



Face-to-face communication:

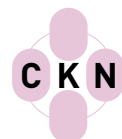


Reworking team briefings in order to connect

A new way to brief teams at [Clerical Medical](#).



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Clerical Medical

Reworking team briefings in order to Connect



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Three years ago, financial services group Clerical Medical embarked on a wide-reaching change programme. A review of internal communication was conducted to assess whether it could support the cultural shift the change programme necessitated. The findings revealed a new communication strategy was needed, based on the form of communication employees valued most: face-to-face. One year after its launch, we spoke to Anne Ledbetter, internal communications manager, to find out how successful Connect – the replacement for team briefing – had been in supporting this cultural change.

The aim of Connect is to provide a flexible framework and sufficient information for team leaders to facilitate discussions of issues affecting the organisation, and to set them in a local context. The previous system, Team Talk, was modelled on the Industrial Society's cascade briefing system. However, this only provided a one-way exchange of information and was considered too dry and detailed, and rarely productive. Connect would be far more involving, asking employees to discuss a nominated issue, to identify and then implement local actions resulting from the conclusions drawn.

AL: It was important to manage employees' expectations from the outset. One of the key messages was that it would no longer be the sole responsibility of the corporate centre to take action: change had to be driven locally as well.

Spreading the word

The strategy was to use all communication tools to kick-start the initiative. Connect was seen as

an inclusive means of communication, and featured strongly in the company's internal media. In-house magazine *Pulse* provided headline information, the intranet *Echo* provided expanded information and reference points, and the in-house television programme *Activate* was used to share the emotional energy and spirit of the team in terms of best practice and successes.

AL: During the review, many employees remarked that if something really mattered, they wanted to be told about it face-to-face. For the strategy to work it was crucial that we got Connect right, and that people knew how it was going to work.

Making the right moves

To ensure successful implementation, about 250 team leaders received communication training. They receive further support for each session in a briefing pack. Employees can also read up on the chosen topic before the session in *Pulse*.

The information in the briefing covers any news not included in *Pulse*, asking team leaders to make local announcements, and report on any actions arising from previous sessions. General information on the executive's chosen topic is also provided, and falls into one of three areas: relationships, performance and the marketplace. This is followed by prompts to aid discussion and generate ideas for action. After the sessions, the team process the feedback to find common themes. This is published on *Echo*, and issues identified as requiring action or comment are reported later in *Pulse*.

Only five sessions a year are held due to the volume of feedback. Processing the output of these

On site

Hearing about the initiatives your peers are running can really help, but how do you find the time or the opportunity to keep up? Every month, On Site talks to communicators about key projects and asks their advice for those running similar initiatives.

sessions is still a mammoth task and work is under way to find a less time-consuming solution.

Making the sessions relevant to individuals has also been difficult. Initially, two topics were proposed for each session, hoping at least one would be of interest. In fact, employees discussed both issues in detail and sessions overran. Now, only one topic is put forward. Sessions are shorter and the team try hard to include everyone.

Learning from experience

All communication is tracked twice-yearly. The latest research revealed that 95% of employees were aware of Connect and 86% had attended sessions – up 5% on a survey six months earlier. In terms of involvement, 76% stated that they participated in sessions "a great deal" or "quite a bit" and 90% read the Connect feature in *Pulse*, up 19% on the previous research. Perhaps the most positive result was that 49% had seen local change as a result of Connect. A more participative culture is now becoming a reality.

AL: One session asked people what the best companies had in common. The overwhelming response was a strong brand. A corporate decision not to advertise widely was rethought, and a series of television adverts are now being broadcast. This is Connect in action.