**UNIT 7: CONDUCTING ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION AUDITS**

Communication is said to be the lifeline of any organization since it is the means through which information is disseminated. You will surely agree that information and indeed communication are vital to the existence of an organization. They are necessary and valuable assets.

How does an organization ensure that it maximizes the value of communication? It can do this by conducting a communications audit or assessment. A communications audit determines and improves the value of communication both within an organization as well as to key outside audiences. It helps you identify the following:

* how past communications were handled
* key audiences, what they currently know about your business, service, product or organization, what they need to know and how they prefer to be reached
* strengths and weaknesses in current communications programmes
* untapped opportunities for future communications

**Some Definitions of Communication Audit**

* A communication audit is said to be
  + A snapshot of an organisation’s communication strategies, activities and programmes.
  + An assessment of the effectiveness and credibility of current communication methods and media, including publications, website, intranet, meetings, face-to-face communication and other communication media.
  + A systematic research method, which will identify the strengths and weaknesses of your current internal and external communications.

**Why Conduct a Communications Audit?**

To understand how effective your communication tools and methods are, determine the strengths and weaknesses of each and provide recommendations for improvements. A communication audit can help your organization answer the following questions:

* I your communication plan working?
* Are the messages you are conveying about your organization and what it does clear? Consistent? Unified?
* Are you reaching the right audiences with your message?
* What are they doing with your messages/information?
* How effective are the methods you use?
* What are you doing that you should not be doing?
* Etc.

**When should an audit be done?**

It is a good idea to do an audit every two to three years or whenever there is a change in the organisation’s mission/purpose.

**Who should do the audit?**

You may either conduct a self assessment or hire a professional to conduct the audit. It would be a good idea to hire a person or company to do the audit (if your company resources allow). An outsider can provide more objective recommendations and suggestions.

**How to do an audit – suggested steps**

A communications audit uses processes such as observations, analyses and evaluations, focus groups, interviews and surveys of employees and other key audiences whose support is needed to improve communication, understanding and collaboration in the organization. The following steps can help you conduct an audit:

**Step 1: Determine key areas to be audited**

Look at both internal and external communications. Include standard identity pieces (business cards, letterhead, logo), promotional materials, website, etc.

**Step 2: Choose your research methods**

To conduct your audit, select among the many research methods such as focus group discussions, on-on-one interviews, telephone interviews, questionnaires, and media analyses.

**Step 3: Collect and evaluate your past communications**

Review all of the previous year’s communications pieces both internal and external. Take time to analyse each communications piece and create a list of what worked and what didn’t.

**Step 4: Query your customers**

Choose neutral researchers to query your customers. One-on-one interviews, telephone interviews or focus groups can be used. Ask questions such as: What are your impressions of our communications? What do you think of our identity pieces, web site and other marketing materials? How could we improve our communications?

**Step 5: Query your community**

Find out what the community knows about your organization. Take a broader look at the impact of your communications. Ask questions to reveal public perceptions. Conduct a formal survey or informally interview community members.

**Step 6: Query your staff**

Collect staff opinions about your communications. Ask: What do you think of the communications in the past year? What was effective? What wasn’t? What could be improved? Did internal documents serve your information needs? What future communications could help you function as part of the organization? You will need to determine if all communications were understood by all internal audiences.

**Step 7: Analyse your media coverage**

As in step 3, review your media coverage. Look at the frequency and reach of your coverage. What is the impact of the coverage? Are your key messages being promoted? Are your audiences being reached? What media opportunities have you missed? Track your coverage in the press.

**Step 8: Conduct a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis**

Pull all your data together from the previous steps and do a SWOT analysis of your communications. Analyse how you can capitalize on strengths, stop weaknesses, maximize opportunities and defend against threats.

**Step 9: Analyse and strategise**

Put together a team to help you analyse your audit results and strategise about future actions.

**Step 10: Put together a plan for future communications**

Use your research as a starting point for creating a Communications Pan for your organisation

**Benefits of a Communication Audit**

1. It demonstrates your commitment to improving communication throughout the organization.
2. It demonstrates your willingness to listen and respond to employees and other stakeholders’ views – a key step in building positive relationship, creating credibility and fostering mutual trust.
3. It helps find out what major segments of employees/stakeholders think about the organisation’s communication and initiatives,
4. It will bring out practical recommendations for improving communication in the organization.
5. An audit can become the basis for creating an effective strategic communication plan for your organization.
6. An effectively designed and implemented communication audit can be a driver for culture change where you engage everyone in building a new work culture of open communication, credibility, and collaboration.