



The Workplace Is Going to Change. Internal Communicators Will Help Facilitate It

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While there is reason for workers in some industries to worry about their jobs giving way to robots and artificial intelligence, internal communicators can expect to stay very busy for the next decade.

Based on the results of Deloitte's 2019 [Global Human Capital Trends](#) report, the publication *HR Technologist* listed [10 key trends](#) for the next 10 years that will define the future of work. While only one lists communication by name, all 10 have considerable implications for internal communicators.

Learning to learn, relearn & unlearn

"Professionals across the globe perceive learning as the most important trend to prepare for," the article says. There has always been a close bond between training and employee communication departments. Both address the same audience, often with the same objectives.

Communicators can make sure employees know the company is making the effort to train and retrain them. Employees [surveyed](#) about why they would leave a new job within six months of starting cited inadequate training as one of the top five reasons. Building awareness that the company cares enough about its employees to make sure they're trained for the current work environment is important, especially among those who *aren't* due for any training.

Communicators can also reinforce and support the substance of training courses. At the company where I work, managers and above go through a lengthy series of leadership classes. The principles taught in the series are based on the culture the company's leaders want to build. By the time a cohort convenes for the first time, participants have already heard many of the principles in various communications; after they finish, references they read in articles and hear from leaders resonate even more strongly.

Driving employee experience

Internal communication is at the heart of Employee Experience (EX), which covers “every interaction that an employee has with the organization right from the stage of candidacy to when the employee leaves or retires,” according to *HR Technologist*.

Here at Webcor, EX is one of the four milestone initiatives driving our 20-year strategic plan. Our top leaders recognize that while we build big, complex structures, we are really a people business. If we don't have enthusiastic employees who are pumped up to come to work and be part of a team, we won't succeed on any level. A laundry list of internal communication themes are tied up in EX: trust, engagement, say-do gaps, engaging managers, shared goals, recognition...

First, communicators have their fingers on the pulse of company culture, which is the foundation of EX. A colleague of mine, who spent his career in internal communications, recently came out of retirement to take a job as VP of culture for a global organization. It's a natural fit. Internal communicators are well-positioned to provide all manner of insight into the state of the culture and the shortcomings of the Employee Experience.

Second, through our various channels, we can shine a spotlight on positive aspects of the EX along with efforts to improve those parts of the EX that are suffering.

Deloitte has identified [20 elements of EX](#), five in each of five categories: meaningful work, supportive management, positive work environment, growth opportunity, and trust in leadership. Among the elements: clear and transparent goals, a culture of recognition, mission, purpose, and transparency and honesty.

Clearly, a strong internal communication effort will have a dramatic effect on EX.

Talent mobility vs stagnation and complacency

Talent mobility, according to the Echelon Group, is “the practice of moving people within an organization, in hopes that new skills will be gained and sharpened through the employees' new roles and responsibilities.” At Webcor, we offer job rotations. In some cases, engineers working in the field are more rounded if they've done a stint in Estimating. In others, an engineer who thought she would be happy for the rest of her life in one division finds her true calling in another.

The communication opportunities here center around building awareness, especially among newer employees who may not be aware that the opportunity exists or how beneficial it can be. Profiles of employees who have benefited from mobility can help

spread the word and even encourage newer hires to stick around.

Since communicators frequently work on onboarding materials, we can make sure we include mobility in the information shared with new hires (as well as prospects, as we lend a hand in recruiting, as well).

The evolution of leadership

Age-based seniority among leaders is declining with a growing number of organizations assigning top roles to the best person for the job. Considering that millennials will make up 75 percent of the workforce by 2025, it stands to reason that a lot of C-suite jobs will wind up belonging to people in their 30s and 40s.

According to the [Innovative Leadership Institute](#), that means “organizations need to be creative in promoting engagement and teamwork across multiple generations.” Internal communicators have been paying attention to the generations in the workplace for years, mainly because we have to communicate effectively to generations that process communication differently. We are well-prepared to pave the way for younger leaders taking the helm in an era that will simultaneously see an increase in the number of older workers (like me) who want or need to keep working.

Faster, better, simpler HR technology

Well, you knew a publication called *HR Technologist* would have to elevate HR technology in a list like this. There’s no denying that Artificial Intelligence and machine learning will have as big an impact on HR as it will in other dimensions of work.

There is nothing new about companies employing internal communication to introduce new technology. In fact, companies that *don’t* rely on their communicators to explain the whys and wherefores of new technologies often fail in their effort to get widespread adoption. (For years, I have been calling the no-communication approach to introducing new technology the “Godspeed Method,” as in: “Here’s your new technology. Godspeed.”)

Creativity, collaboration, and communication

Here’s the item that lists communication by name. “The future of work,” according to *HR Technologist*, “demands that organizations invest in creating a culture where creativity thrives, collaboration is facilitated and communication is encouraged.” This calls for a cultural shift driven from the top with C-suite executives leading the charge.

Counseling C-suite executives is a key internal communication job, as is ensuring the words and deeds of those executives spread across the entire organization, demonstrating the lack of a say-do gap.

Communicators also routinely support creativity and collaboration goals.

From wellness to happiness at work

Workplace wellness programs are on the rise. Employees (and especially millennials) expect their employers to offer wellness benefits, which foster collaboration, improve

cultures, and reduce healthcare costs and absenteeism.

Like any benefit, employees learn about wellness programs and are reminded to participate as a result of communication efforts. My friend Steve Crescenzo used to share an article from an employee magazine about an employee who, after going through a divorce, had started smoking, drinking, and gaining weight. The article offered a candid look at this employee hitting bottom before calling his company's Employee Assistance Program, which led him to a ballroom dance program. In short order, he had become a champion competition dancer while shedding weight and giving up his bad habits. Storytelling like this (as opposed to the usual "be sure to take advantage of our Employee Assistance Program" notices) brings benefits to life for employees.

The rise of superjobs

I confess to having been unaware of the term "superjob," although the concept is familiar. According to [another *HR Technologist* article](#), "As repetitive tasks are taken over by technology, traditional jobs are evolving into superjobs that challenge our cognitive faculties. These superjobs will force us to augment the qualities that separate us from machines: creative thinking, innovation, sound communication, and judgment."

Superjobs are related directly to the first item on this list, "learning, unlearning, and relearning." As employees worry about the prospect of being replaced by a machine, communicators will keep them apprised of the steps the company is taking to make sure they are ready for the jobs that will need to be filled. We can support training's work by sharing stories and scenarios that help employees prepare. And internal communicators can help employees understand the company's journey toward modifying jobs and roles in the organization and the impact it will have on them. Essentially, we're talking about change communication, an activity that has consumed countless internal communication hours for decades.

A treasure trove of data

I mentioned earlier that Employee Experience is one of the four milestone initiatives driving the 20-year strategic plan at Webcor, where I work. One of the others is Data-Driven Decisions. Equipping employees with data to help them make decisions (so they don't have to go through layers of bureaucratic approvals)—and giving them access to the tools that help them retrieve and make sense of the data—is what companies do when they undertake a "digital transformation."

A digital transformation is another case of change management, of which employee communication is a vital component.

Internal communicators will also need to start using data themselves, telling stories with numbers and making calculations about what and how to communicate based on what the data tells us. Data journalism will be a routine part of both internal and external communication before very long.

Winning with diversity

“Inequity in the workplace breeds lack of consumer loyalty while inclusive cultures can yield a stronger customer base,” according to one CEO cited in the *HR Technologist* article. Despite the current disturbing national dialogue on race that is dividing the country, most businesses recognize the benefits of diversity. As a result Diversity and Inclusion (DI) has become a recognized discipline in the business world.

I’m currently working on communication about Webcor’s involvement in [an employment program](#) launched by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission that aims to place job candidates on the neurodiversity scale (including autism). We hired three workers from the program; we’re rightly proud of it and plan to expand our efforts.

In addition to trumpeting your achievements, communicators should promote the value of diversity and address psychological safety in the workplace (which we did with [a LinkedIn article](#) by our president and CEO).

Still worried about whether your internal communication job will remain relevant?

I didn’t think so.

This piece was originally published on [Shel Holtz's blog](#).

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