

# Chapter 17

## Leadership Communication, Internal Marketing, and Employee Engagement: A Recipe to Create Brand Ambassadors

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines the internal communication practices of Lenovo, a \$39 billion Fortune Global 500 technology company, and the world's largest PC vendor. In particular, this study examines how this company uses social media as a form of internal marketing to foster employee engagement. Internal communications (or internal marketing) is generally led by marketing or PR professionals with expertise in human resources, public relations, marketing, social media, and/or employee engagement. One new way that companies are extending internal communication is by developing the use of their company intranets. Intranets can support an organization by sharing accurate leadership communication and company information on a timely basis to develop trust with employees and encourage them to act as brand ambassadors. This chapter describes how Lenovo has developed and uses its Lenovo Central intranet to engage employees in its mission and vision.*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the internal communication practices of a Lenovo, a \$39 billion multinational technology company. This case study examines the intent, development, and use of *Lenovo Cen-*

*tral*, its company intranet. The case study also analyzes how it uses social media to publish internal communications with employees in ways that enhance employee engagement. This chapter will introduce the role of internal communication (or internal marketing), how leadership commu-

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nication through social media can support such communication, the path to employee engagement, and Lenovo's success with *Lenovo Central* (Mishra, Walker, Mishra, 2014). The chapter also discusses the managerial implications for other firms interested in implementing an intranet in order to improve internal communication and foster employee engagement.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Role of Internal Communication**

The practice of internal communication can enhance an organizational culture by promoting employee engagement through open communication (Cahill, 1995; Deloitte, 2013; Harrison, 2013; Men & Stacks, 2014). Employees typically prefer to receive more communication from their superiors as it promotes their willingness to be involved in solving problems in the organization. Research has consistently argued for and empirically found that greater sharing of information by the organization serves to enhance employee empowerment, including a greater sense of impact on the organization and a greater sense of meaning (Mishra, & Spreitzer, 1998; Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999; Siegall & Gardner, 2000; Mills & Ungson 2003). Similar arguments and findings exist for the positive effect of communication within an organization on employee engagement (Kress, 2006; Saks, 2006; Rockland, 2014). In fact, a recent survey by PWC found that 20% of engagement by employees occurs as a result of the company's internal communications (Rockland, 2014). Welch & Jackson (2007) also identified internal communication as crucial for achieving employee engagement. A 2007/2008 Watson Wyatt study found that "Firms that communicate effectively are four times as likely to report high levels of employee engagement as firms that communicate less effectively."

Most recently, a Deloitte culture survey (2013) found that 50% of employees feel that "regular and candid communication" leads to a "culture of meaningful purpose." In addition, internal marketing "enables the firm to serve the needs of the customer (DeBussy, Ewing & Pitt, 2003: p. 150)." As reported in the Deloitte survey on culture and beliefs (2013), only 57% of employees who are happy at work said that their bosses talked about culture with them. Saks (2006) emphasized the need for clear and consistent communications with employees in order to achieve employee engagement, and suggested that employees who are more engaged will have a more positive relationship with their employer. Yet, managers seem to have less time to communicate, due to their demanding jobs (Robson & Tourish, 2005).

### **The Role of Leadership Communication**

It has long been thought that leaders play an important role in communicating the brand promise to all stakeholders, including employees (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2002). A Watson Wyatt (2008-2009) study found that those strategies that engage employees include communication from managers, leadership communication, and a focus on internal communication. In fact, the most effective brand building efforts emphasize the importance of employees in transmitting information from company leadership to external stakeholders (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2002). D'Aprix (2009) concluded that organizational leaders have lost credibility with external stakeholders because they have not been truthful with employees about a variety of issues that impact the company and its customers. However, employees are more willing to take on the role of brand ambassador when they understand and trust brand information from the top (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2002).

In fact, recent research confirms that authentic and transparent leadership communication leads

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