

COMMUNICATING STRATEGY

First, strategy needs to be communicated - to all stakeholders; often; in different ways. The frequency and variety gets your chosen message understood. Even your competitors need to hear from you. Unless you communicate well, strategy will fail. Any momentum you have built will be lost. Contributors to strategic success and the change effort required will lose interest, be counterproductive, or both.

Second, you need to be thoughtful about what you will communicate, to which group and when. This is where communicating strategy becomes - "strategic". The way to decide what, to whom and when is to ask a pivotal question for each stakeholder group:

"What do I want this stakeholder (or group) to do?" (as a result of the communication)

To illustrate the value of strategic communication, consider three stakeholders;

1. Government advisors
2. Competitors
3. Employees (beyond direct reports to the CEO)

Consider each group.

You may want government advisors to put your case before government on many occasions, in many ways, over an extended period of time. Over that period, you want the momentum behind the industry development or change you seek to build and become the prevailing wisdom. In this case your communications strategy may involve such activities as;

- placing thought leadership pieces in respected journals;
- publishing various industry studies or research reports which support your contention;
- identifying and fostering favorable relationships;
- associating your detractors with views or material which is discredited;
- Setting up an Industry Award or two which create a legacy around an issue or leading thought.

This is **strategic communication**.

You may want your **competitors** to see you as doing very little to threaten them, encouraging them to pay you less and less attention. In this case, your communications strategy may involve such activities as;

- Attending industry conferences as which you disseminate misinformation (even by simple omission or ambiguity) to selected individuals
- Draw media attention to an issue which will please many stakeholder groups but signal to competitors you are headed somewhere other than your **strategic intent**.
- Using the recruitment sector to communicate with selected employees at your competitors that you are asleep
- Keep significant activities below the radar through outsourcing or confidential collaboration agreements

Again, this is strategic communication that can smooth the road to your strategic goals.

You may want your **employees** (beyond direct reports to the CEO) to elevate certain beliefs or assumptions to the status of cultural legend; the purpose being to create momentum around an idea that is a little ahead of its time. (For example, a technology convergence, industry rationalization or global alignment that underpins your strategy). In this case, your **communications strategy** may involve such activities as;

- Conducting internal events in ways that position the organization and its people as participants (or icons) in foresight and thought leadership
- Providing selected employees with opportunities to attend conferences or courses which will help them `see' the envisioned future.
- Circulating external information which provokes thought about the envisioned future.

The combined effects of such communications (and there are other stakeholders to involve) have the powerful effect of building momentum around a direction, a strategy and a future.

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