



Everyday talk and convincing conversations: Utilizing strategic internal communication

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Abstract When managing organizational identity, great attention is often paid to external stakeholders while internal stakeholders receive far less consideration. However, organizational identity lives somewhat enigmatically at the intersection of the attitudes of all organizational stakeholders, not just those in the external environment. Moreover, employees are positioned to serve as either ambassadors of the organization or as liabilities depending on the way they speak about the organization to those both within and outside their workplace. Employees regularly discuss their work experiences with those outside the organization and frequently do so using social media, potentially reaching large audiences. This article describes the process through which everyday talk within the organization shapes its identity while wielding powerful effects on external perceptions. We highlight several common errors leaders make that promote negative everyday talk, along with suggestions on how to successfully manage identity through strategic communication and managerial processes. We also discuss the theoretical and pragmatic effects of everyday talk.

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1. Perfectly poised: The power of employees

While many organizations have toiled to create trusted, long-term relationships with external stakeholders, far fewer have dedicated comparable

resources toward generating lasting relationships with internal stakeholders. Internal communication plays a prominent role in organizational functionality, primarily in strategically influencing the ways employees talk about the organization with one another *and* with those outside the organization. This is essential as organizational members are positioned to influence external stakeholders by championing for or against their organization. As such, instead of viewing communication as “a supplemental tool to foster organizational activities”

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(Cheney & Christensen, 2001, p. 237), organizations would be better served utilizing communication as intentionally and frequently with employees as they do with external stakeholders. Thus, we argue that many organizations fall short by simply doing internal communication as opposed to engaging, informing, and dialoging with associates in a strategic, purposeful, and authentic manner. Defined here, strategic internal communication is the thoughtful and proactive framing of messages tailored to meet employees' temporal, informational, and affective needs. Such communication is enacted through the careful development of not only message content and prudent consideration of the source and timing of the message, but also deliberation regarding the way the message will be received and interpreted by employees. Thus, strategic internal communication rejects the idea that communication occurs just because someone hits send, tweets, posts, or publishes. Rather, strategic internal communication is a dynamic, multifaceted approach to fostering strong employee-organization relationships as a means to satisfy employee needs and define the employee experience.

Whereas external stakeholders may influence an organization's profit margin, internal stakeholders shape its identity and can arguably also have a great effect on the organization's bottom line due to the fluidity of organizational boundaries. Websites like glassdoor.com and thebreakroom.org, social media tools like Twitter, and other forms of instantaneous communication (e.g., text messages) provide platforms for employees to readily express perceived organizational strengths and defects. Information can flow effortlessly between employees and a broad audience of external actors, in contrast to the past when associates' sentiments could only be shared with a comparatively small number of interpersonal contacts and an organization's public relations practitioners were the only employees capable of communicating formally with the external public. However, organizations need not passively hope employees will speak highly of them; instead, organizations can communicate strategically and proactively with their employees to influence their informal communication, subsequently augmenting the organization's identity through internal branding (Raj & Jyothi, 2011).

Considering this, employees of Facebook, McKinsey & Co., and Riverbed Technology—which helped their organizations earn the top three spots on glassdoor.com's annual Employees' Choice Awards—are more likely to proudly identify or at least use a positive frame when they talk about their employer than associates whose organizations have endured recent or sustained scrutiny. For example,

Bank of America lately announced plans to introduce ATM kiosks offering video teller service, which prompted concerned employees to picket the new machines and begin an online petition citing fears of lower wages and job eliminations. Although Bank of America reported to the national news media that it had no plans to reduce staff (Kim, 2013), the employees' petition continued to garner support. As another example, craft retailer Hobby Lobby made national news when its owners challenged the Affordable Care Act mandate concerning birth control, a case that will go before the Supreme Court. Protests have been held at several franchise locations, and there have been cries for a national boycott (Barrett, 2013). In these juxtaposed examples, it becomes apparent that employees of organizations which seek personnel with "leadership potential, integrity, and the ability to work with people at all levels" (McKinsey & Company, 2013) or which promise that "senior leaders are committed to transparency" (Riverbed, 2013) are likely to engage in qualitatively different conversations about their employer than are employees of organizations at the radius of national news and debate. Thus, while no organization is perfect and well-intentioned firms may occasionally receive bad press, thoughtful internal strategic communication can provide employees with the means to celebrate and identify with positive events, as well as the tools to contextualize and interpret negative events.

Formal internal communication can culminate in positive everyday talk such that internal stakeholders function as public relations ambassadors for external stakeholders; however, if neglected or done poorly, internal communication can generate negative implications for an organization (Welch, 2012). Consequently, it is important to consider how employees individually and collectively interpret and make sense of internal and external events and strategic internal communication messages, as well as how associates speak about the organization. Such reflections may help management shape perceptions of organizational life to benefit overall organizational identity. A sense of identity situates an organization for members, stakeholders, and society (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000) and helps answer internal and external questions regarding what exactly the organization embodies. Employees who identify with their employer are more likely to enact a positive attitude toward the organization, make choices that align with organizational objectives, remain loyal, and engage in positive everyday talk about the organization with internal and external stakeholders (Cicognani, Palestini, Albanesi, & Zani, 2012).

While there are ways to encourage positive everyday talk, even the most well-meaning organizations can succumb to common stumbling blocks. The goal of this article is to emphasize the importance of strategic internal communication and its subsequent effect on everyday talk and organizational identity. Herein, we highlight frequently observed barriers to positive everyday talk and provide theoretically rooted solutions to overcome these stumbling blocks, thus enabling organizations to more effectively cultivate strong employee-organization relationships and positively influence everyday talk to parallel the organization's preferred identity.

2. The far-reaching ramifications of everyday talk

Everyday talk describes the central role communication plays in the creation, formation, and maintenance of relationships (Tracy, 2002); it acknowledges that people's daily lives are largely constructed through verbal interaction. Everyday talk is the primary means through which individuals shape their identities within relationships, prompting relational norms. Thus, organizational everyday talk is likely to mirror the relationship employees share with the organization and directly influence the manner in which they speak about the organization to other stakeholders. Consequently, if employees speak to each other about the organization in terms of distrust or disgust, it is probable they will do the same when conversing with those outside the organization. However, if employees identify with their organization and feel a sense of commitment, they are likely to reiterate these positive feelings both in their work and in their encounters with external stakeholders, serving as brand ambassadors (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). Organizations must therefore be cognizant of such issues and implement internal processes that constructively shape the way employees make sense of events.

2.1. Shaping organizational identity

Organizational identity has been described as "a rudder for navigating difficult waters" (Albert et al., 2000, p. 13). Identity is accentuated when external pressures increase as ambiguity causes members to reflect on their relationships with the organization. Considering this, organizational identity and everyday talk share a reciprocal relationship whereby identification with the organization promotes positive everyday talk, and identity

threats—or ambiguity—generate member reflection that may positively or negatively affect everyday talk. However, if organizational leaders maintain communication with employees, they can address such issues by formulating messages and utilizing employees' preferred channels to help them manage this ambiguity (Welch, 2012). Assisting employees in managing information or framing equivocal or potentially damaging messages is likely to help members interpret such events, thus limiting interference with identity or organizational effectiveness. Hobby Lobby, for example, should consider taking a proactive approach in addressing the health insurance stance with stakeholders by providing factual information, creating a forum for employees to ask questions, and coaching employees on how to respond if questioned about the recent news. Through a forthcoming stance, Hobby Lobby—as well as Bank of America and other organizations in similar situations—is more likely to satisfy employees' information needs, thereby limiting the emotional or temporal strain the incident may impose on associates. Additionally, by providing outlets for employees to understand negative publicity, organizations diminish the chance of employees turning to social media (e.g., Twitter, blogs) to work through these issues.

Employees seek to understand events in their work life by describing these events to those inside and outside the organization. In seeking advice or simply retelling a story about work, identity is formed. Therefore, the handling of everyday occurrences—positive or negative—and helping employees to frame events has strategic importance in shaping internal and external perceptions of the organization. Recognizing this, some organizations have developed internal branding campaigns to foster identity internally and increase employee-organization relationships (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). Such campaigns are realized through the mindful and strategic use of internal communication messages. For example, online shoe retailer Zappos refers to all its employees as 'family members,' highlights 10 core family values, and has cultivated such strong relationships with its associates that many either shaved their head or dyed their hair Zappos blue to demonstrate company allegiance at an annual appreciation event ("Zappos Delivers," 2010).

Recent studies emphasize the positive effects of high-quality internal communication. Schultz, Hatch, and Larsen (2000) suggest that when employees both identify with the organization and understand its messages, employees more readily exemplify the organization's core values. Organizations with good reputations tend to view communication—particularly internal communication—as a strategic

vehicle to increase their competitive advantage and solve problems. Similarly, poor internal communication is a catalyst for negative employee emotions and may lead to lessened employee and organizational identification. While poor, uninformed, or foiled internal communication can lead to harmful everyday talk, well-managed, intentional internal communication can generate positive and productive everyday talk. In fact, well-orchestrated internal communication can trigger employees to become stewards or advocates of the organization (Schultz et al., 2000), as is the case with employee-nominated organizations such as Facebook, McKinsey & Co., and Riverbed.

Remaining aware of employees' multiple and often overlapping identities (e.g., as organizational members, shareholders, community members, bloggers) is important. Organizational events influence the way employees see the company and in turn communicate about it, to the extent that employees' sense of identity regarding the organization will impact the public's perception of the firm. For example, employees whose organization is an excellent corporate citizen are likely to experience feelings of pride when talking about the organization. However, associates of an organization that is the focal point of a scandal or crisis (e.g., Bank of America) are likely to experience embarrassment, discuss the organization in negative terms, and cognitively and rhetorically disassociate themselves from the organization, particularly if the firm has not taken steps to develop a healthy relationship with employees. Taken together, employees assume multiple roles concurrently, and organizational events influence how employees perceive their organization. Through internal communication, organizations may have bearing on the way both positive and negative events are perceived. Nevertheless, some organizations still fall prey to common stumbling blocks that hinder positive everyday talk. We explore these next.

3. Common stumbling blocks

3.1. Organizational (in)justice

Managers are often inconsistent in applying organizational rules and in granting exceptions to rules. For example, Clark (2000) described a situation in which an unmarried employee frequently helped her sister with her three children, all of whom had Tourette's syndrome. When one of her nephews was scheduled for surgery, the employee requested time off to care for the other children. Because the children were not hers biologically, the manager did

not grant the requested time off. However, when a coworker inadvertently ran her cat over on the way to work, the manager allowed the employee to leave work to bury the animal. In such circumstances, employees often engage in discussion to make sense of the events; perceptions of organizational or managerial injustice have been linked to withdrawal of citizenship behaviors, retaliation, and gossip. Employees interpret treatment that varies from the norm as a benefit or a punishment because it relates directly to perceptions of interpersonal treatment (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Consequently, scholars (e.g., Tyler & Blader) warn that organizations and managers should be vigilant in establishing and enacting procedures as they provide members a guide for behavioral norms.

3.1.1. Stepping stone

There are several steps managers can take to cultivate a work environment where employees engage in positive everyday talk. Allen (2001) suggests that conscious decisions should be made when communicating: resist assumptions about particular actors or social identities, value differences, and acknowledge the power of communication. For instance, pertaining to the story of the manager who advantaged pet ownership over childcare, the manager should have been more responsive to both employees' overall caregiving needs instead of privileging one over the other. Allen (2001, p. 193) also advises that individuals should be "response-able" in taking initiative to promote change if there are biases.

3.2. Misleading and withholding information

Presenting employees with misleading information, withholding information, and/or neglecting to deliver information can severely affect employee perceptions of the organization and have detrimental effects on everyday talk as employees seek to understand what has happened by discussing these occurrences both internally and externally. While senior management or human resources may advise withholding certain information, this strategy is often perceived as furtive and dishonest in employees' eyes. Similar to other notable relationships they share (e.g., familial), employees establish a relationship with their organization (Shore & Coyle-Shapiro, 2003) and presume that common relational dependencies—such as trust and openness—will be maintained. Grice (1975) noted that audiences expect communicators to observe the cooperativeness principle: the information exchanged through conversation is truthful, balances too much with too little information, and is relevant and clear.

Intentionally or unintentionally deviating from these basic assumptions in communication with employees may result in damage to the employee-organization relationship.

Employees hold beliefs about what they have promised to do for the organization and what the organization has promised in exchange. These psychological contracts can be fragile, with violations having a significant impact on trust. Thus, when employees learn about particular organizational changes (e.g., layoffs) or procedural changes through back channels or via the media, the employee-organization relationship is damaged. Such violations impact employee well-being and job satisfaction, and discourage employee voice. Moreover, employees may strategically engage in silence if they feel that speaking up is futile or if they feel a fundamental contract has been broken (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). If employees perceive their employee-organization relationship has been harmed, they are likely to seek social support from other exchange partners and engage in everyday talk to make sense of the violation. In this sense, employees who are upset with their organization may post on workrant.com or start a blog or a hashtag relevant to their negative experiences in the workplace. Consequently, the original news the organization sought to conceal is not only known within the organization but also subject to external scrutiny.

3.2.1. Stepping stone

Committing to a forthcoming stance regarding access to and the delivery of new information should be an organizational constant, but is never as important as during times of change. Whether internal factors (e.g., structure, management) or external factors (e.g., competitors, economic environment) are the catalyst of change, fear of the unknown, lack of information, and status threats may culminate in resistance to change. However, awareness of what employees must know, should know, and could know may alleviate the anxiety employees anticipate or feel. Information that must be known is that which is indispensable to an employee's ability to complete his or her formal role requirements; information that should be known pertains to knowledge that is often high-level but which may not directly influence employees' formal roles, such as personnel changes in senior management. Organizational rumors and office gossip are among the pieces of information that employees could know. Considering this, internal communication can be utilized to increase the delivery of accurate information and dispel irrelevant or inaccurate information that

employees may receive. Companies may even consider creating means for employees to pose questions or comments anonymously so the organization can be instrumental in helping associates understand why certain decisions are made, and can address and dispel confusion or anxiety within the organization as opposed to handling it externally. Thus, providing information to employees may help prepare them for change by eradicating negative or erroneous expectations and increasing internal cohesion and coherence.

3.3. Organizational dishonesty

Cialdini, Petrova, and Goldstein (2004) argue that organizations stand to incur more long-term harm than good when engaging in organizational dishonesty. The authors contend that while organizations which employ dishonest business practices may enjoy short-term financial benefits, these habits are like tumors that can weaken or destroy the organization. The three types of malignancies—poor reputation and less return business, (mis)match with employee values, and increased surveillance—thwart successful organizational operation (Cialdini et al., 2004). For example, poor reputation and less return business will likely trigger lower long-term profits. A (mis)match with employee values suggests that honest employees will endure heightened levels of stress, lower job satisfaction, and higher turnover, while dishonest employees—by virtue of their nature—may pilfer organizational supplies, accept kickbacks, or waste time instigating increased costs. Dishonesty may also result in a breach of trust such that employees perceive the psychological contract they share with their organization to be impeached, resulting in a redefinition of the employee-organization relationship. For instance, an organization with which one of the authors is familiar held a company-wide meeting in which an employee asked if there would be layoffs. The CEO responded that there would be no immediate layoffs and then quietly dismissed 20% of the workforce 2 days later. The layoffs were distressing and difficult, but it was the communication of the event and the lost trust that was talked about within the organization and, eventually, the community. As such, the context of internal messages is as important as the content. Presented in a thoughtful, reassuring way, even distressing news can be palatable.

3.3.1. Stepping stone

While some may view their position solely as a means of generating income, others seek meaningful work. When employees select positions and

organizations based on fulfilling internal needs, it is especially important that the organization attempt to nurture the employee-organization relationship. When employees believe that management is sincere and transparent in its communication, they are more likely to be loyal to the organization and experience increased levels of perceived organizational support (Briggs, Jaramillo, & Weeks, 2012). In addition, when those with decision-making power treat others with dignity and justify particular decisions, personnel are more likely to perceive the organization as fair. Consequently, even when organizational changes (e.g., layoffs, corporate mergers) may not be welcome, they must be communicated and communicated accurately to employees.

3.4. Pseudo open-door policy

Many CEOs and other organizational leaders have an open-door policy: they explicitly invite employees of all status levels to visit their offices to voice opinions or raise concerns. However, in many contexts, an implicit undercurrent exists that discourages employees from taking advantage of the practice; as such, these systems are often viewed as being widely ineffective. Some may perceive that their attempts to speak up will be in vain, or even professionally damaging (Milliken et al., 2003). Organizations characterized by large power differences—where status differences are emphasized and members interact socially and professionally only with those of comparable levels—may also tacitly discourage active two-way communication. Managers who immediately respond with ‘no,’ without giving suggestions due thought or explaining why the suggestion will not be implemented, are also unlikely to receive further input from subordinates and may in turn foster increased resentment. Organizations with pseudo open-door policies or unresponsive voice systems experience increased employee frustration, a collective sense of injustice, and decreased employee performance: all factors that may prompt negative discussion within and outside the organization.

3.4.1. Stepping stone

Managers should listen more than they talk when engaging with subordinates; foster trusting, supportive, and interdependent relationships; share relevant information; and permit employees to express honest opinions, which may include venting. When such practices are enacted, an environment of fairness and openness is created, leading to two-way communication and the constructive discussion of issues.

3.5. Invisible leaders

In many organizations, it is normal for high-status actors to interact with their peers while forgoing exchanges with organizational members of lower status levels. While this may not be done intentionally, it nevertheless may still occur because responsibilities require collaboration with those who possess a similar amount of organizational power, and may inadvertently negatively influence everyday talk.

Leaders are particularly influential in shaping communicative processes due to formal role power and privileged access to organizational strategy and information. Considering this, some (e.g., Whitworth, 2011) suggest that senior leaders should practice ‘management by wandering around’ (MBWA), taking time to engage with employees of all status levels. While MBWA empowers associates at all levels by emphasizing the interdependence of each employee in fulfilling organizational goals, leaders are positioned to define, initiate, and engage in everyday talk. In this sense, when a manager asks about an associate’s sick child or discusses a competitor’s project, he or she is not only promoting interaction but is also helping to define expectations for the work environment on a deeper level, such as caring for and collaborating with others. Thus, managers are able to both formally and informally guide everyday talk by the questions they ask, the conversations they engage in, and the way they listen and respond.

3.5.1. Stepping stone

Senior management impacts the quality of communicative transactions and the way communication is valued and disseminated (Welch, 2012). Through their actions and interactions with others, an organization’s leaders explicitly and implicitly demonstrate how they believe communication should function. Thus, high-status members often imply the level of openness in sharing opinions and feedback expectations for lower status organizational members. Likewise, the visibility of high-status members encourages additional information and social exchange, which proliferates communication. When employees feel that their opinions and actions are valued contributions to the organization, they reciprocate with increased levels of productivity and commitment. By heightening senior management’s visibility and interaction with employees at various levels, chances are greater that organizational members will feel recognized and thus become more engaged. While this action may be difficult in certain situations (e.g., members work remotely, expansive factory/warehouse), organizations can designate

days or events—such as company picnics or holiday parties—when members of senior management act as greeters or servers and are placed in positions to interact with all.

4. Shaping positive everyday talk

While possibly promoted through a number of outlets, it is absolutely critical that positive everyday talk be facilitated via staff empowerment. Organizations need to offer employees the tools and means to engage in positive everyday talk (Welch, 2012). Positive everyday talk is most likely to increase when firms implement strategic internal communication that enhances and fosters organizational identity. Additional internal factors that enable positive everyday talk include creating a work environment in which managers lead by example, establishing and fostering an internal brand, providing targeted messages regarding organizational success and goodwill, and—most importantly—establishing a constructive outlet for negative everyday talk.

4.1. Leading by example

Managerial demonstration of preferred behaviors can shape organizational identity in a particular way. Social learning theory suggests that people can learn, retain, and reproduce behaviors simply by observing others (Bandura, 1977). Thus, if managers are trained to exemplify the organization's mission, articulate the myriad reasons why certain decisions are made, and behave in line with the preferred identity of the organization, employees are provided with valuable positive information regarding how they should act and are given information they can discuss with those inside and outside the organization. Therefore, demonstrating the thoughtful and intentional use of communication can influence everyday talk through both instrumental and affective processes (Miller & Monge, 1986).

Social learning theory posits that there are three basic means of transferring knowledge through observation: (1) demonstrating behavior, (2) describing behavior, and (3) symbolically using real or fictional characters. When employees are involved in a conversation, they will interpret positive and negative events more frequently within the organization and with managers and administrators. This enables employees to communicate with those who are often in positions to enact change, provide explanation, or supply resources rather than with traditional outlets for employee concerns within

(e.g., coworkers) or outside (e.g., spouses, blogs) the organization. Additionally, the organization can use strategic internal communication in the form of intranet posts, weekly emails, or managerial talking points to provide examples of employee behavior that is consistent with the preferred identity of the organization. 'Mission moments' can also be held weekly, during which employees recognize one another for being good organizational citizens. In this sense, organizations are forwarding real models from which others can learn.

By engendering goodwill—such as through the exemplification and reward of positive behaviors—an organization stands the best chance of encouraging employees to speak positively about it in everyday conversations (Briggs et al., 2012). Additionally, by treating all employees as essential partners in managing organizational identity, leaders may spur both the *willingness* and *ability* of organizational members to engage in positive everyday talk while discouraging negative everyday talk. This goal can be achieved by providing employees with both positive and negative organizational information, as well as social contexts and tools they can use to talk about and make sense of such information while at work. For instance, organizations may host open forums for employees to discuss concerns or voice questions, make space available for team members to interact at work, or provide an anonymous hotline or intranet discussion board for staff to iron out work-related events. In doing so, the organization can create a strategic advantage by simultaneously earning employee benevolence toward the organization and sustaining a conversation with employees. In sum, the act of communicating from organization to employee coupled with management's demonstration of preferred behaviors may provide staff members with content for everyday talk, as well as the platform to express opinions and work through questions with those most capable of addressing their concerns. By creating thoughtful, formal communication (i.e., internal communication), organizations can shape informal communication (i.e., everyday talk) while strengthening the organization's identity or brand.

4.2. Building an internal brand

Today, organizations must not only tell their stories to the external public but also commit to internal brand building. Often considered an organization's most important asset, a brand helps differentiate the firm from its competitors and can also initiate and solidify company identity for employees (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). An internal brand should reiterate the intended external brand but should have employees

as the primary audience, with associates treated akin to customers.

Creating a strong internal brand can increase employee identification with and trust of the organization, enhance employees' ability to speak positively about the organization with external stakeholders, and increase the likelihood of employees 'living the brand.' Living the brand suggests deep employee identification with the organization, such that employees are positioned as the organization's first customers and are therefore poised to serve as brand ambassadors (Raj & Jyothi, 2011).

Burmam and Zeplin (2005) suggest three means for building an internal brand: brand-centered human resources (HR) activities, brand communication, and brand leadership. One tactic for increasing an internal brand is to hire employees who fit the organization and its intended brand. For this tactic, internal talking points and external recruiting materials are used to articulate and reiterate the organization's identity, providing sample attributes of successful employees and realistic details regarding the job. HR may continue to supplement the internal brand through socialization activities such as orientation, periodic training seminars, or town hall meetings. However, it is not enough to simply select and retain those who align with the brand; organizations must also use internal communication to reaffirm the brand through brand value statements, employee mantras, and consistency in appearance and messaging used in employee-centered communications. Atomic Object, a software product development company, refers to its employees as Atoms, and Atoms follow five mantras: (1) give a sh*t, (2) teach and learn, (3) share the pain, (4) own it, and (5) act transparently. This internal branding is complementary to and a more actionable form of the company's external brand, which is exemplified by vision statements such as "great not big." While Atomic Object's focus has not been to grow but rather to produce an excellent product, its branding has culminated in greater than 25% revenue growth annually since 2001. Additionally, employees are lining up for the opportunity to become owners of the organization, a testament to their identification with the firm (www.atomicobject.com).

To increase internal brand commitment, brand champions must be present at all levels. Burmann and Zeplin (2005) advocate for brand leaders at both the macro (e.g., senior leadership) and micro (e.g., managers) levels so that organizational members interact with and witness brand role models in all of their organizational endeavors. The creation of and commitment to an internal brand generates consistency and coherence in messages such that inclusive communication results in a sense of community within

the organization. Employees who identify with a brand are well-positioned to serve as organizational ambassadors and increase perceptions of the company both internally and externally.

4.3. The vital role of employees

If organizational rhetoric reiterates the vital role employees play in realizing company objectives and provides associates and managers with messages regarding successes or good deeds (e.g., charity work, sustainability practices), staff members are more likely to talk about the firm in favorable terms. Professional communicators frequently supply journalists and media outlets with promotional collateral that highlights their organization's attributes and achievements. These documents are created to provide external stakeholders positive and accurate information that strategically positions the organization among the media and the community. However, creating similar documents for distribution amongst senior leaders allows organizations to shape the rhetoric that managers and employees utilize. Furthermore, by providing talking points—that is, precise, specific pieces of information managers can use to cultivate conversations with employees—organizations are more likely to enjoy the benefits of well-informed staff who speak highly of their employer. Creating internally directed communication pieces may encourage members of senior leadership to view employees with as much value as they do external stakeholders.

Practitioners and researchers should also consider where everyday talk about the organization occurs within and outside the organization, as well as online. These locations can be targeted with specific messages about the organization in the hopes that employees may discuss them. One large national retailer, for example, places a three-sided discussion pyramid at each table in the break room. Two sides are dedicated to corporate messages that describe pro-social community activities in which the organization is engaged. The third side of the pyramid is left blank so each store can promote local activities, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. By placing the message board where employees are expected to engage in informal conversation, the organization has some ability to shape everyday talk in a positive way. Organizations without designated break areas can still benefit from this strategy. Some firms may want to make whiteboards and dry erase markers available in public locations where staff and managers can give positive feedback and create kind notes directed toward each other or the company. Other organizations may want to utilize an intranet to highlight successes and provide employees the

means to recognize members and various internal accomplishments.

4.4. Embrace social media

Unlike their predecessors, contemporary generations of employees grew up in a social, informational, and communicative environment. Considering digital natives' proclivity toward social media, organizations should embrace—rather than discourage—social media use and relationships with employees. Savvy organizations will encourage employees to be active on social media by providing opportunities and channels for associates to become successfully engaged. Sodexo, for example, provides each of its employees with a professional social media profile picture. After Sodexo's logo is inserted into the pictures, employees are encouraged to serve as brand ambassadors within their social media networks, where many associates acknowledge being proud to align themselves with their organization (Bennington, 2013). Firms may also create contests, challenges, and other opportunities to blog, tweet, post, or pin; for instance, organizations can promote the use of certain hashtags, such as #missionmoment or #proudtobe, as a means of fostering positive everyday talk among employees on Twitter. Monthly prizes could be awarded to associates who capture, post, and tag images or videos that affirm the preferred identity of the organization's brand on sites like YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) promotes online engagement of current and potential employees through an annual event dubbed Personal Brand Week. As part of the festivities, participants are encouraged to submit to the company's Facebook page videos of their elevator speech, which are subsequently voted on. Other media channels (e.g., Twitter) are used to generate online chatter about the event and, more so, about the organization. In this sense, PwC employees are able to engage each other and potential future hires in a real-time and visible forum. Thus, just as organizations use social media strategically with external stakeholders, the same principles can be employed to generate engagement and positive everyday talk with internal stakeholders.

4.5. Encourage conversation

While organizations may proactively cultivate positive talk about themselves, it is not realistic to assume they will always experience success and that employees will never feel disenchanting with their employers. However, if organizations create opportunities for employees to make sense of negative work events (e.g., missing company

goals, bad press), associates are able to discuss their frustrations with those who have the context to understand and perhaps the power to make changes. Noted as a common stumbling block, invisible leaders and pseudo open-door policies restrict employees from conversing with those who may have the ability to fix issues. Employees who are not provided outlets to productively work through job-related frustrations are more likely to discuss the firm in negative terms with those outside the organization in order to make sense of an event or garner social support. Although discussing work-related grievances with loved ones may afford emotional support, it does not provide organizational members with answers or the ability to make necessary changes. Research suggests complaints that go unaddressed often cause employees to feel worse (Milliken et al., 2003). Thus, leaders who make themselves available and engage frequently with employees are those who can be most effective in helping staff make sense of negative organizational events or diffuse negative organizational rhetoric. When these outlets are in place, associates are provided a productive means to air grievances and seek answers instead of being left to ruminate or—worse—blog about them.

5. Conclusion

Many (e.g., Welch & Jackson, 2007) have warned organizations not to underestimate the importance of communication with internal stakeholders, yet firms often misjudge the value internal stakeholders have in shaping organizational identity. As ambassadors of the company, employees are likely to be the single-most important aspect in determining an organization's identity (Raj & Jyothi, 2011). Moreover, employees play a synergistic role in determining corporate reputation that can be channeled to realize strategic objectives (Cravens & Oliver, 2006) such that identification with the organization generates positive outcomes for both the employee and organization.

5.1. Theoretical and pragmatic implications

As senior leaders and professional communicators, it is important to remember that the realization of organizational goals relies on the effort and interdependence of the collective. If employees feel disconnected from the firm or believe the company violates their expectations by withholding

information or forgoing communication, they are likely to express negative opinions about the organization to those with whom they interact. Employees can be stewards or liabilities to the organization. Through dedicated, accurate, and sincere internal communication efforts, it is possible to cultivate an environment in which employees feel favorable toward the firm and convey positive rhetoric about it during interactions with peers and external stakeholders. We identified several solutions for utilizing formal communication as a way to bolster positive informal communication. This is particularly salient as each employee also serves unofficially, but often convincingly, as a public relations practitioner in his or her daily life. Employees will talk about their organization, so it is in organizations' best interest to provide associates with positive frames to interpret organizational events. This article has focused on processes through which official organizational rhetoric and other communicative behaviors shape internal stakeholders' perceptions of the organization. These perceptions—particularly when uncertainty exists—will foster sensemaking activities, and employees will discuss these events among themselves and with those outside the organization. This everyday talk then becomes part of the story shaping the organization's identity. As such, the communicative behaviors exhibited within the organization quickly permeate the loose boundaries of the organization. By avoiding certain stumbling blocks and creating locations where positive everyday talk is likely to occur, organizations are better positioned to develop a positive identity.

Given the power everyday talk has on affecting internal and external communicative environments, researchers may wish to further explore the ways it can be influenced. Herein, we have discussed several communication context and content issues that can influence everyday talk. However, other issues (e.g., new media technologies) have made communication with larger audiences easier, so everyday talk in organizations may have more of an impact today than ever before. Researchers could find it fruitful to examine how employees disseminate organizational rhetoric through such mediums. Additionally, access to training and development and reward structures are likely to impact the way employees experience organizational life and therefore discuss it. Research investigating the topics, motivations, and processes of storytelling and sensemaking by employees to those outside the organization will be particularly useful toward expanding our understanding of how organizational identity is created, maintained, and managed.

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