

Workplace



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By Jacqueline Elias

Over the past two years, the pandemic has forced most companies to quickly transition their teams from working physically together to hybrid and remote “office” environments. As a result, the strengths of many teams and their communication styles were seriously tested.

For me, effective communication in the workplace is defined as how well a company engages with its people; through active listening, timely sharing of information and importantly encouraging all to provide input and offer suggestions.

Leaders play a critical role in setting the tone and ensuring that information is clearly, regularly, and openly shared. Regardless of the size of the company, it is important to constantly assess the effectiveness of communication channels to ensure that the right message is being delivered.

Communication is one of the areas covered in the Barbados’ Best Employers (BBE) opinion survey. The survey seeks to assess, through the responses of team members in the company, the effectiveness of communication – the transparency and frequency within and across departments and so on. Descriptors require team members to rate how information is shared throughout the company, within and across departments, and to gauge whether there is effective listening by leaders and their willingness to genuinely address team members’ concerns.

Clarity of communication regarding company’s goals and strategies

It is essential to ensure that team members understand the company’s purpose, its value system and goals. The predicament is that some leaders set strategic objectives, but these objectives are filtered down to all other levels by heads of departments. If a company directly involved its team members in the strategic planning process, it would not only have their direct input in setting objectives, but the team would feel more engaged and better help the company achieve the desired result. Granted, this process may be easier to facilitate in smaller companies, but it can still be done by larger companies where heads of departments gather input from their teams.

Depending on the size of the company once a strategic plan has been developed, action plans need to be prepared to ensure implementation



COVID-19 has changed the work environment and communication needs to adapt. (Internet image)

Communicating in hybrid, remote environments

of objectives. These would be best executed by the departments or cross functional teams that are closely aligned with the objectives. These objectives and action plans could be communicated either at a town hall meeting or in departmental meetings or through the company’s performance management system.

Critical information is shared

Employees would be more engaged if they knew what was happening in the business, therefore, business owners and leaders should communicate candidly about the current financial reality and the impact the pandemic has had on their business. Team members would be more willing to “ride out the storm”, if they felt that they were being communicated with, timely and honestly. For instance, at Caribbean Catalyst Inc., financials are shared weekly with the entire team with time taken to ensure that all understand. This is one of our strategies in building a more effective team.

The 2020 BBE results revealed that some of the finalists in the programme had general staff meetings at least twice a year, focused on reviewing the financial results and other relevant information that would impact the business. In addition, departmental meetings were held monthly.

Team members need to feel connected to the company and their colleagues. There is the risk of not feeling part of a team, especially when working from home or in a hybrid work setting. Generally, leaders need to “check-in” with their employees regardless of the work environment. This calls for genuinely listening to team members’ – taking the time to understand what they are going through and seeking ways to help.

Based on the feedback from the BBE 2020 survey, this seems to be easier to accommodate in smaller companies. Therefore, larger



companies need to find more creative ways to achieve this level of communication, for example, some of this can be done through one-on-one meetings, weekly or bi-weekly departmental meetings, an open-door policy and walking the floor, that is, observing and interacting with team members.

Departments can sometimes work in silos with little or no collaboration from other departments. This could have worsened when working remotely or in hybrid situations. Team members can become isolated in these work environments, focusing only on their tasks with little interaction from their colleagues. Collaboration is needed to deliver outstanding results. We can only learn from each other and benefit from the collective wisdom of the team when we collaborate. From the BBE 2020 survey, and even in previous BBE surveys, communication across departments was not rated as favourably as communication within one’s own department. Working on cross functional teams, using online meeting tools and virtual social gatherings are some of the ways to encourage greater collaboration.

Improving communication impacts how well a company achieves its desired results through its people. It is crucial to take the time to measure or assess if your communication channels are working effectively. Look out for BBE 2022 as an objective way to measure how well your company is performing in this and other areas.

Jacqueline Elias is director, Caribbean Catalyst Inc., is founder and organiser of the biennial Barbados’ Best Employers programme, which is sponsored by The Nation Group.