

When Amersham Biosciences underwent a huge restructure last year, it used research and measurement as a means not only of plugging gaps in communications, but also to build on employee morale and inclusion.

Using research to improve morale during a company restructure

TOP DATA GATHERING TIPS

1. Don't gather too much data. You'll be bogged down and confused.

2. Get a good analyst. If possible, get an external expert to help you go through the data.

3. Don't underestimate the aggravation in data gathering. It may seem an easy online/paper exercise at first, but don't be fooled.

4. Put your best brains onto it.

5. Don't underestimate the capacity for denial. Some managers may take a stance in the face of all evidence to the contrary.

6. Know your data. As above — be prepared to stand your ground and use statistics to back up the findings.

7. Managers prefer verbatims. Many will ignore the data in your report and flick to the list of employee quotes. Present information in as engaging a way as possible so that they don't just latch onto a single issue.

8. Cheap doesn't mean low value. Some of the most effective means of data gathering aren't the most costly.

Source: Independent consultant Liam FitzPatrick spoke at last month's Internal Communication Alliance event in London.

In the last year, Amersham Biosciences has undergone a massive restructuring program, with waves of closures and redundancies across its international portfolio. It has since started to turn a UK£35 million loss into profitability. When Aniko Czinege was appointed as internal communications director in August 2002, she decided to initiate greater local communications activity to improve employee morale and information flow during the changes.

The company is a world leader in developing systems and solutions for disease research, drug discovery, development and manufacture. Over 50 percent of employees are graduates and around 12 percent have PhDs. "We have a great deal of intellectual property here and were worried that the closures and redundancies would discourage employees. People don't necessarily work for the company for the money, but because they're interested in the work, so if they feel undervalued they could just move."

Changing the focus of communication

Czinege's intention from the outset was to use her first project – an internal communications audit – to change the focus of her communications team, which was very channel driven. "They were very focused on getting magazines out and updating the intranet." Czinege wanted their role to be more like that of an internal consultancy. This meant pushing communicators and managers at a local level to take charge of communications, while her team

concentrated on measuring behavioral and cultural change.

"There were several things I wanted the research to do: I wanted managers at the sites to take local ownership for their communications – they were just relying on all the material going out rather than working with it. So I didn't know what was working and what wasn't. I also wanted leadership to take communication more seriously because of the forthcoming restructure."

Training the new in-house team

If things were to change, senior managers would have to spend more time visiting sites and talking to people. "To persuade them to do that I had to have facts and figures on which to base my argument," she says. She decided to launch an all-employee questionnaire for the audit. Lisa Betteridge, a partner at communications consultancy HarknessKennett, was drafted in to help create and shadow the research. Betteridge and Czinege also designed a training program for the new team, coaching them how to run the research and building their facilitation skills. "We didn't do all the delivery, but coached the team behind the scenes and trained Jane Milsom to lead the research," says Betteridge.

Building ownership for global research

It was the first time the company had held a global internal communications audit. Czinege kicked off in November and December with face-to-face interviews with senior management to

ensure ownership of the survey results and their commitment at an early stage. Employee focus groups were also conducted to get a better angle on what communications were working.

Betteridge and Czinege went through the latter's interview notes to pinpoint business priorities and devise means by which internal communications could support them. They jointly designed the questionnaire in such a way that it addressed business issues, measured how much employees understood vision and values, and what job performance information they received. It was also designed to explore their views on content and style of information and the channels through which they received it. Finally employees were asked what changes they would like to see made.

Company restructure and hard times

Amersham Biosciences went through the major part of its restructuring process in February last year. In April the all-employee questionnaire was sent out. "We had a much better feel of the issues at different sites. We did more focus groups and research in April after the largest wave of redundancies and closures. We used it as a way to re-build morale by telling people we were implementing the changes that they had told us needed to be made," says Czinege.

Most of the major changes came about because of local site issues. As a result, the team held more meetings as well as introducing themselves via site newsletters. "We were flagging up things that weren't going as well as they could because we wanted to respond to that. We put in new feedback mechanisms and also launched a new executive visibility program."

Taking responsibility for tough news

According to Betteridge the questionnaire gave the team a good base for managing communications during the restructure. "We found that people reacted very well considering there were some very difficult things they had to

WHAT TYPICALLY DRIVES EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION?

- Feeling valued and respected
- Consultation on issues that affect them
- Perceived honesty and openness of the senior management
- Understanding the organization's goals and business objectives

Source: NOP World

face." It also gave the team the confidence and drive to handle the change in the way they believed best."

When the team received the survey results in May and June they got the evidence they needed to argue their case and have resources behind it, says Betteridge. "Management put an awful lot of time into face-to-face interviews to announce the changes, and the team worked with the external communications team to ensure their messages were aligned. That was pretty new to the organization and went down very well with employees."

Site visits and coaching local teams

After the initial survey in the US the team began site visits with discovery days. Face to face consultation was held with employees at every level. There were also lunches with senior management, focus groups and five-minute desktop surveys. The point was to get as much information as possible as a measure of the culture and what people meant by particular answers to questionnaire questions.

The discovery days were then rolled out across Europe later in the year. The team were coached on how to present the research findings and what to say to each particular site manager.

"We gave each site its set of figures from the questionnaire to compare to the overall global figure for the rest of the company and we also gave them recommendations for improvements," says Czinege. Workshops or site meetings were then held so the team could work with managers on what to put into place to deliver results locally.

"Each site is different and what works in Sweden may not work in California. We

couldn't put in a blanket approach but held a meeting with each site and have been working with them ever since on a regular basis to help them implement those improvements and address their particular needs."

Initiatives help potential trouble spots

A site in California had problems with morale largely because it had been hit with major redundancies. It was also a fairly recent acquisition so had not yet integrated properly into the business before suffering the cutbacks. "Their results from the questionnaire were not good at all," says Czinege.

The team began coaching the site management on how to manage a change to a more positive culture. "We've given them a higher profile in the business, and they've carried out local initiatives to improve communications."

A senior executive now visits every two months giving a talk that enables employees to see how what they do fits into the bigger picture. In fact, senior management visit more sites more often. Executive visibility has grown along with town hall meetings, lunches and a new monthly bulletin for employees to see change and momentum.

"We haven't had any major problems with morale amongst employees and research was a key tool for helping to manage that," says Czinege.

MORE INFORMATION

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