Evans' Framework for Effective Organizational Communications

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Communication is a key driver of organizational success and resiliency. Organizations that care about productivity, profit, culture, efficiency, and effectiveness will benefit from a deliberate and consistent focus on communication. This white paper describes Evans' approach to effective organizational communications.

Evans' communications consulting draws on these principles:

- **Collaborative partnership:** Evans works closely with our clients as partners throughout the process of planning and implementing communications strategies. We spend time understanding their needs, engaging with stakeholders, developing options, and selecting the best approaches to address their needs.
- **Communications agility**: While we are devoted to planning, we understand that things constantly evolve; we're adept at modifying, growing, and changing plans to match emerging needs and requirements. We draw on lessons from past engagements but refine their application based on what we're learning about each client's needs and priorities.


As stated above, communication is a KEY component for driving organizational success, and Evans embraces the key image to represent the core elements of our *VIP Framework for Organizational Communications*.

Overarching Principles

The Evans VIP Framework for Organizational Communications encapsulates key principles for effective communications. These principles hold true both for internal communication to staff and external communication with customers and stakeholders.

Vision, *Inspiration*, and *Performance* are the key tenets of the framework. Specifically, communication is important to:

➢ Share and realize the organizational Vision,

➢ Inspire its employees and stakeholders, and

➢ Drive organizational Performance.
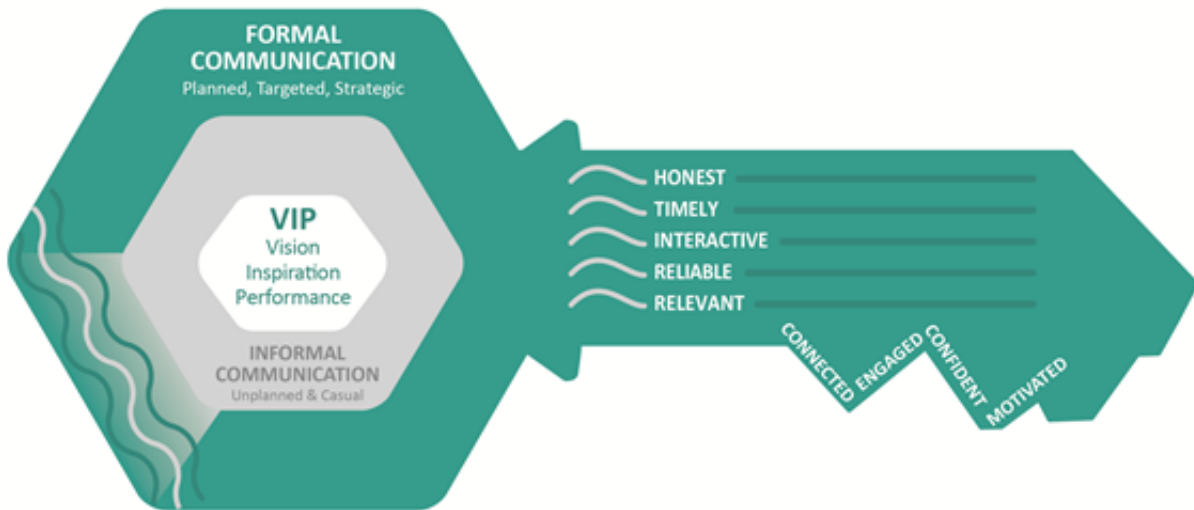
The Evans VIP Framework for Organizational Communications

As noted in the framework, organizational communication includes both planned, targeted, strategic communication approaches (formal) as well as unplanned, casual communications (informal), and both are intertwined and affect one another (represented by the wavy lines in the head of the key). Therefore, it is in the best interest of the organization to be thoughtful about the who, what, where, when, why, and how to gain maximum benefit from communication investments.

Formal strategic communication involves:

- **Deliberate planning (Planned)**: A planned approach to communications is essential for guiding communications in a way that supports the organization's vision and goals. In particular, a formal communications approach is critical to influence informal communication in a positive way by disseminating key messages that will naturally filter into informal channels, including both internal and external stakeholders.
- **Stakeholder engagement (Targeted)**: Stakeholders play a critical role in the success of any communications strategy and should be engaged at all phases of planning and implementation. Their insights are central to crafting messages that resonate with key audiences. Additionally, it is important to identify the best means and frequency of communicating those messages to influence understanding and acceptance. Involving stakeholders also increases their buy-in and motivation to support and participate in the relevant efforts.
- **Tailored strategy (Strategic)**: There is no "one size fits all" approach to communications. The strategy needs to be developed in partnership with the organization based on an

understanding of their situation and tailored to fit their needs. Furthermore, approaches and deliverables should be tailored to the different audiences.

Execution Principles: "The Five Be's" of Organizational Communications

Through numerous engagements focused on impactful organizational communications, Evans has identified several core principles to inform the "how" of communicating within organizations. These principles foster an environment in which employees are *connected*, *engaged*, *confident*, and *motivated*.

- **Be Reliable:** Ensuring that communication occurs regularly and predictably is a core practice for building organizational trust. In selecting approaches to enhance information flow across their organizations – such as holding a quarterly staff meeting or sharing a weekly newsletter – leaders should carefully consider the ability to commit resources to and reliably deliver what they begin as a communication channel. Otherwise, announcing a new initiative like a monthly newsletter and then not executing it for a meaningful duration will undermine the environment of trust that the improved communication is intended to enhance. Being reliable also includes following through and reporting back on previously discussed items especially where future actions were planned.

- **Be Honest:** Honest communication is key to organizational transparency. Even when communications are regular, if they don't address employees' interests or concerns, they can feel that the communications are empty which can breed mistrust. Sometimes in the early phases of addressing a burning issue, leadership cannot yet disclose details; in these cases, staff members appreciate that their leaders at least acknowledge the issue, even if they don't know all the answers. An honest statement about what is known and future plans for sharing information will go far toward establishing transparency and honesty as an organizational value.

- **Be Timely:** Another way to ensure that organizational communications are relevant and meaningful is to strive for timeliness. Effective and impactful communication can be achieved with thoughtful planning:
  - *Before:* What advance notice or preparation can you provide to staff so that they will be well positioned to meet upcoming demands and take advantage of key opportunities?
  - *During:* What is occurring that may prompt employee questions or require further clarification?
  - *After:* What milestones have recently been accomplished that can be celebrated, learned from, or built on for further success?

Organizations typically have room to enhance communications at each of these phases, but the "during" phase can be particularly challenging when something is underway that is unclear or possibly worrisome to staff. In these cases, sharing information as it is

learned is better than saying nothing until every answer is known and there has been time for rumors to spread across the organization. A common phrase in communications is "feed the rumor mill with facts."

- **Be Relevant:** It may seem to go without saying, but ensuring that the content is useful to the intended audiences is another important facet of effective organizational communications. Information that fosters awareness and understanding across different technical or functional units and among different levels of an organization (e.g., leadership to staff level) can help to broaden perspectives and foster cross-organizational coordination. Staff are typically most interested in what's new and upcoming for the organization, so they can be prepared and be proactive about emerging developments and opportunities. People-focused content builds engagement and connection with the broader team. Involving representatives of your target audiences as advisors and contributors, and soliciting input and feedback helps to ensure that the content of communications resonates with your audience.

- **Be Interactive:** Ensuring that an organization consistently shares relevant information in a timely and transparent manner is fundamental to strong organizational communication; however, pushing information out (one-way) only goes so far. To create real engagement, communication should be a two-way, ongoing conversation. In-person interactions are a very powerful and critical supplement to written communication channels; one in-person interaction with a leader can enhance the power of all other types of communications for an employee. Internal social business platforms (e.g. intranets, instant messaging) offer another approach for fostering information-sharing and connections among an organization's busy and often dispersed members.

Desired Outcomes: Benefits of Effective Communication

The overall desired outcome of strategic communication is to support the Vision, Inspiration and Performance (VIP) of the organization and get employees *connected*, *engaged*, *confident*, and *motivated,* which benefits both the individual employees and the organization as a whole.

Below are more specific benefits of strategic communication investments.

Benefits of Effective Communication for Organizations	
Big Picture Understanding	• Stakeholders understand organizational strategy and their role in it • Employees feel valued, listened to, and feel like an important part of the team and the organization • Employees will feel better about their contribution and be motivated to help move the business forward • Leaders are better able to understand employee needs, and to motivate, inspire and engage them • Managers can build the trust and credibility
Better Use of Time	• Quicker decisions made because more information is available • Communication planning early in the decision-making process helps to deal with issues before they develop into a crisis • Stronger cross-functional communications lead to less duplication of effort • Ability to pull information that is available real time • Grapevine is based on fact
Improved Quality	• Improved consistency of work due to appropriate and timely information • Improved morale which leads to retention of key staff • More innovation which supports business growth • Less conflict due to misinformation • Receipt of relevant messages at the right time • Trust of information; minimal communication pollution
Increased Productivity	• Discretionary effort is made by staff due to sense of involvement and good working relationships • More correct decisions are made the first time • Sharing of information results in less duplication • Less management time spent dealing with challenges • Appropriate consultation in key business decisions • Trustworthy communications infrastructure
Improved Introduction to Change	• Swift and complete introduction of changes with consistent and full information provided • New ideas and support to improve/adapt locally • Management makes better decisions as they are aware of front-line views
Improved Customer Service	• Better judgement calls because employees have access to information that leads to better and instinctive customer service • Improved reputation and reinforcement of the brand because employees have full information to make informed decisions for/about the customer