

## Case Studies

### Aligning Employees with Corporate Goals Nation's largest non-profit health insurer

The nation's largest non-profit health insurer, representing three major Blue Cross-Blue Shield plans with eight million members, recently teamed up with L.M. Dulye & Co. to raise the levels of voice and engagement of its 13,000 employees as part of a major two-way communications improvement initiative.

The organization offers customers a non-profit alternative to their health care needs. But with the consolidation of health care markets in the early 2000s, it faced unprecedented change in regulation, cost structures and physician/patient relationships. It needed to improve internal communications in order to sustain growth, develop new products, deliver excellent customer service and develop and retain employees.

Knowing that it wasn't a Corporate Communications or Human Resources challenge, the organization hired L.M. Dulye & Co. to implement our award-winning **Communications Improvement Planning (CIP) process** - an improvement program specifically designed to enhance two-way communications performance.

Our initial survey of employees at this organization found a severe deficit in cross-team/cross-department/cross-divisional communications, senior management visibility and credibility, as well as communications accountability. Each of these communications deficiencies was having direct and indirect impacts on the ability of employees, managers, leaders and teams to work effectively together in pursuit of Corporate goals and objectives.

L.M. Dulye coached senior leaders, helping them set clear expectations for two-way communications; provide the tools, resources and environment for improvement; and hold employees and managers for performance against goals.

We then worked directly with 16 teams of employees who brainstormed communications problems and potential solutions. Each team made detailed improvement recommendations to leadership - more than 75 communications improvement ideas - who in turn, made same-day decisions and empowered the teams to implement their ideas. Today, these teams are implementing nearly 70 percent of their proposed ideas!

In order to make best use of available resources, L.M. Dulye & Co. also introduced a master implementation planning tool that consolidated recommendations to ensure no duplication of efforts, as well as an innovative scorecard system that helped track progress against specific goals, timelines and deadlines.

The organization's leaders, who worked side-by-side with employees throughout the entire CIP process, incorporated regular reviews of this progress in their normal staff meetings, demonstrating that communications is not separate from normal business operations - it is an integral part of the process that enables success in all other areas of business performance.

After 14 months of improvement efforts, increases of 20% and more were achieved in trust in senior leadership, employee knowledge about the customer and health care industry, communications quality (specifically, timeliness), and lateral communications between departments and locations.

If your organization is facing serious workplace barriers - such as poor cross-department communications, senior leadership invisibility or message inconsistency - our CIP process can help. With

a goal of bringing front-line managers-and employees-into the development and decision-making roles of change initiatives, we will help you develop, implement and sustain action plans for improving communications.

## "Creating a Culture of Communications Ownership"

Have you ever wondered how a company would get by without its communications department? It would be hard. But even more challenging would be how a company would survive without its employees.

Sounds crazy, doesn't it? Yet every day hundreds of companies and their communications departments make a grave mistake: they don't include employees in communication efforts. They "push" products on employees -newsletters, Web sites, memos - without ever giving them a say into the communications process or a chance to "buy-in" to the company's communication efforts.

The results can be severe: low-morale, lost productivity and high turnover.

I've learned a valuable lesson in my 20 years as a communicator: that what separates the great companies from the not-so-great companies is just how much they engage employees in communication efforts. In a great company, communications doesn't come solely from the communications office - it comes from action plans that are developed by employees, with employees and about employees.

L.M. Dulye & Co.' s highly regarded **Communications Improvement Planning (CIP)** process has helped more than 70 businesses and work sites bring communications out of the office and onto the shop floor, into lunch rooms and meeting halls; where employees become active participants in real communications issues.

Rather than a top-down directive, CIP uses a process that builds bottom-up involvement and fosters collective ownership of workplace communications. It also builds accountability and tracking into the communications improvement process, meaning issues identified by employees are taken seriously by management.

### **What are the benefits to Communications Improvement Planning?**

- Focuses on solutions and opportunities for improvement
- Promotes high employee engagement across functions and businesses
- Quickly elicits ideas and actions for improvement communications
- Signals a visible commitment and high involvement by senior management
- Creates a common, strategic plan for improving communications that can be integrated into day-to-day operations and practices
- Establishes ongoing, shared accountability at all levels for implementing improvements
- Builds communications bridges between employees and management to communicate more openly and candidly with each other
- Improves work practices and processes
- Builds teamwork and ownership.

### **How does it work?**

CIP combines strategic planning with two-way communications dialogues to unite employees and senior managers in a series of high-energy "Action Sessions." During these sessions:

- Barriers to effective communications are identified
- Root causes to barriers are uncovered
- Ideas for improvement are surfaced
- Formal solutions are developed
- A structured implementation plan is created

- Employee Communications Action Teams are formed to work closely with top management on the implementation and tracking of improvement actions.

Using surveys, feedback tools, focus sessions or interviews, employees initially identify "hot" communications issues that they are concerned with: for example, management accountability or openness, performance feedback, or meeting ineffectiveness.

The Communications Action Teams then use structured brainstorming and problem-solving techniques to examine hot issues and look at where communications breakdowns are occurring. They also use a structured process and templates (provided and guided by our firm) to develop and recommend improvement actions for senior management. Teams present these recommendations during face-to-face open meetings with top leaders and engage in active discussions with those present.

Management, in turn, rapidly responds to the team recommendations. Teams and management together commit to an implementation schedule and process for tracking progress.

### **What are the results?**

Our CIP program has positively affected respect and rapport, which has led to improved information sharing and trust between individuals, teams and business units.

Clients who have utilized the program have achieved results of as much as double-digit performance improvements in employee knowledge of business goals and performance, management credibility, and two-way communications.

At one of our clients, the program was used to surface employee knowledge and morale issues stemming from lack of information relative to career development and on-the-job performance. Through CIP tools and methodology, employee teams quickly developed recommendations - based on quantitative and qualitative data - for improving:

- Managers' capabilities, knowledge and accountability to communicate about career development with employees
- Mentoring opportunities
- The performance management process at the company (including performance appraisals between managers and employees)
- Access to online and printed materials on career opportunities

Among the outcomes of the teams' work was the go-ahead by senior management to establish a dedicated facility - a Career Development Resource Center - where employees can go to discuss and research job prospects within the company and development opportunities.

What did that mean to employees? Comments from feedback systems indicated employees viewed their company and senior leadership as very committed to listening to employees and resolving key concerns with employee involvement.

What has it meant for the company? Senior managers at the company report more employees are taking ownership in business issues, managers at all levels are seen as more approachable and are more visible in workplace, and trust between teams and departments had grown as demonstrated by more frequent, open sharing of important business data.

### **When should CIP be used?**

Communications Improvement Planning is a logical next step after a company engages its employees in a survey, as the success of any research effort or survey depends on the commitment of senior management to share results and use the data to improve communications efforts.

Who better to identify important communications issues and work with management to improve them than employees themselves?

While newsletters, Web sites and memos from communications department are important, research has shown time again that reliable and effective face-to-face dialogues between manager and employee is still the preferred communications method.

The CIP process helps foster this method, breaking down communications barriers and encouraging a disciplined two-way communications process that continuously cycles key messages and feedback between managers and employees.

This cycle is one of the most important keys to any business's success.

**For More**

For more information about Communications Improvement Planning and other high-impact communications programs, send an e-mail to [Linda Dulye](#) or call us at (845) 988-5855.