

Effective XM Communication Plans: Strengths and Gaps

SUMMARY

For Experience Management (XM) efforts to succeed long-term, employees and other stakeholders need to hear, understand, and internalize a myriad of important information. Effectively communicating key messages is so critical, in fact, that *Ecosystem Communications* is one of the 20 XM Skills an organization must master to establish XM as a discipline. However, it's not always easy to cut through the noise and reach employees with essential Experience Management information. It requires XM teams to create and execute a well-defined XM communication plan. Use this worksheet to help you identify existing gaps and strengths in your approach to XM communications.

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE XM COMMUNICATION PLAN

XM transformation efforts can falter when they share too little information, present disjointed messages, or leave out compelling content. So how can organizations develop the XM Skill of *Ecosystem Communications* to keep employees and other stakeholders informed about the value and progress of their XM efforts? By building and implementing an effective XM communication plan. This plan should incorporate four key characteristics:

- 1. Audience-Centric Content.** Employees are not all the same, and different groups of employees will have distinct information needs. Therefore, an XM communication plan needs to adapt its key themes and core messages to suit the preferences and requirements of each different audience, from senior leaders to individual contributors to operational leaders to people managers and everyone else across the XM ecosystem. To create messages that resonate with and motivate each of these different groups, clearly articulate *why* XM matters to the organization at large as well as to its employees, customers, and other stakeholders.
- 2. Multi-Faceted Messaging.** Since organizations often have to reach people who are geographically and generationally diverse, they need to take advantage of an assortment of available communication modes and methods. An effective XM communication plan will accommodate a variety of communication preferences and learning styles by using a range of message types and delivery channels to share a blend of practical and inspirational content with each of the assorted audience segments.
- 3. Two-Way Dialogue.** Historically, corporate communications have been top-down and one-way. Effective XM communications, on the other hand, will identify opportunities to create a two-way dialogue. This dialogue could take a number of different forms, such as establishing a feedback loop with target audiences to monitor the effectiveness of the XM communication plan, packaging assorted turnkey interventions to drive interactive group discussions around key XM messages, or providing guidance on how to engage external audiences around the XM vision and strategy.
- 4. Formal Management.** Effective XM communications don't happen by chance. At the heart of successful *Ecosystem Communications* is a well-defined, formally-managed XM communication plan. The formal management structure should include an owner who's assigned to oversee internal collaboration and keep the plan up to date as well as senior leaders who are selected to take on specific responsibilities for communicating and cascading key messages.

HOW TO USE

To help you identify current strengths and existing gaps in your XM communication plan, you can use this tool in a number of ways:

- + **Self-evaluation.** Fill out this worksheet yourself by first marking existing strengths of your XM communication plan and then identifying gaps in your approach.
- + **Group discussion.** Use the worksheet in a group exercise. After each individual completes it, discuss the current strengths and gaps you each marked as well as areas of agreement and disagreement in the results.
- + **Action planning.** Develop plans for leveraging strengths and closing gaps in your XM Communication plan. For more inspiration and ideas, read the blog post *Effective Communication: A Critical Skill to Propel XM Success*.

Effective XM Communication Plans: Strengths and Gaps

First, in the “strength” column, check off the XM communication plan characteristics that your organization is already consistently strong at. Then, in the “gap” column, mark elements where your change efforts require additional investment and work.

		STRENGTH	GAP
Audience-Centric Content	The XM communication plan is built around a set of consistent themes and persistent core messages		
	The XM communication plan translates themes and core messages into clear and relatable communications written for defined audience segments		
	XM content focuses as much on <i>why</i> XM matters to the organization as it does on <i>what</i> the company is doing		
	The XM communication plan thoughtfully defines appropriate frequency and timing of messages, taking into account target audience situations		
Multi-Faceted Messaging	The XM communication plan generates multiple types of messages to deliver essential content (written, video, audio, visual/infographic, etc.)		
	XM content is delivered through various push and pull communication channels (email, workflow apps, intranet/social, print, etc.) to reach disparate audiences		
	Success stories highlighting desired behaviors and outcomes are regularly used to reinforce the XM vision		
	XM content balances a blend of practical elements – progress updates, insights and data – and inspirational elements – testimonials, examples of XM resilience		
Two-Way Dialogue	The XM communication plan uses social tools to amplify the interactivity of messages		
	The XM communication plan includes a feedback loop to monitor that content is reaching audiences and delivering value		
	Essential XM content is packaged into turnkey deliverables that managers or others can use to engage people in huddles, ‘lunch and learns,’ and interactive sessions		
	XM content provides transparent guidance on what information can be shared with other internal or external audiences and how to discuss it		
Formal Management	The XM communication plan is managed by a designated workstream owner		
	Senior leaders are assigned specific responsibilities for communicating and reinforcing key messages		
	The XM communication plan is regularly updated		
	The XM communication plan has sufficient commitment and execution support from the internal communications team		