CHANNELING (COM)PASSION
Exploring the Strategic Potential of Internal Communications in Member-Serving Community Nonprofit Organizations

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NPA 622: Nonprofit Data Analysis - Capstone
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Instructor: Dr. Marco Tavanti
Healthier Aging

Higher QOL
- Health Access, Secure/Affordable Housing, Support & Social Connections, Meaningful Enrichment
- Autonomy, Dignity Throughout the Lifespan

Social Determinants
- Existing Behaviors, Environments That Pose Higher Risks
- Poor Diet/Exercise Social Isolation
- ID High-Risk Behaviors Make Lifestyle Changes

Slippery Slope
- Aspects of Normal Aging Become “Symptoms”
- Over-Diagnoses Over-Medicalization
- Consider the Long Term Document Medical Wishes

Over Treated

End of Life
- Living Longer ≠ Living Better
- Document EOL Wishes Medical Aid in Dying

JOURNEY: START @THE END, MOVE UPSTREAM

Over Treated

Slippery Slope

Aspects of Normal Aging Become “Symptoms”

Over-Diagnoses Over-Medicalization

Consider the Long Term Document Medical Wishes

Low QOL

Living Longer ≠ Living Better

Document EOL Wishes Medical Aid in Dying
2035: A DEMOGRAPHIC TURNING POINT
From Pyramid to Pillar

For the First Time in U.S. History Older Adults Are Projected to Outnumber Children by 2035

Projected percentage of population

Adults 65+ 22.8% 23.5%
Children under 18 15.2% 19.8%

Projected number (millions)

2016 2020 2025 2030 2035 2040 2045 2050 2055 2060
49.2 73.6 78.0 76.4 94.7 79.8

Note: 2016 data are estimates not projections.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2017).

MNA Master of Nonprofit Administration
ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNER

A California “Village”

VISION
To be recognized as a leader and key partner in creating and sustaining vital, healthy communities centered on justice, equity, and inclusion where older people are engaged, supported, and honored throughout their entire lifespan.

MISSION
To empower all people in our member communities to age with dignity and a sense of belonging by connecting neighbors with one another and offering equitable access to support services and enrichment opportunities for meaningful engagement between members, volunteers, donors, and partners.
PURPOSE & SCOPE

- Explore a unique member-driven nonprofit model …
  - that meets the needs of older people largely unaddressed by existing local, state, or federal institutions or programs
  - whose grassroots design can lack strategic thinking, formal processes
  - has struggled to find sustainable solutions

- Determine whether more formal internal communications processes can channel stakeholder passion toward achieving strategic objectives, greater sustainability

"The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."

- Coretta Scott King
The Member-Driven

VILLAGE MODEL

✓ Grassroots intentional caring communities, volunteer-based, member-driven, self-governing
✓ Promotes meaningful reciprocity between those providing and those receiving
✓ Creates opportunities for building interpersonal connections and social activities to minimize isolation
✓ Offers varied programs that support healthier aging
✓ Cultivates regional and community partnerships to address the challenges of aging

MEMBERS

As Consumers (program/service users)
As Investors (membership dues)
As Volunteers

GOVERNANCE

Board Members

OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Board Committee Chairs
Board Committee Members

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP & DELIVERY

Liaison Councils (Programs/Neighborhoods)
Team/Group Leads & Members (Programs/Neighborhoods)
Direct Service Providers

STAFF

Executive Director
Operations Manager
Social Care Manager
Programs Manager
Office Support

NON-MEMBER VOLUNTEERS

MNA MASTER OF NONPROFIT ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
**PROJECT OBJECTIVES, OUTCOMES & OUTPUT**

**OBJECTIVES**

- Identify opportunities where more formal internal communications processes can facilitate greater leadership team coordination and channel efforts toward shared goals

- Identify opportunities where more formal internal communications processes have the potential to promote intergroup knowledge sharing

**OUTCOMES**

- Greater Member-Volunteer Embeddedness
- Improved Program Efficiency
- Greater Leadership Cohesion
- Greater Organizational Impact

**OUTPUT**

An internal strategic communications framework for member-driven NPOs that promotes knowledge sharing and strategically aligns teams to help achieve organizational goals
APPROACH AND METHODS

RESEARCH APPROACH
- Little research has been conducted on internal communications practices within NPOs.
- This exploratory research project uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist perspective to examine how members perceive, experience, and interact at different levels of leadership in their organization through internal communications practices.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
- What formal internal communications processes exist to promote intergroup knowledge sharing?
- How can internal communications between leadership and member-volunteer leaders be formalized and aligned to collaboratively achieve organizational strategic objectives?

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT
- 36 member- and volunteer-leaders within the case study organization were purposively recruited via email to participate.
- A commitment to organization and individual confidentiality was provided to all participants.
- Potential participants self-selected interview dates between July 1 and July 15, 2021.

INTERVIEW PROCEDURE
- 1-on-1 interviews with 10 participants were conducted using the Zoom platform.
- Interview length ranged from 40 to 60 minutes.
- Each semi-structured interview included 5 predetermined categorical questions and 5 to 10 open-ended questions regarding internal communication and organization strategy awareness depending on leadership level.

RESEARCH DESIGN
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteer leaders in a member-serving NPO located in California that served as an organizational partner and case study.
- The nearly all-volunteer run case study organization was formed in 2010 with a mission to empower older people to age in community through programs, services, and policy advocacy.
DATA ANALYSIS

Stakeholder Analysis

Figure 4.2: Internal Communication Stakeholder Analysis (CSO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Influence</th>
<th>Level of Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>INVOLVE/CONSULT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• General Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COLLABORATE/EMPOWER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership-Gov</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Committee Chairs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Committee Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership-Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership-Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>INFORM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• General Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONSULT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Project Leads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s creation, adapted from United Nations Statistics Division (2020).

Stakeholders:

- Members;
- Includes Non-Members

Note:
- General Members are included in both the High Influence/Low Commitment and Low Influence/Low Commitment quadrants to reflect a segment of General Members assert more influence through active and intentional communication regarding programmatic and organizational feedback.

Core Communications Themes by Organizational Level

Organizational Leadership

- Believe organic communication is effective
  “The villages are better than the usual groups out there at relationship building and that becomes critical, so what that means is that the people who see common ground between the various committees and so forth, we all find each other.” (Board member)

Middle Leadership (Liaison/Council Groups)

- Lack of transparency from organizational leadership (operational and strategic)
- Unclear of group’s primary purpose/goals, decision-making authority/boundaries
  “You know, the words ‘manager’, ‘team’, ‘support group’, ‘committee’ -- they’re all kind of mixed names, and so knowing where to go for information, having the correct information and not having to run around and call different people [is important]”. (Neighborhood Lead/Councilmember)

Program Team Leadership

- Lacking communication regarding staff vacancies, recognition of impact on volunteer time/responsibility
- Blurred responsibilities
  “The position of program director has been open now for over half a year – it didn’t really seem to be an urgent need to find someone… If you have a staff member there, he’s in charge. You can say ‘sorry, I cannot do this this month’, but for half a year now, it was all on us.” (Non-Member Volunteer, Program Team Lead)
### IMPLICATIONS: ISC FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Strategic Goal</strong></th>
<th>Make it SMART (specific, measurable, audience-focused, realistic, timely)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values to Convey</strong></td>
<td>Which values align with the strategic goal? (Trust, Transparency, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Strategic Actions</strong></td>
<td>Which actions align with the strategic goal and overall organization mission? (Provide Vision/Leadership, Inform/Engage Certain Stakeholder Groups, etc.)</td>
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</tbody>
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#### Internal Strategic Communications Framework

| **Internal Communications Objectives** | —Make them SMART | —Develop one primary objective and at least one secondary objective |
| **Internal Stakeholder Audience(s)** | Identify stakeholder groups\(^1\) that will be the target(s) of internal communications messages related to the specified objective |

| **Do** | Answer: *What specific action(s) do we need each stakeholder audience to take?* |
| **Feel** | Answer: *What do we want them to feel? What feeling will encourage them to take (the right) action?* |
| **Know** | Answer: *What do we need them to know? What data/facts explain the reasoning behind the message?* |

| **Simple Memorable Message** | Develop a short, meaningful phrase that elicits an emotion or catches attention and conveys the value underlying your strategic objectives |
| **Supporting Messages** | Answer: *Why should each stakeholder group care? What is the rationale? What happens next and how will it be communicated? Where can more information be found and who is the main contact?* |

| **Messaging Flow** | Consult the Internal Communications Matrix and establish a messaging flow plan that involves the right communicators for the right stakeholder audiences |
| (Bi-Directional, Intergroup, Multi-Channel) |

| **Reinforcing Methods & Channels** | Based on the outcome of an internal communications audit, identify the most effective communication methods and channels for each stakeholder group. Reinforce messaging with additional communication as necessary according to stakeholder group needs. |

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**Table 5.2 Internal Strategic Communications Framework**

Source: Author’s adaptation (2021) from Dewhurst & FitzPatrick (2019) and United National Statistics Division (2020)

\(^1\) Precursor planning steps that precede this step could include a comprehensive internal communications audit and a detailed stakeholder analysis that identifies specific groups and subgroups.
### Overall Organizational Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Goal</th>
<th>Example A</th>
<th>Example B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Restructure Operations Staff & Hire | (1) Provide Leadership (Set Direction/Plan of Action)  
(2) Inform & Engage all Stakeholders | Increase Membership by 10% (FY21) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values to Convey</th>
<th>Trust, Transparency, Meaningful Responsiveness</th>
<th>Mission-Centered, Inclusion, Impartiality, Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Key Strategic Actions | (1) Increase Earned (Dues) Income  
(2) Deliver on Key DEI/Sustainability Objective |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------|
|                       | (1) Increase Earned (Dues) Income  
(2) Deliver on Key DEI/Sustainability Objective |

### INTERNAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Communications Objectives</th>
<th>Primary: Provide Awareness/Understanding Secondary: Elevate Trust in Leadership</th>
<th>Primary: Channel Member Engagement Toward Strategic Goal Secondary: Increase Intergroup Collaboration/Knowledge Sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Stakeholder Audience(s)</th>
<th>All Stakeholders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevant Leads; Members of Program Teams, Groups, Liaison Councils (e.g., Outreach Team, DEI Work Group, Events Team)</td>
</tr>
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#### Do
**What specific action(s) do we need each stakeholder audience to take?**

#### Feel
**What feeling will encourage them to take (the right) action?**

#### Know
**What data/facts explain the reasoning behind the message? What evidence shows there is a plan or that a goal has been achieved?**

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<tr>
<th>Simple Memorable Message</th>
<th>“Organizing to Better Serve Our Members”</th>
<th>“Inviting Others to Age with Dignity and a Sense of Belonging”</th>
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| Supporting Messages | Why should stakeholders (by category) care? What happens next and how will it be communicated?  
Where can more information be found and who is the main contact? |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
| ED → All Stakeholders | ED → High Influence/High Commitment Stakeholders  
High Influence/High Commitment Stakeholders → General Members  
General Members → General Members (WOM)  
General Members → General Members → Potential Members (WOM) |

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<tr>
<th>Reinforcing Methods &amp; Channels</th>
<th>All stakeholder email/postal mail; member and volunteer web portal posts; monthly (e)-newsletter; weekly/monthly liaison/council group communications; job boards</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Relevant team lead and liaison/council group communications to members; monthly (e)-newsletter; community partner communications</td>
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(Source: Author’s adaptation from Dewhurst & FitzPatrick, 2019; United National Statistics Division 2020)
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Illustrating the bi-directional, intergroup, and multi-channel message flow between stakeholder groups

Figure 5.1 Conceptual Model of Directional Internal Communications Between Stakeholder Groups

Source: Author’s creation (2021).
RECOMMENDATIONS

■ Member-Serving NPOs:
  ◆ Capitalize on the benefits of highly embedded member-leaders by establishing an integrated internal communications process that leverages this passion to achieve strategic goals
  ◆ Ensure programs and decision-making authority are clearly differentiated and communicated
  ◆ Identify internal stakeholder segments and analyze for strategic alignment and communications opportunities
  ◆ Prioritize strategic planning and develop supporting marketing and communications plans (internal and external)
  ◆ Establish a measurement and refinement process

■ Future Research:
  ◆ Explore the value of internal communications, especially within the social sector and subsectors
  ◆ Explore the phased scalability of internal communications process and develop frameworks that support the transition from organic grassroots approaches to more formal processes
REFERENCES


The Village Movement is a unique nonprofit organization model that was born nearly 20 years ago to facilitate peer support, offer healthier aging resources, improve health, and reduce isolation among older people at the neighborhood level. This project explores internal communications processes among high-value member leaders; investigates the level of member-leader awareness of organizational strategic goals; and identifies opportunities where a more formal internal communication framework could be applied to better align strategically relevant program teams to help achieve organizational goals.

Explore a unique member-driven nonprofit model that meets the needs of older people largely unaddressed by existing local, state, or federal institutions or programs; whose grassroots design can lack strategic planning/formal processes; and has struggled to find sustainable solutions.

Determine whether more formal internal communications processes can channel stakeholder passion toward achieving strategic objectives.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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2. Ensure programmatic and decision-making authority are clearly differentiated and communicated

3. Identify internal stakeholder segments and analyze for strategic alignment and communications opportunities

4. Prioritize strategic planning and develop supporting marketing and communications plans (internal and external)

5. Establish a measurement and refinement process