BEST PRACTICES FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to recommend best practices for employee engagement through internal communications strategy. This study utilizes a survey of the communications preferences and habits of employees in a mid-size healthcare company, Premier Inc., recommendations from internal communications professionals, and standards from published communications professionals. It was discovered that many employees still preferred email communication over multimedia such as video or podcasts, though several professionals feel email is outdated. Additionally, Premier's current strategy had good overall engagement with 88% of survey respondents feeling that they are least mostly informed about what's happening in their company.

Overall communication strategy was found to work best in enhancing engagement when created around employees' most-used platforms and channels and featuring their topics of concern such as company events and benefits, all with well-formatted text and webpages. In conclusion, the best method for creating an overall communications strategy is to choose the platforms that employees interact with the most on a daily basis (e.g., Microsoft Teams for Premier employees) and utilize those to increase employee engagement with internal communications and the company as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Employee happiness is becoming a growing concern among organizations, especially in recent times when the COVID-19 pandemic and the "Great Resignation" have caused employees to leave their jobs in droves (Parker et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic allowed for more remote job offerings, which led employees to look for jobs in better environments around the nation since they didn't have to stay in a job in the area where they live. The "Great Resignation" refers to the high number of employees resigning from their current positions for new and better opportunities or simply to spend more time with their families during the post-COVID-19 era where the home has once again become a hub of activity for work and school (Fuller & Kerr, 2022).

Organizations are focusing more on ensuring their employees are happy and satisfied with their positions so that they won't seek other opportunities in a different company. Gallup reported that the percentage of engaged employees fell for the first time in a decade to just 34% with 16% of sampled employees actively disengaged in their work and workplace (Harter, 2022). Research in this project has shown that an engaged employee is less likely to leave an organization, and the best way to ensure employee engagement is through dedicated employee or internal communications (Izquierdo, 2021). These communications can help an employee to feel connected to their colleagues, the executive suite, and the company as a whole, leading to a more positive work experience and happier employees.

The research in this project will benefit internal communications teams seeking to establish the most efficient communication practices for increased employee engagement. Teams of all sizes will be able to utilize the best practices recommended; however, recommendations will be targeted towards smaller teams with limited resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, existing research studies into the effectiveness and best practices of corporate internal communications will be described. Effective communication for this study is communication that conveys necessary information to employees in a timely manner in a way that allows them to engage with and use that information appropriately. It is also communication that ensures all company employees are on the same page when it comes to an organization's policies and practices, including promoting an inclusive and supportive culture. This review contains best practice recommendations from sources published by professional writers and designers in the communications field. Their suggestions are used to provide more context to the research of this study.

The research discussed here will set a basis for the future needs and practices of internal communications teams and professionals. There are numerous studies and professional sources available on public relations and marketing communications with results that can be applicable to the internal demographic, and some will be discussed in this review. Studies that inform the importance of employee engagement, emotional culture and productivity, and communication method variation will be summarized here.

Employee Engagement

This section will cover research into the effects that internal communications can have on employee engagement, satisfaction, and overall business productivity.

As mentioned before, the Great Resignation has been affecting workplaces through disengaged employees either leaving the organization or quiet quitting, which is the act of doing

the bare minimum required for their roles because they don't feel motivated to go above and beyond according to Sean Devlin (2022). Devlin notes that internal communications can lead to healthier workplace through employee success stories and platforms such as surveys where employees can express their thoughts, "and employees won't feel the need to quiet quit because they're engaged and needed" (2022). David Cowen in his 2017 book, *Strategic Internal Communication*, defines employee engagement as "getting employees into a trade-off between their participation in the success of the organizational mission and what makes them content with their work/life balance," rather than focusing solely on how happy they are. Vercic (2021) noted that employees are the most-important stakeholders for organizational development. The study included a survey of 1,805 employees from 12 large corporations and found that insufficient or unsatisfactory communication is one of the most-common issues in organizations today and leads to employees feeling disengaged with their place of work. According to the results of the study, internal communication satisfaction is directly correlated with employee engagement which, in turn, leads employees to promote the overall employer brand. Dhanesh (2017) agrees that increased employee engagement leads to increased productivity and satisfaction. They note that employee engagement can fall under three categories: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Their study found that the best communications engaged all three categories and offered a model of communications wherein informative communications that appeal to the cognitive nature of engagement should serve as the base of a pyramid that supports other communications that appeal to the affective and behavioral engagement categories through control and collaborative communications.

Vercic's (2021) further studies into employee engagement in relation to internal communications supported the idea that internal communication satisfaction has a significant

effect on high levels of employee engagement. In a Delphi study, Vercic et al. (2012) interviewed 18 communications experts across Europe and consequently defined internal communications as "all forms of communication within the organization and includes the exchange of information among employees or members of an organization to create understanding." These experts agreed that internal communications elevate employee engagement because it is a management function that integrates human resources, communication, and management together to bring information dissemination to an organization's employees, thereby helping to ensure employees remain connected to their company. In a separate study, Vercic and Poloski (2017) sourced responses to a questionnaire from 104 employees of the same company to determine their own perceived level of engagement with their company's internal communications. They discovered that internal communications such as feedback and informative communications were most relevant to employee engagement and encouraged higher levels of performance from employees (Vercic and Poloski, 2017).

Culture and Productivity

The studies in this section cover research on how internal communications and employee engagement can help create a positive emotional company culture and increase employee productivity.

Lee and Kim (2021) surveyed 405 employees from various companies and industries in their study, "Cultivating employee creativity through strategic internal communication: the role of leadership, symmetry, and feedback seeking behaviors." Their results determined that communications from management enhanced creativity and productivity because employees felt encouraged to seek feedback. The authors support the idea of symmetrical communication as a positive effect on company culture because it is communication that promotes collaboration and

understanding among an organization's workforce. Because of this, they conclude that communications should focus on being supportive, and employees should be given the opportunity to voice their needs in a way that management can listen and respond (Lee & Kim, 2021). Similarly, Men and Yue (2019) surveyed 506 U.S. employees about their work culture. Lee and Kim's (2021) study supports what Men and Yue (2019) found, which is that "symmetrical communication and responsive leadership communication cultivated a positive emotional culture in organizations." This study also found that there are two different types of corporate cultures emerging: emotional – how employees feel – and cognitive – how employees think and behave. However, the study found that emotional culture is becoming increasingly important because employees are then encouraged to be helpful and respectful to their coworkers (Men & Yue, 2019). They determined that symmetrical internal communication helps to foster this needed positive emotional culture.

Vercic (2021) agrees that the engagement resulting from great internal communications is essential to a productive workforce. He found that "engagement increases when employees are emotionally connected to others and know what is expected of them, have all the necessary information to do their job and have opportunities to develop and improve" (Vercic, 2021). This supports Men and Yue's (2019) results that a positive emotional culture is essential to creating a healthy cognitive culture through the connection and knowledge that internal communications can bring to an organization's workforce.

Communication Method Variation

Further research into the necessity of well-developed internal communications unearths studies on the effects that various methods of communication have on employee engagement and

productivity. This section discusses research on internal communication methods and their effectiveness on employee populations.

Newsletters

In another internal communications study, Vercic and Spoljaric (2020) analyzed through a survey how 1,524 employees from 10 different companies perceived the quality of internal communications. They found that the use of rich media in communications such as blogs, graphics, and social media had a significant positive impact on internal communication satisfaction; media such as digital newsletters had a moderate impact; media such as all employee meetings and printed memos don't have any significant impact on communication satisfaction. Their conclusion was that "satisfaction is a result of intricate combinations of media, content, situational and personality factors" (Vercic & Spoljaric, 2020). In their 2011 book, *The Definitive Guide to HR Communication*, Alison Davis and Jane Shannon agree that, while the digital newsletter is useful for collecting and distributing updates and information that lead to employee understanding, other communication tools would be better to increase engagement through discussion and personalization.

Visuals

Davis and Shannon provide a few suggestions on visual best practices for text-based communications such as using simple text treatments like bold text to make communications more interesting, infographics to make the content more compelling, and creating or buying a store of stock photos for quick image needs (2011). Rebecca Hagen and Kim Golombisky in their 2017 book, *White Space is Not Your Enemy*, go a step further in their layout recommendations by saying that grid systems are the best way to determine the most appropriate

layouts, particularly modular layouts for written communications since text can nicely fit into square or rectangular columns. According to Hagen and Golombisky, negative space should be utilized to highlight important content and larger pools of it spaced throughout the communication is a better practice than many small patches of white space that make a communication piece look cluttered. Additionally, they recommend creating a visual hierarchy of text by using varied headline sizes and including any visuals towards the top of a communication where they won't interrupt the flow of text (2017). Hagen and Golombisky's recommendations support Alberto Cairo's suggestion in his 2013 book, *The Functional Art*, that different sizes of the same fonts as well as different shades of a few colors can create a unified look across a communication rather than using several different font types or colors that make a communication unappealing to the eye.

Cairo also has suggestions for how to choose the best visuals for a communication piece, including defining the focus of graphics, gathering information, choosing the best graphic form for the function of the communication, and ensuring that the desired visual fits with the overall style of the company as a whole and the particular communication in which it will be used for (2013). According to Cairo, "the first and main goal of graphic and visualization is to be a tool for your eyes and brain to perceive what lies beyond their natural reach," so internal communicators should understand their audience's scope of knowledge on the subject being communicated and adapt the graphic or infographic to help organize that knowledge (2013, p. 9).

Liff and Posey (2004) note that most businesses have important information stored in long and detailed text documents that employees can find overwhelming. They advised that utilizing a communication method that includes visual elements such as charts or graphics can be a more effective way of presenting critical information. In her 2022 book, "Writing on the Job,"

Martha Coven agrees, citing studies that have found that communications are more likely to be effective if a block of text is accompanied by a graph, even if the graph provides no additional information.

Finally, Ewing et al.'s (2019) study combined interview answers from 27 senior-level internal communications practitioners working for global organizations to determine how social media can be strategically used to improve employee communications and engagement. They discovered that the visual and connection elements of communications methods such as interactive social media helps to create a positive connection among employees because it is focused on storytelling and imagery. They cautioned that social media training is necessary for employees to avoid any negative conversation and that organizational leaders should be involved so as to "listen" and respond to employee concerns (Ewing et al., 2019).

Intranet

Organizational intranets should be useful, learnable, memorable, effective, efficient, desirable, and delightful, according to Steve Krug's definition of webpage usability in his 2014 book, *Don't Make Me Think*. He recommends internal communicators ensure their intranet pages don't leave employees confused about where they are or asking more questions on how to find something by including search functions, simple navigation, and sticking to web-browsing conventions and cohesive structures to help users identify where they are and if they're in the right place (Krug, 2014). Further than that, usability of webpages includes easily-scannable text for different audiences looking for different pieces of information and even omitting needless words such as introductions or simple instructions because those aren't always useful or read. Krug also advises intranet creators to consider accessibility such as text replacements for images and considerations for mobile users (2014).

Charles David Waghmare's 2019 book, *Beginning SharePoint Communication Sites*, also offers a lot of intranet best practices to internal communicators around the idea that intranets are a great way to present employees with a media-rich content management and collaboration platform that helps them understand their company better and perform better business tasks because this is the place to include more fun graphics, visuals, videos, and other interactive elements that allow employees to engage with each other. Waghmare's definition of a successful intranet is one that includes the elements of communication and accessibility; content and file uploads; employee culture; and collaboration, connection, and sharing. He agrees with Cairo that search functions are important and notes that these can be helped by using simple naming conventions and that images can help bring focus and visual interest to a page (Waghmare, 2019). Waghmare concludes that "designing a strategy will help to develop clear-cut plans on how your intranet should look, the contents, how employees are going to consume information, and how the organization can achieve business growth" (2019, p. 79).

Communication Strategy

The research in this section will cover recommendations from professional writers and designers on overall communication strategy that best allows employees to engage in information distributed by internal communications teams.

Davis and Shannon (2011) note that "the best way to choose the appropriate tool for a communication is to consider your employees' needs and what your goal for their interaction with the content is" (p. 101). They propose using a step-by-step way of thinking by first approaching each communication project with asking questions about the goal and intent of the project; from there, a simple project plan can be created and an appropriate budget can be established if applicable (Davis & Shannon, 2011). For smaller teams without any budget for

communications, they note that the project planning stage is also a great time to brainstorm ways around needing a budget, such as utilizing employee images.

An early study into internal communications by Ruck and Welch (2012) found that internal communication satisfaction is between 50-60% even though effective communication was seen as a prerequisite for organizational success. They emphasized the use of medium theory, which was defined as the effects of using different forms of media for internal communications, and determined that internal communications teams should focus on content, communities, and dialogue rather than sheer volume or extreme detail (Ruck & Welch, 2012).

In *Strategic Internal Communication*, Cowen agrees that internal communications need to make strategic sense for every occasion or use case to be successful. While a common strategy for communications is to cascade the information down from the top of the organization to the lower-level employees, Cowen argues that communications should be dynamic and require active engagement from all levels and in all directions across an organization (2017). According to Cowen, the biggest strategic challenges to effective communications that need to be considered are the barriers between employee work silos and uncommunicative leadership – internal communications leaders can't produce effective communication if they don't know why an organization's leaders are making their decisions for the company (2017). Jakubiec's (2019) more-targeted study, which included 90 employees in an international financial organization, also identified some of the barriers to effective communication as lack of visibility into the communications process, distrust in fellow employees and management, few organizational communicative tools, and communications that were too lengthy or contradictory to other communications (Jakubiec, 2019).

The studies discussed above focus on the importance of internal communication as a whole and provide some insight into possible communication areas to focus on in order to improve employee engagement. The research contained in this study will fill the gap in current studies by utilizing existing research and applying recommended general communication strategies to internal communications-specific best practices.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in that the survey research is conducted among the employees of one company. A more national pool of survey participants may produce deeper results. However, the results of this survey will be analyzed and synthesized with the recommendations of published professionals as well as with interviews of professionals in the communications field, providing adequate support for the findings and conclusion of this study.

FINDINGS

The results of the survey (Appendix A) are shown below. This survey was taken by 439 full-time employees at Premier Inc. between December 2, 2022, and December 5, 2022. The first and second questions gathered demographic information on the anonymous respondents (Figures 1 and 2).
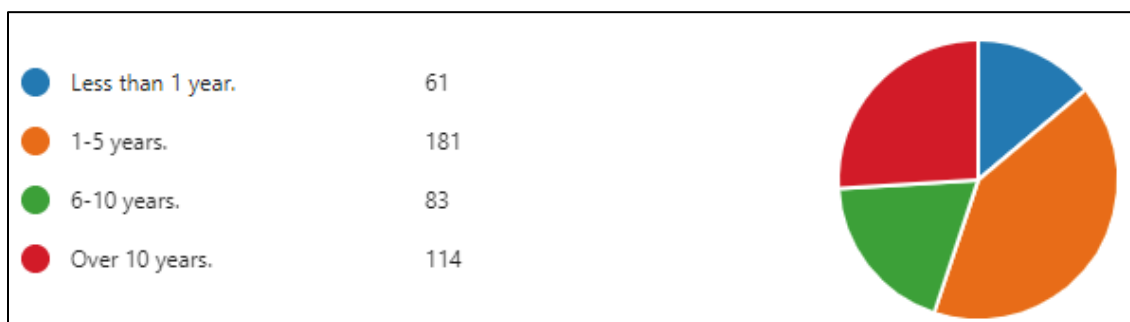

● Less than 1 year.	61	
● 1-5 years.	181	
● 6-10 years.	83	
● Over 10 years.	114	

Figure 1: How long have you worked for Premier?

48 respondents (**17**%) answered **Director** for this question.

Product Director
Contracting Director
Chain Services
Analyst
Field Services   Success Director
Senior Director
Team **Director**
Manager
Region Director
Sr
Operations   Contract Manager
Contigo Health
Supply Chain
Implementation Manager
Director Pharmacy
Performance Services
Advisory Services
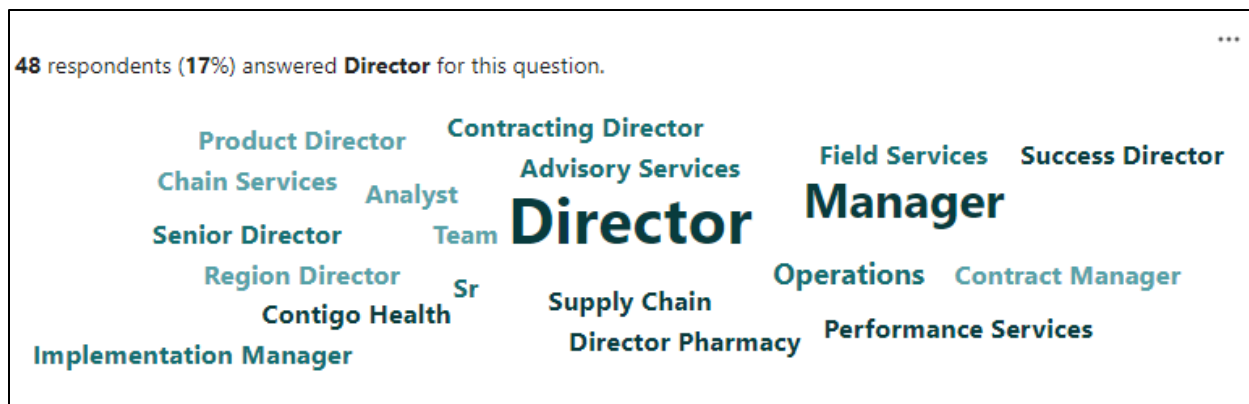
Figure 2: What business unit do you work in and what is your title?

The remaining questions gauged the employees' communications habits and preferences, as well as the current communications strategy's effectiveness in disseminating information. Figure 3 shows how informed the respondents feel about their company. 62% answered that they know most of what they need to know; 26% feel very informed; and only 1% answered they don't feel informed at all from the current communications strategy. Similarly, Figure 4 demonstrates that 80% of respondents feel confident that they know where to go to look for information they need or have questions about.
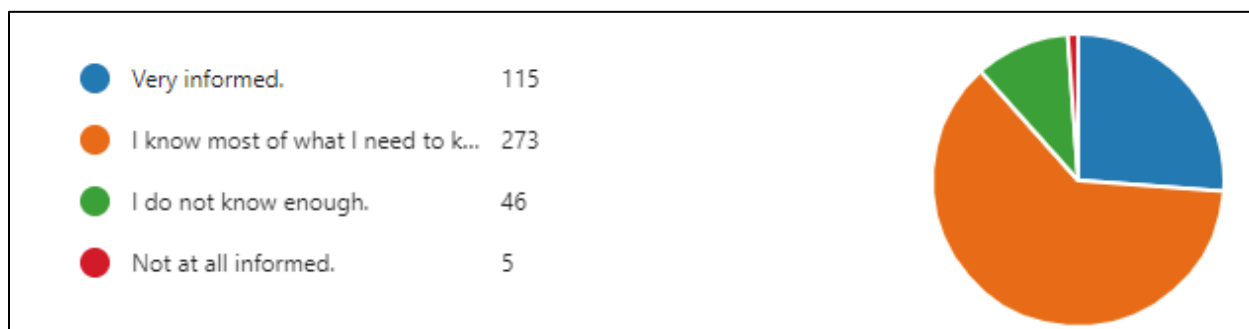

Very informed.	115
I know most of what I need to k...	273
I do not know enough.	46
Not at all informed.	5

Figure 3: How informed do you feel about what's happening at Premier?

Figure 4: Do you feel that you know where to find an answer to a question pertaining to Premier corporate functions?

Figure 5 details which specific platforms are most commonly used among Premier employees with Microsoft Teams being the most used and the company's intranet, Inside Premier, being the least used.
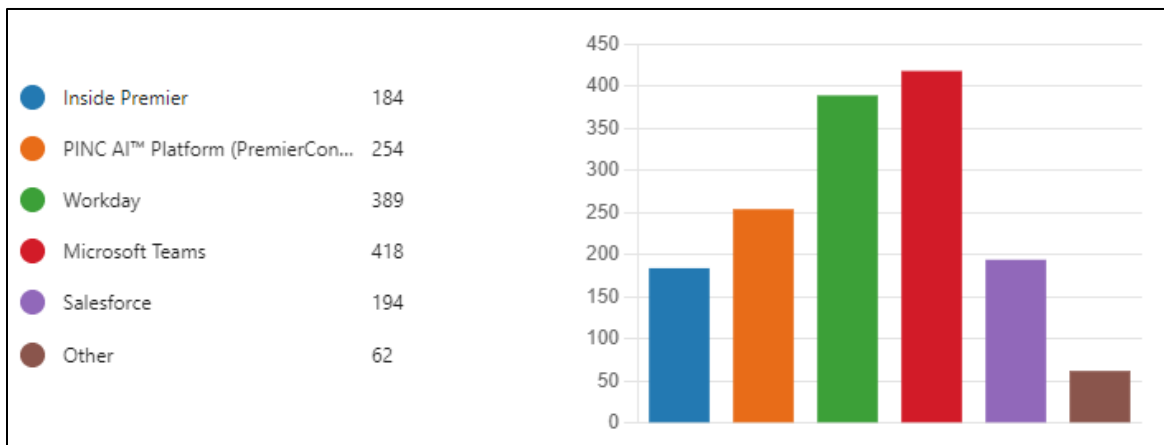

Figure 5: Which of the following platforms do you work with regularly? Choose all that apply.

Employees indicated that they find emails to be the most effective mode of communication for need-to-know information, followed by meetings (Figure 6). Multimedia modes such as podcasts and videos were listed as the least effective.
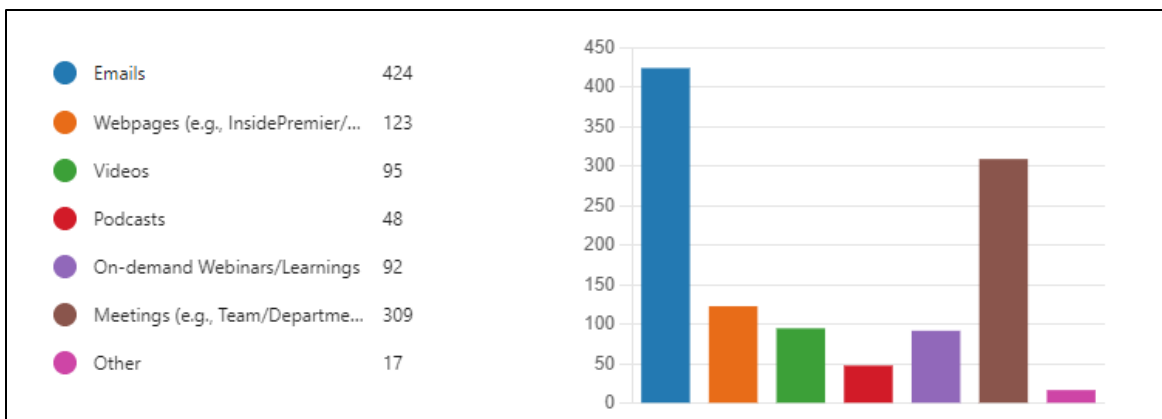
Figure 6: Which modes of communication do you find most effective for receiving timely and important information? Choose all that apply.

Digging deeper into specific communications, Figure 7 illustrates which communications are read regularly by respondents. Emails from the Corporate Communications team, the company weekly newsletter, and emails from executive leaders were the highest read communications. The lowest read communications were those from Premier's Council on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. Only 8 of the 439 participants noted that they do not read any of the listed communications regularly.
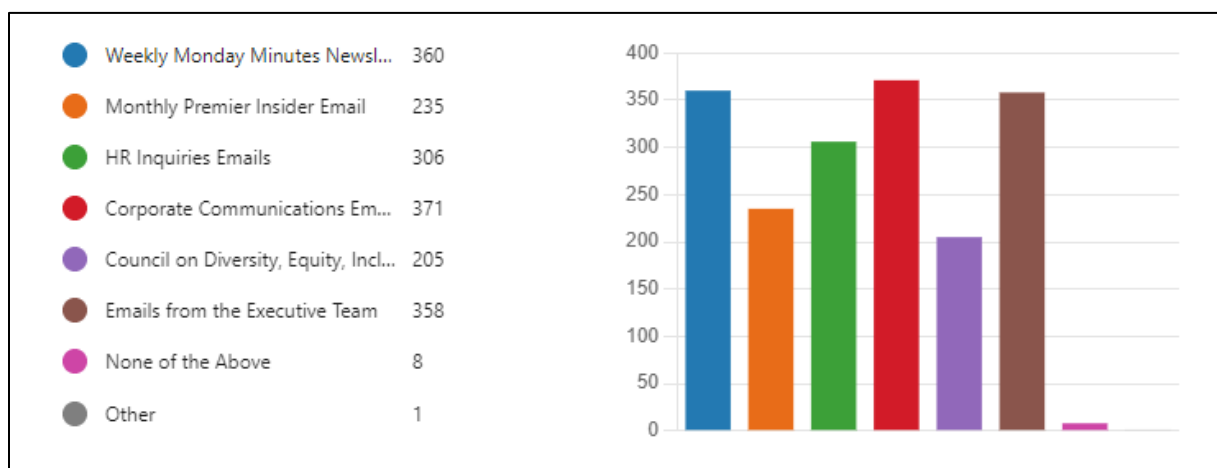

Figure 7: Which of the following update communications do you read regularly? Choose all that apply.

In the next question, respondents indicated their preference of which pieces of information they felt were better to be included in direct emails rather than stored on Premier's intranet for them to find on their own time (Figure 8). Messages from executive leaders, wellness

and benefit information, and company events were the top topics that were preferred to be communicated through direct email. The topics of Council on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging and external news about the company were at the bottom of the list.
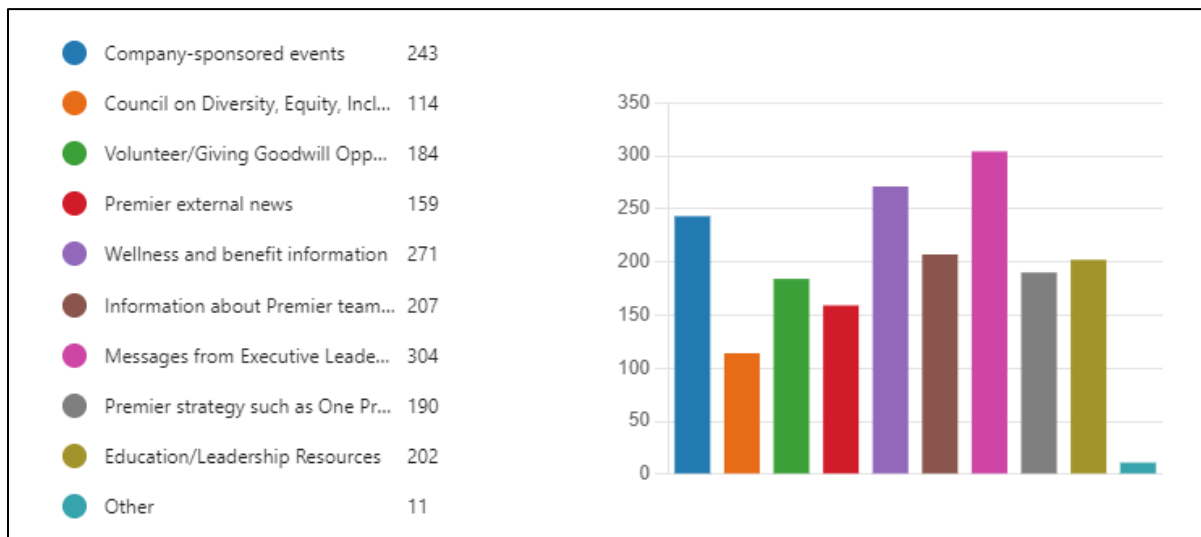

Figure 8: Which of these topics would you prefer to learn about via direct email instead of looking for them on Inside Premier/HR Portal on your own time? Choose all that apply.

To gauge usage of Premier's intranet, Inside Premier, respondents to the next question indicated what information they access when and if they visit the intranet. Figure 9 shows that the most sought-after information includes wellness and benefit information by a margin of almost 100 votes, followed by learning resources and company updates. Deadlines, events and company strategy were about middle of the pack, with networking and premier external news falling to the bottom.
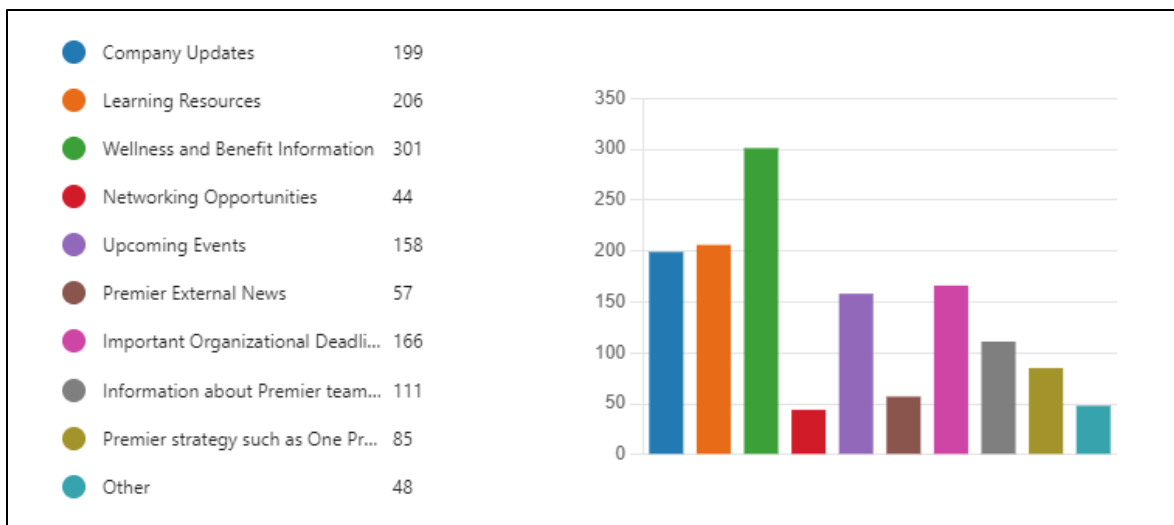
Figure 9: What information do you typically look for or access on our Inside Premier intranet? Choose all that apply.

The last two questions of the survey focused on visual and formatting strategy. 87% of respondents indicated that they preferred information such as statistics or lists to be presented visually rather than in a text description (Figure 10).
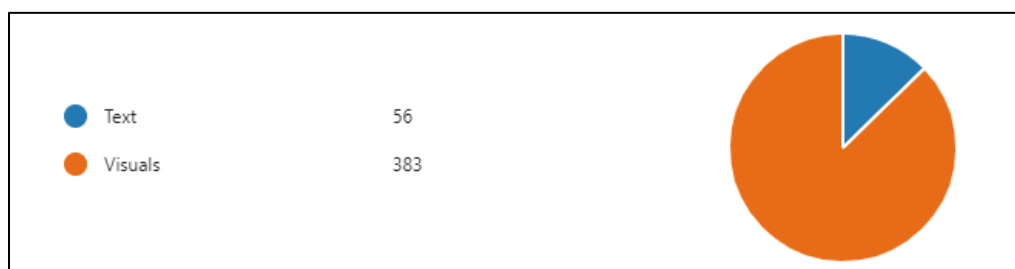

Figure 10: Do you find information such as statistics, lists, etc., easier to understand when presented in descriptive text or in visuals like infographics?

Finally, respondents were asked to rank the readability of Premier's current three main forms of communication - email, newsletter, and webpage – which is illustrated in Figure 11. 87.5% of respondents said that the organization of information in emails was easy to follow, 11.2% said that there is too much text to get through, and 1.5% said that they found the formatting was too distracting. 76.5% of respondents said that the organization of information in newsletters was easy to follow, 20.7% said that there is too much text to get through, and 2.7% said that they found the formatting was too

distracting. 65.6% of respondents said that the organization of information on intranet webpages was easy to follow, 22.8% said that there is too much text to get through, and 11.6% said that they found the formatting was too distracting.
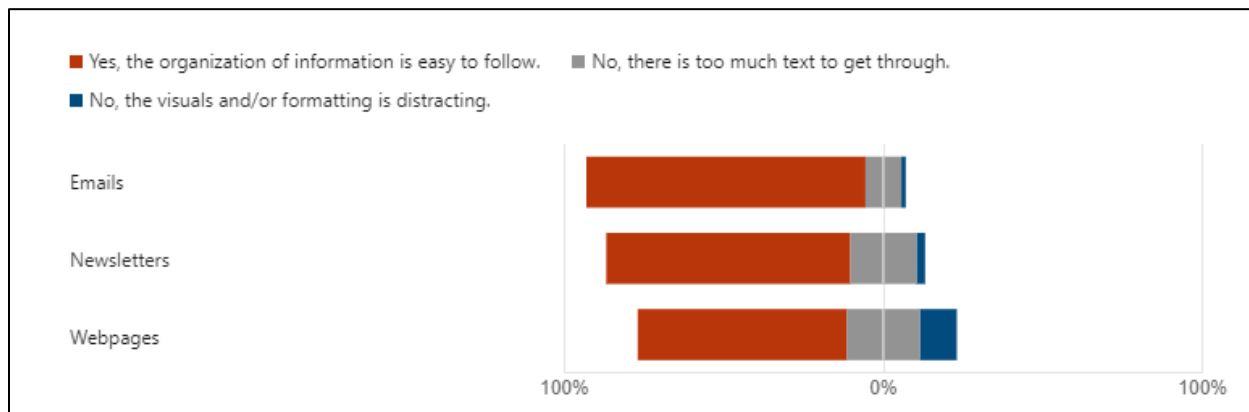

Figure 11: Do you find Premier emails, newsletters and internal webpages easy to read? Please rank each on the following scale.

DELIVERABLE

The intended audiences for this project are internal communications professionals and their teams. Because of this, the best practices derived from the research in this study are presented as a written guide in PDF form. A written PDF guide is the best platform for this information because PDFs are easily searchable, can be accessed via desktop, laptop, or mobile devices, and can be printed for writers who prefer to have hard copies on hand. Images and graphics recommendations and examples within the PDF guide are essentially locked in place and avoid the risk of distortion on various screen sizes or browser settings; yet, professionals with the appropriate software can insert their own notes, highlights, and more to help them make the most of each best practice listed in the guide.

The best practices guide is broken down into sections by internal communications platform, such as emails and newsletters, websites, videos and podcasts, and additional

resources. Each section provides details, examples, and recommendations on appropriate content types for each platform, effective use of visuals and space, ideal lengths, analytics and metrics, and more. All recommendations fit into a generalized overarching communication strategy geared towards maximizing employee engagement with these communications and, subsequently, with the reader's organization as a whole.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed the effectiveness of internal communications in engaging employees by measuring their preferences in three main areas of communication: email and newsletters, internal webpages, and multimedia such as video and podcasts. Communications were considered effective based on employee confidence in knowledge on their company's systems and readability of common communications. The results of this study are synthesized with recommendations from published communications experts and interviews with communications professionals.

Email and Newsletters

Out of 439 respondents to the survey, 424 indicated that they preferred to receive important information via emails. This supports Alcon's Digital Channel Execution Manager, Jennifer Jurczewsky's, assertion that "If there is an action that has to be done, email is still king." Of these emails, respondents selected emails from the Corporate Communications mailbox and weekly newsletters among their most-read update emails, which reflects Davis and Shannon's (2011) recommendation that the digital newsletter is useful for distributing updates and these can lead to better employee understanding. Jurczewsky also says that emails and newsletters offer a strategic advantage because "tracking emails like our newsletter have been helpful to prove to

our client groups what works and what doesn't." She shares that numbers and analytics are a great way to strategize communications around stories or topics that perform well with employee readership.

However, Labcorp's Enterprise Communications Senior Manager, Katie Mee, notes that "my current organization relies heavily on emails and intranet. I prefer videos, direct to employee communications, social channels, etc." Mee recommends following the content trends that people engage with in their normal lives, such as podcasts.

Multimedia

Multimedia such as videos and podcasts are an area that companies like Premier could improve on. Only 95 survey respondents selected video as an effective mode of receiving important information with even less (48) selecting podcasts. Labcorp's Enterprise and Business Communications Senior Director, Jennifer Minx, notes that "we have found 'live' interactions (either video or face-to-face) tend to be more effective" when communicating to different populations of employees. Katie Hamlin, Internal Communications Manager for Diagnostics at Labcorp, agrees with the recommendation that "we want to be better about creating more engaging content. We want to create more visuals, videos and … a podcast."

Visuals are something that respondents to the survey preferred, with 383 selecting that they find some information easier to understand when presented in a visual format. This supports Liff and Posey's (2004) advice to utilize a communication method that includes visual elements to effectively present critical information. Coven (2022) also recommends including graphics with text, even if the graphic doesn't present any new information, and Cairo (2013)

recommends using graphics and visualization to increase understanding among audiences as well.

Intranet

Survey responses indicated that the usage of Premier's intranet to gather information is lower than emails and only 189 selected that they even work with the intranet regularly. The information topic with the highest number of selections for use, wellness and benefit information, only received 301 votes out of 439, and the count for other topics dropped quickly to 206 and below. 11.6% of respondents felt that the intranet the visuals and formatting of the intranet webpages was too distracting to be able to engage in the content. Krug (2014) recommends internal communicators create webpages that don't leave their employees confused, which could be a reason why usage rate of Premier's intranet is low. Waghmare (2019) also recommends utilizing intranets as a place to display media-rich content, but to keep them accessible.

Overall Strategy

The survey results suggest that there are areas for improvement in overall internal communications strategy. For example, Council on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging communications and multimedia communications scored low in respondents' preference selections. Intranet pages were also noted to be the communication method that had the most distracting format and was one of the least used platforms by employees. When creating a strategy, Minx advises to "look at the objective and the audience and select the best channel to meet employees where they are." Mee agrees, saying that the most important aspect to her

internal communication strategy is "understanding what the objective of the message is, along with understanding the intended audience."

Similarly, Hamlin first looks at her audience and determines which one or more channels is best for her communication, for example, "if there are action items for employees, we will send an email then post to our intranet page [to] be included in that Friday's all-employee newsletter." This supports Davis and Shannon's (2011) note that choosing the appropriate communication tool means considering your goal for how employees should interact with the communication. To ensure employee engagement, Mee recommends "direct, transparent and personal communication tactics" regardless of which channel of method of communication is used. Jurczewsky notes that "in terms of building a better community, our [Microsoft] Yammer channel has been wildly popular," which supports Cowen's (2017) recommendation that engaging communications should utilize input from all levels of an organization through various social channels like internal messaging channels.

Summary emails like the weekly newsletter were also selected as preferred communications in the survey, and newsletters and emails scored high for readability. This supports Jurczewsky's recommendation to consolidate messages and to ensure that each communication has a "must know or an action attached to the message" to give the communication value.

CONCLUSION

Premier's current communications strategy shows good overall engagement with 88% of survey respondents feeling that they are at least mostly informed about what's happening in their

company. 80% also are confident that they know where to go to find the answer to a question they may have regarding corporate operations at Premier.

Email communications are still preferred by employees; however, there is opportunity for improvement in what topics are included. Content strategy should be crafted around corporate events and benefits information, with less emphasis on topics such as Council of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging based on survey responses. Topics such as volunteering and donation opportunities, education and leadership resources, and information about teams throughout the company could also be featured in summary communications. Less need-to-know topics such as Council of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, external news, and organizational strategy should be included in less direct communication methods such as podcasts or the company intranet.

While multimedia methods of communication were not among the top preferred channels in the survey, there was still expressed interest in visual or media-rich channels. Current intranet formatting strategy may be too distracting, so selecting a less-confusing format with purposeful graphics and visuals, content flow, and appropriate use of white space that tell a complete story is an area for improvement.

Based on the research included in this study, the best method for creating an overall communications strategy is to choose the platforms that employees interact with the most on a daily basis (e.g., Microsoft Teams for Premier employees) and utilize those to increase employee engagement with internal communication and the company as a whole.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have opened the door to opportunities for further research into the reasons behind some of the employee survey results. For example, an appropriate expansion of this research would be to include recommended word counts and page lengths for the various communications methods and additional accessibility options such as read aloud features for emails and webpages.

Focus groups or other discussion forums could serve to expound on some of the results of this study, such as why Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging communications performed so low, if poor quality or resources contributed to multimedia communications being less preferred by some employees, and other communication details. The specifics found through further research in these targeted areas can add helpful recommendations to the internal communications best practices derived from this study.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Survey Questions

The following survey disclaimer, instructions, and questions were distributed to Premier Inc.'s organization of 3,000 employees to gauge internal communications effectiveness and preferences. Questions are mostly multiple choice or choose one options to allow for better quantitative data collection and increase response rate; however, most questions also have the option to provide open text answers if applicable. 439 employees responded between December 2, 2022, and December 5, 2022.

Employee Survey

Disclaimer: The results of this survey will be used to provide a better understanding of the communications preferences and needs of the Premier community. Your answers will be completely anonymous and no personal identification information will be collected. Research gleaned from this survey will be shared with a third-party committee at UNC Chapel Hill to further studies on internal communications. By completing this survey, you understand and agree to provisions in this disclaimer. Thank you for your participation!

The following questions are intended to collect demographic information:

1. How long have you worked for Premier?

    a. Choose one answer: Less than 1 year; 1-5 years; 6-10 years; Over 10 years.

2. What business unit are you currently working in?

    a. Open text answer.

3. Which of the following platforms do you work with regularly? Choose all that apply:

a. Multiple choice answer: Inside Premier; PINC AI™ Platform; Workday; None of the Above.

4. How informed do you feel about what's happening at Premier?

   a. Choose one answer: Very informed; I know most of what I need to know.; I do not know enough.; Not informed at all.

The following questions are intended to help determine communication preferences:

1. What mode of communication work best for you for information sharing? Choose all that apply:

   a. Multiple choice answer: Emails; Webpages; Videos; Podcasts; Webinars; Live Meetings; Other (Fill in).

2. What mode of communication work best for you for information retention? Choose all that apply:

   a. Multiple choice answer: Emails; Webpages; Videos; Podcasts; Webinars; Live Meetings; Other (Fill in).

3. Do you feel that you know where to find an answer to a question pertaining to Premier corporate functions?

   a. Yes/No answer.

4. Which of the following update communications do you read regularly? Choose all that apply:

    a. Multiple choice answer: Weekly Monday Minutes Newsletter; Monthly Premier Insider; HR Inquiries emails; Corporate Communications emails; Council on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (CDEIB) emails; Executive Team emails; None of the Above.

5. Which of these topics would you prefer to learn about via direct email? Choose all that apply:

    a. Multiple choice answer: Company-sponsored events; Council on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (CDEIB) events; Volunteer/Giving Goodwill opportunities; Education/Leadership Resources; Premier external news; wellness and benefit information; information about Premier teams across the organization; messages from executive leadership; Premier strategy such as One Premier Growth Mindset; Other (Fill in).

6. Do you find information easier to understand when presented in descriptive text or in visuals like infographics? If you can, please provide examples of what information is best conveyed with each option in the "Other" selectin.

    a. Choose one answer: Text; Visuals; Other (Fill in).

7. What information do you typically access on our Inside Premier intranet? Choose all that apply:

    a. Multiple choice answer: company updates; learning resources; wellness and benefit information; networking opportunities; upcoming events; Premier external news; important deadlines; information about Premier teams across the

organization; messages from executive leadership; Premier strategy such as One Premier Growth Mindset; Other (Fill in).

8. Do you find Premier emails, newsletters and internal webpages easy to read? Please rank each on the following scale:

   a. Emails: Yes, the organization of information is easy to follow.; No, there is too much text to get through.; No, the visuals and/or formatting is distracting.; Other (Fill in).

   b. Newsletters: Yes, the organization of information is easy to follow.; No, there is too much text to get through.; No, the visuals and/or formatting is distracting.; Other (Fill in).

   c. Inside Premier Webpages: Yes, the organization of information is easy to follow.; No, there is too much text to get through.; No, the visuals and/or formatting is distracting.; Other (Fill in).

9. What can we include on our Inside Premier intranet or in our direct communications that will help you achieve personal career growth?

   a. Open text answer.

Appendix B – Professional Interview Questions

Disclaimer: Your answers to these questions can be completely anonymous if you so choose and no personal identification information needs to be collected. Research gleaned from this interview will be shared with a graduate committee at UNC Chapel Hill to further studies on

internal communications. By participating in this interview, you understand and agree to provisions in this disclaimer. Thank you for your contributions!

1. OPTIONAL: Please provide your name, current title, and current employer.

2. What is your professional experience with internal communications for a company/organization. Please specify company size in number of employees (approximate numbers are acceptable).

3. Describe your direct communications team – how many members, their titles/responsibilities, etc.

4. What type(s) of information are you and your team(s) responsible for distributing internally?

5. Describe your overall internal communications strategy and goals, particularly in relation to employee engagement.

6. What communication methods do you utilize the most (e.g., direct emails, newsletters, intranet, multimedia such as videos or podcasts, etc.)?

   a. Do you find that some methods are more effective at engaging employees than others? Why/why not?

7. How do you determine which communication method or tool is most appropriate for communicating different pieces of information?

8. How do you collect and analyze feedback on or satisfaction with communications?

9. Any other professional tips or strategies you would like to share?

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