

Communicating Strategic Narrative Engages Employees

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Create and communicate your strategic narrative

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Introduction

A strategic narrative is a compelling business story that explains your business' background, vision for the future and how employees can contribute to this. It can be a powerful tool for improving your business' performance.

A strategic narrative can increase an employee's sense of personal attachment to your business by providing a clear link between their role and your business strategy. It can also guide the decisions that your employees make every day to ensure everyone is working towards the same goals.

This guide sets out best practice principles for developing, introducing and communicating a strategic narrative in your business. It provides a range of practical ideas, ranging from small steps to more wide-ranging initiatives. There is no single way of creating a narrative - what is appropriate for one business may not be right for you.

Create your strategic narrative

A strategic narrative can be written or verbal, shown through images or diagrams. However you express it, creating a narrative is a powerful tool that builds common purpose across employees at all levels of your business.

Your narrative starts with you. You should be clear on your vision for your business and what inspires you about it.

Map out a framework

Create and communicate your strategic narrative

Mapping out your own thoughts can help you form a framework, which you can then ask senior managers and employees to contribute to or amend. [Download a sample structure for a strategic narrative \(DOC, 178KB\) - Opens in a new window.](#)

Work with senior managers

You need to work closely with senior managers to decide how to create your strategic narrative. You all need to make a clear and consistent commitment to communicate and support your narrative.

Some businesses hold away days for this purpose, others use workshops.

Involve employees in your strategic narrative

Involving your employees in developing your narrative can help them make a personal connection to it and strengthen their commitment to achieving your business' goals.

Your narrative has to mean something to your employees. It has to be about more than facts and figures - for example - it could contain stories and anecdotes to illustrate where your business is going.

There are different ways of involving your employees - here are some approaches you could consider:

- hold a workshop or series of workshops for employees to help them contribute to the narrative - [download a sample format for a strategic narrative workshop \(DOC, 183KB\) - Opens in a new](#)

window

- ask employees to submit their views - for example - you could set up a suggestions box or create a diary room and invite employees to give their views on three or four questions about your business
- involve employees who work remotely or from satellite sites - try to visit them, organise dial-in calls or web-based workshops
- identify champions in different departments or teams who can identify and share examples from their parts of your business - they can have a key role in linking managers with the ideas and experiences of employees - see our page on [employee engagement champions](#) in our guide on [employee engagement - an overview](#)

With any method you use - collate the results, identify key themes and discuss them with your employees.

Communicate your strategic narrative

You need to communicate your narrative to build common purpose across your business and to guide everyday behaviour. You could:

- make your narrative document freely available for employees
- publish a summary of your narrative on a range of materials for your workplace eg posters, postcards, business cards, desk-drop leaflets or screensavers
- include regular features or case studies in internal newsletters - or on

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the intranet if you have one - to show how employees have used the values to inform their decision-making

- be creative in communicating your narrative - eg use graphics, photos, maps or timelines to illustrate your business' past, present and future
- hold a regular meeting for all employees - eg every six months or annually - to communicate your strategic narrative and its link to business plans - and give everyone the chance to ask questions or raise any concerns
- arrange a conference call or web-based conference for any employees who can't attend your regular meetings or who work remotely
- link new internal programmes back to the strategic narrative - eg briefings on new products
- make sure that you communicate your narrative to every new starter so they understand the business culture and its importance from the start

Tailor your strategic narrative

To help employees build a personal attachment to your narrative encourage teams to tailor the strategic narrative to fit their area of work. Keep involving your employees in updating your story and communicating new examples and anecdotes.

Teams may want to do this by:

- developing their own summary statement of what the strategic narrative means to them and their work
- writing articles for internal

publications, blogs or the intranet on how their team is using the narrative

- hosting lunchtime seminars for others to explain their role and the way in which they support the narrative in their everyday work
- filming their own take on the narrative or what key elements mean to them to be shown in communal areas or as part of a video gallery for the intranet
- working together to strengthen the link between the narrative and everyday activities giving you their views, examples and anecdotes

Here's how we built shared purpose among staff

7Side provides data services to customers and helps organisations with the legal obligations of setting up a business. It was formed in 1981 and employs 37 people.

For years, 7Side's senior management team believed in command and control leadership. As a result, employees didn't understand the reasons behind executive decisions and simply focused on their tasks. In 2005 a new board of directors addressed this.

Define a clear narrative for the organisation

Based on input from wider staff, directors developed a new foundation for the business which defined the mission, vision, values and culture of the organisation. The concept of the foundation was introduced at a staff conference. As a result, employees had a much clearer understanding of 7Side's business goals and the business strategy.

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Harness views and ideas from staff

With greater understanding of the narrative, employees started volunteering ideas around all areas of business, from management team structure to how to improve internal communications. This created a virtuous circle - when employees saw the positive impact that their ideas and actions had they became more motivated and engaged with business goals.

Keep communicating with employees

The lines of communication between employees and management remain wide open. Every two months there is a company-wide meeting, where the senior team shares its plans for the business and employees ask questions and offer their views.

Here's how we created a one company culture

Business Environment (BE) owns and provides flexible serviced offices in southern England. Its employees are spread out across multiple sites, meaning it has been a challenge to ensure employees feel in touch with the core business.

Unite staff around the company story

Senior managers addressed the issue by increasing their commitment to employee engagement across the company. They created and communicated a clear vision for the business to map out its story and goals. This was communicated widely and included in an induction pack for new recruits. As a result, 87 employees based across multiple locations are drawn together by the same vision and know they are part of one organisation.

Open up the channels of communication

The company introduced a new Monday morning conference call to update site managers on company news and plans and to give them the chance to share local employee concerns and ideas with head office. Meetings between managers and employees are also organised on a local level so managers can keep communicating the organisation's vision and discussing any questions or concerns with staff.

Keep engagement going

Establishing an employee intranet has helped articulate the organisation's values and goals, report on customer wins and recognise outstanding employee performance. Regular company-wide events are organised, including annual away days, Christmas and summer parties, to maintain a one company culture.

Here's how we engage staff to improve local services

Wychavon District Council in Worcestershire, has won accolades such as The Times' 'Best Council to Work For' in recognition of its engaged staff. As Head of Strategy and Communications, Fiona Narburgh says: "You don't improve services to the public without engaging staff". What I did:

Communicate a clear narrative

"At the heart of the council's approach to employee engagement is clear communication of a narrative, summarised in the organisation's priorities and its promises to residents."

"The priorities give everyone clear direction

Create and communicate your strategic narrative

of what needs to be achieved. They have been developed with staff and have been widely promoted through management briefings, the intranet and internal newsletters."

Seek ideas and contributions from staff

"The senior management team seeks new ideas on how to address the priorities through effective two-way communication and a big ideas scheme. A staff sounding board helped to develop the council's values and an improvement plan. Performance on plans is measured quarterly and managers also review individual contributions towards the priorities in quarterly appraisals."

Build shared purpose

"These steps helped to build a strong sense of shared purpose across the organisation and commitment to improvement. They have also helped provide the buy-in for operational decisions, such as the introduction of a new waste and recycling system and the council's current focus on delivering more for less in a challenging economic environment."

Here's how we involve our people in our vision

Telefonica O2's strategic aim for 2011 is simple - to create fans and have twice as many customers who are fans as its nearest competitor.

To help it succeed, O2 first aims to turn its people into fans - engaging their hearts and heads with the company story. The world of fandom now resonates with everyone at O2, being brought to life through two-way internal communication.

Open leadership

Face-to-face briefings hosted by the CEO demonstrate ownership and direction from the top. Channels including video, email and print keep telling the fandom story - demonstrating proof points along the way.

Sharing the company story

Most innovatively, O2 created an inspiring company-wide intranet fanclub - which promises 'recognition for our people, by our people'. In addition to supporting efforts to build motivation and well-being, the intranet reinforces the company story by encouraging employees to leave messages on colleagues' profile pages describing why they are a fan of them or their work.

"We want our people to come with us on the journey, love O2 and love our customers," says Director of Corporate Affairs, Glenn Manoff. "It's not unusual for a company to have a business plan, but it's more unusual to articulate the journey to everyone. We're telling a story that will define the path we'll travel in later years."

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Business Environment - Opens in a new window

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