



The IC Space

Case study: How the Home Office got face-to-face with over 30,000 staff

The Internal Comms team at the Home Office tell us how they helped senior leaders get more visible and better manage change in an organisation with over 30,000 operational and office-based staff working different shift patterns.

Setting our objectives

The importance of talking to staff directly can't be underestimated when your organisation is changing.

Results from Home Office People Surveys told the Home Office Internal Communications Unit that staff felt senior leaders needed to be more visible and change managed better across the department.

So how do you go about this when your organisation numbers more than 30,000 staff, is dispersed over 25 locations across the UK and overseas, and is a mix of operational and office-based staff working different shift patterns?

All things Viewpoint

A key part of our multi-channel approach to communicating transformation has been to run a series of face-to-face events called 'Viewpoint', designed to engage directly with staff and provide a platform for open and honest discussion with members of the Home Office Board and SCS. Held twice a year across the department since 2013, the Viewpoint format and approach has evolved over time based on feedback from attendees and senior managers.

The first series of events, aimed at managers at SEO grade and above, was a half-day session combining an update on organisational change with bite-sized learning sessions on managing change led by external experts.

The feedback told us that these externally hosted sessions added value, putting the Home Office's challenges in context. The benefits of an outside voice are to give things a different perspective, shine a light on areas we may not be aware of, and make us reassess what we are doing.



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Adding value through technology

For the next round of events, held across the country in autumn 2013, the Board decided to extend the events to staff at HEO grade to include more managers from operational areas. We were also keen to refresh the approach and develop a more participatory event format using a mix of media, including video, to deliver the message.

We recorded an introductory message to camera from the Permanent Secretary. This acted as a powerful opening to the events, setting the scene from the head of the department and giving the context to Home Office transformation.

Previous feedback told us that staff appreciated hearing not just from senior managers but operational frontline staff too. With that in mind, we filmed some 'talking head' footage of operational staff talking about what transformation meant to them and how they had applied core principles to their work.

We also added an interactive element by providing each delegate table with an iPad. An icebreaker served a dual purpose of warming up the audience and familiarising them with the technology, which was used throughout the session to record feedback following table discussions, capture questions, and share the results of a real-time evaluation survey.

As well as being well received by delegates and adding a new and engaging element to the event, the technology also automatically collated all questions and feedback for further analysis back at the office, saving the events team considerable work.

Although we did not provide iPads for the events in our overseas hubs, we tried to make the experience as similar as possible for staff based in Lagos as those based in Leeds. The Permanent Secretary message was provided via DVD or web link, and the iPad interactive questions were provided as scripts and voting sheets to the overseas events hosts. This helped make staff overseas feel more included in the conversation and feedback



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showed this support was also valued by managers delivering the sessions.

A more conversational approach

In spring 2014 another round of Viewpoint events was delivered across the country, this time to all staff and covering the next phase of transformation.

Given the larger target audience, sessions were limited to 90 minutes, with the majority of time devoted to questions and answers following a corporate and local business area update on transformation. This more informal, conversational approach worked well, with staff raising what was on their mind and appreciating the honesty and willingness of senior managers to put themselves in the hot seat!

Given the greater number of events, staff feedback was collected through an anonymous online questionnaire, which allowed us to gather data and conduct detailed analysis of how the events resonated with staff. This feedback helped greatly in shaping the sessions as we delivered them over several months – very much a case of continuous improvement!

So what have we learned?

Since we began running these events, a large amount of staff feedback has been gathered and reviewed. Key themes have emerged and been shared with the Board, and staff have been encouraged to work with their local managers to progress actions.

We've learnt a 'one size fits all' style of delivery is not suitable for all staff and that the approach needs to take into account the different styles of information cascade used across the department.

Consequently, in autumn 2014, we identified points of contact in different business areas to deliver the latest round of Viewpoint through existing events and channels, using local senior managers to cascade the core corporate message and agreed tailored message for each business area. This new approach responded directly to feedback from staff who were struggling to make the



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connection between corporate updates on transformation and their own role in change where they worked.

We've now gained agreement from the Board to move to a formal cycle of three Viewpoints a year, prioritising managers as the primary target audience for these sessions as they are best placed to provide local context for transformation messages to their teams. We have also committed to offering some structured training to those involved in delivering and cascading messages from the events. This training could include modules on storytelling, communicating at a time of uncertainty, ensuring effective cascade, and using lessons learnt in leading and managing change. Finally, we will continue to improve evaluation data in relation to management cascade of viewpoint messages so that we can offer additional sessions in those areas where coverage is poor.

Thinking creatively

Viewpoint has given staff an opportunity to help shape the next phase of Home Office transformation, raise concerns and put forward solutions. As the events have developed we have seen an increase in attendees saying they have a better understanding of how the department is transforming and their role in making it happen, from 68% for the autumn 2013 events to 92% for the most recent.

Our challenge now is to maintain the momentum, keep the conversation going, and demonstrate to staff that their engagement with these activities really does help to shape concrete improvements.