO HE HUFFED AND HE
PUFFED AND HE BLEW THE
COMPETITORS AWAY...**



Once upon a time...

In our noisy, information-laden world, one short, compelling story can cut through a raft of strategic messages. Engineer opportunities for new conversations to take place – between the sales director and a call centre agent, or the chief executive and assembly line worker. Make a note of the stories they tell each other. Use your channels to share these stories and ask for more.



Do a channel audit

You will probably want to assess the effectiveness of your communication channels. A channel audit need not be long and laborious. Ask an objective and analytical mind to capture the following on each channel – objectives, method, frequency, audiences, cost, owner and, if it exists, audience research. An analysis of this data will help you develop a clear picture of the effectiveness of your comms toolkit.



Measure your impact

Some people instinctively know what success looks like. Others need a few pie charts. Use recent staff surveys to set a benchmark for the effectiveness of internal communications today.

Bring the outside in – there are lots of industry reports out there to help you compare against other internal communication functions.

For a free copy of our research into annual engagement surveys – ‘A Questionable Exercise’ – please email hello@abcomm.co.uk.



(Re) Read Tŷ Larkin

It may have been written a few years ago, but the central argument of TJ Larkin's book, *Communicating Change*, is as convincing now as it was in 1994. TJ states that line managers hold the key to change communications because they have the most influence on frontline employees. He also has some brilliant examples of the power of short, simple messages.



Question the language

In your first few weeks, you will probably be drowning in new terminology and acronyms. Some common language is good. It creates a sense of community and provides a useful shorthand. But only if everyone understands it. If they don't, jargon can be divisive and alienating. If, when questioned, employees draw a blank when trying to decipher the organisation's terminology, you may want to introduce a Plain Language programme. Getting your key documents accredited with a Plain English Crystal Mark can be a powerful signal. Visit www.plainenglish.co.uk

HAPPY SUPPLIER DAY!



Meet suppliers

You may have some favourite suppliers lined up, which you are hoping to bring into your new firm. If you are thinking of letting the incumbents down gently, it may be interesting to hold a Suppliers' Day. Listening to the frustrations and challenges faced by today's suppliers may give tomorrow's a head start, or, at least, something to chew on.



Meet some customers

Get an external perspective from the people who buy or use your products or services. The marketing team might be willing to invite you along when doing customer research. Local managers might be willing to recommend some friendly customers to visit. The views of customers often align with those of frontline employees and give added credence to their concerns. If they do not align, that's equally useful to know!



Head of Internal Comms:
YOU'RE ALL FIRED! LOL

15 seconds ago - [Comment](#) [Like](#)



Find a purpose for social media

As you meet and greet across the organisation, look for ways that online collaboration tools can address business issues. Use social media for a defined purpose – to seek views on product enhancement, cost reduction or knowledge sharing.



Win an award

Winning external accolades for the work that your team produces can be motivating. It also encourages you to keep a collective eye on best practice. For more information on the awards schemes for internal communications, click on www.ioic.org.uk, www.iabc.com and www.cipr.co.uk

FREEZE!



Stay visible

Well done! You have survived your first six months. By now, you will be in the thick of it. Don't let internal communications, as a business enabler, lose its visibility. Meet regularly with your stakeholders. Hold one-to-one sessions with your team using this six-month marker to re-assess progress against your manifesto.

About the authors

Katie Macaulay is managing director at AB. She has more than 20 years' experience of guiding public and private sector companies through internal change. She has worked with organisations in almost every sector, including Royal Mail, HSBC, Barclays, British Gas, British Red Cross, Novartis, Roche, London Underground and the Post Office.

What we do

At AB, our consultants develop and test communications strategy and plans. We advise internal communicators and management teams on organisational change, restructures, mergers and acquisitions, as well as new product and service initiatives.

Our unique AB Acid Test Audit gives you a privileged peek inside the minds of those running and working for your organisation. It pinpoints communication gaps – where understanding is breaking down – and gives you solid, practical recommendations on plugging these gaps.

Your next move

Whether you are new to your role or a long-server, our consultants would be delighted to hear about your communication challenges and discuss how they can help.



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