

Improving communication using a blended approach – a work in progress.

Background

Communication, within the organization and with the wider academic community is a key issue for academics.

Internal communication has appeared in the BU staff survey as an area that could be improved.

In my role as one of the leadership team of the health and wellbeing community in HSC helping to address this is part of my leadership role.

Several sections of the Managers toolkit were used to underpin this blended approach to improving communication.

There is a comprehensive section on communication, including introducing the concept of Generation C <http://m.goodpractice.net/bournemouth-university-mkh/resources/topical-content/who-are-generation-c>)

There is a small section focused on creativity <http://m.goodpractice.net/bournemouth-university-mkh/resources/personal-skills-and-development/creativity> and a hints and tips style page <http://m.goodpractice.net/bournemouth-university-mkh/resources/topical-content/six-steps-to-a-creativity-culture>

What is Generation C?

In 2001 Prensky¹ had the idea that there was a new generation who, having been brought up with technology, were more fluent with it than people who learnt it as a 'second language'. This is however a very contested concept (e.g. Bennett et al²). Generation C, according to the management toolkit is another way of looking at the permeation of new and internet technologies in the population. Rather than basing people's technology engagement on age it bases it on people's connectivity.

This project

Communication for an academic leader happens at multiple levels. This project looked at individual, team, and school wide communications and sought new and creative ways of improving communication at all three levels.

Individual.

As an academic I am actively engaged with my discipline internationally. Often this means I use traditional means of communication: publishing papers and attending conferences. As a member of Generation C I also connect via a range of

¹ Marc Prensky, (2001), "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1", On the Horizon, 9(5) pp. 1 – 6 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>

² Bennett et al the 'digital natives' debate: A critical review of the evidence. British Journal of Educational Technology 39(5) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2007.00793.x>

internet means. I keep my Brian profile up to date, have a personal blog and use twitter, facebook, LinkedIn, and various other online groups.

I carried out a review of my online activity, looking at which activities seem to have the most benefit, and found that new sites were also appearing that I needed to consider. As a result I joined <https://www.academia.edu> and explore the additional functionality that mendeley.com offers with it's citation manager. I also signed up for an ORCID profile. Finding the time to devote to maintaining my presence on these online platforms is an ongoing part of this project.

Team

HSC is currently organized around academic communities, each with a leadership team. I am a member of the leadership team for the health and wellbeing community. One of the aims of the communities is to encourage people to develop opportunities for people to come together to develop areas of shared interest. Attendance at meetings has however been reducing. The leadership team, and community members (albeit the ones who came to the meeting) explored ways of reinvigorating us. Members of the community come from across the school, covering a range of professional backgrounds, and we decided that exploring the meaning of health and wellbeing might encourage people to see connections they were unaware of.

One idea that I took forward from this was to introduce a series of short PechaKucha³ style presentations on what health and wellbeing meant for them, and their work. This was a new way of presenting that one of the team had experience of, but no-one else had heard of. We adapted the format to meet our own timescales and asked for volunteers to come along with just 10 slides each taking no more than 30 seconds to give a very quick and snappy presentation to open up a discussion.

These ran in until the summer, with a range of interpretations of health and wellbeing being shared, and some discussions continuing outside of the meetings.

School

A series of 'Listening Events' had been organised by the Dean in the autumn term to discuss ways to diversify the school's business and to explore the opportunities and barriers. One barrier that emerged was that people didn't feel they were aware of the opportunities to participate in projects and work outside of their own areas. Even though people used school wide email to share this type of information there was a feeling that emails easily got lost and if people wanted to refer to them later had often been deleted.

I suggested a school blog as a way of reducing emails and creating an archive that people could search.

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PechaKucha>

This idea was taken to the school academic board, and although there were some dissenters it met with a willingness to give it a try. Although I was the driving force behind the blog I tried to keep a low profile to avoid it being seen as 'Carol's blog'. For it to be successful it was essential that people felt that it belonged to everyone, and there was a move from email to the blog so that it very quickly became the norm, and people saw a quick gain by the reduced throughput on their inboxes.

Working with marketing I developed the framework for the blog and then sought out some people already active online, and key people who would be likely to generate material for the school's blog and worked with them to populate it before it was launched.

Although training sessions were offered creating a new post was very easy and there was no demand for training. A daily digest was set up so that people who would have sent emails could be confident that people would still get to see their information. I found the most effective way of encouraging people to post to the blog rather than sending emails was to respond to emails sent when the blog would have been more suitable. I adopted a friendly helpful approach, suggesting they might like to also post it to the blog, and offering help if they weren't sure how to do it.

To maintain the back office aspects I periodically review posts on the dashboard, and make sure posts have appropriate tags and categories added.

The blog has been successful, and there are very few days when there isn't a post or several. As use increased the need for two new sub categories became apparent, and these were added to the structure.