

CEO Communicator

Organizational communication and performance insights for the C-suite.

How CEO Messaging and Communication Impacts Business Results

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BY: JAMES O'GARA

Most CEOs Would Be Shocked to See What We See and Hear What We Hear.

At OnMessage, we work with executives around the world every day. We always have one goal in mind: to help them establish greater clarity and alignment between their corporate vision, strategy and story – up and down their business.

The truth is, most executives would be terrified to see the serious disconnect that exists within each level of their organization as it relates to ...

Vision (where they desire to take the organization)

Strategy (the plan to get there)

Story (words and actions employees use to bring the vision and strategy to life)

To impact organizational performance, clarity and alignment (in these three areas) must be established between...

- > The C-suite and leaders across the organization
- > Line-of-business leaders, managers and frontline employees
- > Marketing teams and the customer experience
- > Sales representatives and customer conversations

As an executive you might ask, 'Does organizational clarity and alignment really matter?' Well, you tell me.

Here are three real-world examples of how lack of clarity and alignment in these areas has negatively impacted business performance ...

- 1** The C-suite had spent six months communicating a go-to-market strategy that included three growth initiatives. Yet when we surveyed line-of-business leaders in the organization to capture their sales and marketing priorities ... the growth initiatives never even surfaced.
- 2** A CEO had been communicating the company's vision for more than a year. However, when we asked employees in a workshop how the vision impacted their daily work activities, they said ... it really didn't.
- 3** At the beginning of the year, the executive team had defined and communicated three core markets and offerings they wanted to focus on. Yet when we audited the company's sales enablement tools and digital content ... only 20% of it aligned with the opportunities they were trying to pursue.





Which camp do you fall into?

No matter how you answer this question, just remember that establishing alignment between your vision, strategy and story is hard. Operationalizing it is even more difficult. However, executive teams that make it a priority and stay the course ... improve employee engagement, increase customer retention and create high-performing businesses.

As a C-suite executive, ask yourself ...

- > How can we hope to attain our vision if employees don't see how it plays a role in their daily work activities?
- > How can we achieve our growth initiatives if leaders don't operationalize them in the field?
- > How can we attack defined market opportunities if the story we are sharing in the market doesn't align?

Now, these may seem like simple issues to solve. And if that was all there was to it — they would be. However, symptoms such as these usually represent larger clarity and alignment challenges in areas such as: leadership accountability, internal communications, corporate culture, operating models, sales compensation plans, and marketing strategies.

For some executive teams, this comes as a positive surprise, and they welcome the idea of surfacing and addressing barriers that prevent the company from achieving a higher level of performance. Other executives who are looking for a quick, cosmetic fix ... quickly lose their appetite for what it will really take to achieve greater organizational alignment.

After doing this for more than 15 years, we've seen executives who fall in both camps. That's why, before we engage with clients, we explain that what we are about to undertake is much more than a messaging or marketing exercise. It will have implications in almost every dimension of the business.

OnMessage specializes in helping executives align and activate their entire organization around a unified corporate strategy and story that dramatically improves the employee and customer experience. Leveraging our disciplined methodology — executive teams crystalize their go-to-market strategy, formulate a strategically aligned corporate messaging platform and ensure every stakeholder understands how to activate the strategy and story throughout the customer journey. Learn more at www.itsonmessage.com.

BY: JAMES O'GARA

A hand in an orange sleeve holds a black and white checkered racing flag. The background is a blurred asphalt track with white lines. A white wireframe grid is overlaid on the entire image, creating a geometric pattern of triangles and polygons.

CEOs: Don't Allow This 'Disconnect' to Interfere with Business Performance.

Ask most C-suite executives if their company's vision, mission, values, strategy and story impact business performance and they are sure to say ... "Well, of course."

However, when you look at how these critical dimensions are managed, you would question just how important executives think they are to business success.



To start with, in most cases these initiatives are developed and managed in silos.

- > Human Resources most often maintains the vision, mission and value system across the company.
- > C-suite and business executives define and drive the company's strategy and core business initiatives.
- > Marketing or corporate communications typically owns the corporate story (message).

In addition to being managed separately, they also operate on different timetables.

- > Vision, mission and value systems are often put aside and only updated when major changes in the business take place.
- > The go-to-market strategy may have a two- to three-year shelf life, but most companies launch new strategic business initiatives on an annual basis.
- > The corporate story is refreshed sporadically as new agency partners are brought on board, market conditions change, competitive threats arise, etc.

Combined, distributed ownership and inconsistent timing of when these initiatives are refreshed can negatively impact business performance.

Why? Because they quickly get out of alignment. As a result, they no longer drive clarity and connectivity across the business ... they create confusion and doubt.

For instance:

- > The company's go-to-market strategy no longer aligns with the vision and mission.
- > The corporate story being shared externally and internally no longer supports the go-to-market strategy.
- > The leadership team's actions and decisions no longer align with the corporate values.



When these cornerstones of a company's culture and customer experience get out of alignment – employees, partners and customers question their validity and importance. Worse yet, it makes the executive team look misaligned and their message less than authentic.

Don't let this happen to your company.

Form a cross-functional team that is responsible for establishing and maintaining alignment between these critical dimensions of organizational performance. Commit to an intentional process where this team audits, refines and realigns these critical dimensions of organizational performance on an annual basis.

Companies that maintain alignment between their vision, mission, values, strategy and story – win.

They win ... because they establish clarity in the minds of employees, partners and customers.

They win ... because they create a unified culture.

They win ... because they deliver a superior customer experience.

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C-suite: It's Time to Get Serious About Pull-Through and Activation Strategies.

Maybe there was a day when the CEO or members of the C-suite spoke and those messages were amplified up and down the organization. Well, if there was such a time, those days are long gone.

The noise level inside companies today is louder than ever before. Thus, making it more difficult for C-level executives to get “messages that matter” to stick and ultimately have a lasting impact on business performance.



That's why it is time for C-level executives to get serious about communication pull-through and activation strategies.

What is that? It's the disciplined and sustained process that ensures strategic messages are heard, embraced and ultimately acted upon at every level of the organization.

Think about it. How detailed, disciplined and sustained was your “pull-through and activation” process when you rolled out strategic corporate priorities for 2017? What about your new brand promise? What about changes in the company's go-to-market strategy?

If you're like most executives, you gathered top-tier leaders from across your organization and shared this message with them at an event or meeting. From there, you assumed leaders would passionately and consistently share that message throughout their area of the business. Maybe you even sent out a company-wide email. Well, having worked with large, complex organizations for more than 15 years, we can tell you ... this doesn't cut it.

The message ... is NOT communicated correctly.

The message ... is NOT shared persistently.

The message ... is NOT acted upon by frontline employees.

The message ... does NOT deliver desired business results.

This doesn't mean your leaders are incompetent. It means they are busy. It means they need help. It means they must have the communication tools, air cover and support it takes to deliver the message in a way that it sticks.

As a C-suite executive, that's your job. You have to ensure there is a disciplined, persistent communication pull-through and activation strategy in place to ensure critical business initiatives are a success.



What does a pull-through and activation strategy include?

There are five key components ...

- 1 Story:** time and energy to formulate and crystallize a clear, compelling message.
- 2 Sequence:** a communication roadmap that ensures the story is compartmentalized into bite-size chunks and delivered in an intentional and highly sequenced manner.
- 3 Strategy:** a plan that targets and tailors the message for relevant roles and areas of the business.
- 4 Structure:** a disciplined communication cadence that ensures the message is heard, internalized, understood and activated by all critical stakeholders.
- 5 Statistics:** a method for measuring absorption, retention and activation in specific areas of the organization.

In today's noisy, constantly changing, high-speed business environment, you have to realize that critical messages don't cascade ... they don't translate into action ... they don't impact business results ... without comprehensive communications management.

So, if you want strategic messages to get across and your corporate initiatives to be a success, you need to have a pull-through and activation strategy in place. You need a partner with the communication expertise and methodologies required to engage and activate employees in a way that positively impacts business performance.

OnMessage has been working with C-level executives to successfully design and execute strategic messaging and communication initiatives for more than 15 years. We have the disciplined methodologies, tools and expertise your company needs to ensure strategic business initiatives are a success. To learn how we can help you align and activate your strategy and story, visit www.itsonmessage.com.

Keys to Converting CEO Messages into Desired Actions and Outcomes.

This is a message CEOs need to hear over and over again...

There are two keys to translating executive communication into action:

1. Strategic intent
2. Persistence

Many executives are perplexed when their message doesn't translate into action. They are dumbfounded by the lack of "retention" that exists up and down their organization. Most executives feel like they have communicated the same message over and over again ... and it still does not translate into the desired action or outcomes.

Many times, this is because they are communicating the ... exact same message ... over and over again. Their messaging strategy is one-dimensional. It is not aligned with the learning and adoption curve that is required to translate words into action.

BY: JAMES O'GARA



For your message to convert into desired actions, you must communicate in phases. You need to deliver the message with the strategic intent of moving your audience from:

- > **Context:** What is this about and why is it important?
- > **Understanding:** What does it mean for the company, our customers, etc.?
- > **Internalization:** How does this impact me and why should I care?
- > **Application:** How do I apply this in a meaningful and relevant way in my job?
- > **Operationalization:** How does this change the way my team operates moving forward?

The core message remains constant; it is simply wrapped in a story that is intentionally designed to move your employee from one phase to the next. And, just to be clear ... no, you can't move your audience through the learning and adoption curve by addressing all of these in one long message.

This leads us to the second key to success. Persistence.

Most executives underestimate the sustained communication effort required to translate a message into consistent action.

Whether it pertains to changes in the business model, new offerings, strategic initiatives ... most CEOs are communicating messages that are critically important and many times complex.

That's why you must realize that your employees are inundated with messages every day ... from every direction.

Persistence is the only way you will get your message across.

Some believe the "Rule of 7" applies. You have to deliver a message seven times before the desired behavior is activated. However, Microsoft recently conducted a study designed to measure the optimal number of exposures required for audio messages to stick. The study showed that messages must be communicated between 6 and 20 times to achieve the desired result.

No, this doesn't mean simply sending out one to two messages for each phase of the learning and adoption curve is the answer (2 messages x 5 phases = 10). It means you utilize the repetition and frequency that is required to move your audience from one phase of the adoption curve to the next.

For instance, providing your audience with "Context" may only require one to two messages. However, establishing "Understanding" may require two or three; "Internalization" may require three or four; "Application" eight to 10; and "Operationalization" may demand 10 to 20.

Many factors come into play with respect to communication repetition and frequency. The complexity of the message; the hierarchy of your organization; the number of unique audience segments you must reach; the measurable results that are actually being attained, etc.

So, the next time you plan to activate strategic initiatives, share critically important messages, or change the mindset of employees across your organization – ask yourself ...

- > Where is my organization on the learning and adoption curve?
- > What is my strategic intent with this particular message?
- > What repetition and frequency is required?

The key to success is anchoring your communications plan in strategic intent and persistence. Only then will your words (messages) translate into the actions and outcomes you want to see in the business.

OnMessage is a management consulting firm that specializes in helping executives formulate intentional messaging and communication strategies that create clarity in the minds of employees and customers. Clarity that increases employee engagement, improves the customer experience and maximizes organizational performance. Learn more at www.itsonmessage.com.





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